

An aerial photograph of a river flowing through a dense forest. The river is surrounded by large, dark rocks and is flanked by trees with autumn foliage in shades of orange, red, and brown. The water is a clear, light blue color. The entire scene is framed by a thin white border.

*JOHN
THE
BAPTIST*

Mathew 11:11 “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist..”

Gal220 Ministries



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INTRODUCTION

Mathew 11:11

Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist

We know that the Bible consists of two testaments, the Old Testament and the New Testament. God spoke to His people in the Old Testament through the prophets. But, for nearly 400 years, there was no prophet until John the Baptist, whom Jesus declared as the greatest Prophet of all! Who was John the Baptist? What was special about him that God chose him as His representative? What and why is it so significant about John the Baptist that we talk about him even now? These are few questions that arise within us when we hear about him. Let us read further to get the answers to the few questions above.

The gospel of Luke gives an elaborate account of John the Baptist while the gospels of Matthew and Mark talk about the events taking place during John the Baptist ministry. The gospel of John points out the testimony of John the Baptist. Let us look at them one by one.

WHO WAS John The Baptist?

John (the Baptist) was the son of Zacharias (@Zechariah) and Elizabeth. Let us dig deep to know his lineage.

Zacharias was a priest under the division of Abijah (an Aaron's descendent who led the 8th division of 24 priesthood divided by David to serve the temple sanctuary – 1 Chronicles 24:1,2,10). Zacharias' wife Elizabeth was an Aaronic descendent and was barren. They lived in a city in the mountainous region of Judea (Luke 1:39). They were well advanced in age. They were both righteous and walked in all the commandments of God. They were both blameless. It was during the time of Herod, the king of Judea.

Luke 1:5-7 – ⁵ There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

Scriptural Sidebar | Notice, the verses tell us that Zacharias and Elizabeth were 'blameless'. Now "blameless" is not same as "sinless". No one is sinless except Christ and man is never without sin, which why we need Christ. Similar to Zacharias, other examples in the scripture are Noah, Job and Abraham etc. Apostle Paul said that concerning the law, he was blameless (Philippians 3:4-6).

There is a huge difference between being sinless and blameless. Sin is vertical (with God) whereas blameless is horizontal (with the world) meaning as Zacharias lived before the watchful eyes of his peers, no one could justly charge Zacharias with moral failure. His reputation was impeccable. |

When Zacharias' lot fell to serve the temple sanctuary, he went into the temple to burn incense while others were praying from outside. At that time, an angel of God, Gabriel appeared to him and said to Zacharias the following things:

- Do not be afraid
- His prayer was heard

- His wife, Elizabeth would bear a son and shall be called John
- He and his wife would have joy and gladness

Concerning John, the angel Gabriel said:

- Many would rejoice in his birth
- He would be great in the sight of God
- He would not drink wine
- He would be filled with Holy spirit right from his mother's womb
- He would turn many children of Israel to their God
- He would go before God in the spirit and power of Elijah in order to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready the people for God.

Great blessings indeed! After many centuries, God had spoken to His people; God spoke to Zacharias through the angel Gabriel. The first word that came out of the angel Gabriel to Zacharias was not to be afraid or be frightened. We can see that the angel Gabriel was able to understand the feeling or emotion of a man when suddenly he encountered an angelic visit. The angel Gabriel confirmed about the prayer of Zacharias' was heard and granted. God had blessed him with a son who would be a great warrior in bringing people to God. Parents were blameless in the sight of God and their son would be great in the sight of God. Moreover, the angel said that he would be filled with Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. Remember, so far, there was none filled with Holy Spirit from the time of conception. A magnificent blessing to John the Baptist! Notice that the angel not only said that the couple would have joy, but many people would also rejoice in John the Baptist's birth. He would go before God in the spirit and power of Elijah. Why? Because his commission was to turn many children of Israel to their true God, turn the stubborn hearts of father to that of a child's that is like a sponge, ready to absorb God's word and also, the disobedient people to get the wisdom of being obedient and just in the eyes of God.

Scriptural Sidebar | Concerning the ministry of John the Baptist, Luke is connecting what God had prophesied through prophet Malachi as he writes this gospel.

Malachi 4:5-6

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet

Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

*And he will turn
The hearts of the fathers to the children,
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”*

Luke 1:12-17 AMP - ¹²When Zacharias saw the angel, he was troubled and overcome with fear. ¹³But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, because your petition [in prayer] was heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴You will have great joy and delight, and many will rejoice over his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great and distinguished in the sight of the Lord; and will never drink wine or liquor, and he will be filled with and empowered to act by the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb. ¹⁶He will turn many of the sons of Israel back [from sin] to [love and serve] the Lord their God. ¹⁷It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous [which is to seek and submit to the will of God]—in order to make ready a people [perfectly] prepared [spiritually and morally] for the Lord.”

Zacharias doubted it as he and his wife were well advanced in age to bear a son. So the angel struck Zacharias mute until the days those things must take place because of his unbelief. When he came out, the people outside assumed that he saw a vision. As months passed by, Elizabeth was due to deliver and she brought forth a son. Everyone around her rejoiced as God had shown mercy to her. On the eighth day, at the time of circumcision, when her relatives wanted to name the child after his father, Zacharias, Elizabeth intervened and wanted to name him John. As Zacharias was mute, he wrote on a writing tablet that he wanted to name his son, John as well. Immediately, Zacharias’ mouth was opened and his tongue was loosened. He spoke praising God and fear fell upon everyone around. They marvelled at the child who was born.

Insight: Why do you think the angel Gabriel struck Zacharias dumb and not Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus?

In Luke 1:34, Mary was inquiring Gabriel about how she could have a baby, as she was a virgin and not married yet. So, Gabriel could understand her curiosity of questioning him. But, in Zacharias’ case, he was first a high priest who was went into the inner chamber of the holy temple to offer sacrifices for him and for all. According to the scriptures, God chose priests from Levites to minister to Him

(Exodus 30:30) and also to teach the Israelites from the Book of the Law of the Lord (2 Chronicles 17:9). As written in Malachi 4:7,

*“For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge,
And people should seek the law from his mouth;
For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.*

Zacharias must speak with belief the message from God, as he was the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But, in this case, when Zacharias doubted about having a son at a well-advanced age, it clearly showed his unbelief in the good news brought by the angel Gabriel from God. It would be better for the priest Zacharias not to speak rather than speaking in unbelief and negating the blessing from God. So, Gabriel stuck Zacharias dumb.

ZACHARIAS' PROPHECY

After Zacharias' tongue was loosened, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and started prophesying. It was a clear proclamation. Let us look verse by verse and understand them.

Luke 1:67-79:

⁶⁷ Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

*⁶⁸ "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited and redeemed His people,*

He blessed the God of Israel as He had visited them after a very long period and also had redeemed them.

How did He redeem them? He brought redemption by ...

*⁶⁹ And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David,*

God has risen up a mighty Saviour (horn of salvation - Jesus) for Israelites in the lineage of David. It was through Him the redemption would take place for all.

Why did God bring redemption? Because He had already spoken ...

*⁷⁰ As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,
Who have been since the world began,*

God promised to His people through His holy prophets from the beginning of the world about ...

*⁷¹ That we should be saved from our enemies
And from the hand of all who hate us,*

Firstly, to save His people from their enemies and from all those who hated His people.

*⁷² To perform the mercy promised to our fathers
And to remember His holy covenant,*

Secondly, to show mercy (though we are sinners, God doesn't avenge us for it; that quality is called mercy) towards His people as He had already promised to their fathers; and thirdly, to remember His holy covenant that He had made with His friend, Abraham. (Genesis 17)

⁷³ The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:

*⁷⁴ To grant us that we,
Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,*

⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

Fourthly, God had made an oath to Abraham about delivering His people from the enemies so that they might serve Him without fear of any humans in pure worship and exclusive devotion to Him, and being upright before Him throughout their life.

⁷⁶ "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;

Here, he was talking about the child born to Zacharias – John (the Baptist). He prophesied that John will be called the prophet of the Most High God.

Why is he called the prophet and what is his purpose?

For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,

John (the Baptist) had to go and prepare God's ways before Messiah was born on this earth.

How will John (the Baptist) make the path ready for Messiah's coming?

*⁷⁷ To give knowledge of salvation to His people
By the remission of their sins,*

John (the Baptist) had to prepare the way for the Messiah's arrival to all His people by teaching about the salvation which means spreading the knowledge of getting saved through the repentance (or forgiveness) of their sins.

How do we deserve this salvation?

*⁷⁸ Through the tender mercy of our God,
With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;
⁷⁹ To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,
To guide our feet into the way of peace."*

We deserve this salvation only because of the tender mercy of our God who sent His son (Dayspring) from above to give life (light) for us who live in the darkness and under death. He leads us into the way of peace and serenity.

The hand of God was always with the child and he grew stronger in spirit. He lived in the wilderness of Judea (Luke 1:80) until he came out into the world as John the Baptist.

JOHN The Baptist's COMMISSION

It was during the 15th year of the reign of the emperor Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea, and Herod, the ruler of Galilee, and Annas and Caiaphas (his son-in-law) as the high priest, the word of God came to John (the Baptist) in the wilderness (Luke 3:2). This is when John becomes John the Baptist. It was the time for action – a GO signal - to start the preaching the arrival of the Messiah and baptising in the water. From then onwards, John the Baptist came out of the wilderness into the region around Jordan teaching and preaching the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins from God. The prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3-5) had already written this and the gospel writers have quoted it.

Luke 3:4-6:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord;

Make His paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled

And every mountain and hill brought low;

The crooked places shall be made straight

And the rough ways smooth;

⁶ And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "

Matthew 3:3:

³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord;

Make His paths straight.' "

Mark 1:2,3:

² As it is written in the Prophets:

"Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,

Who will prepare Your way before You."

³ "The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord;

Make His paths straight.'"

John 1:23:

²³ He said: "I am

'The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

"Make straight the way of the Lord,""

as the prophet Isaiah said."

John the Baptist began his ministry from the wilderness crying out or preaching sincerely. He was preparing the way of God and making the paths straight for Him. We learn something very powerful from this verse - God needed someone to help Him! It was an effective strategy. Liken this to the vast dry lands that have caked hard because of years of neglect. The farmer is looking to cultivate and produce a great harvest. John's mission was to till the soil so that the sower can sow the seeds. It was not sufficient that Jesus came and preached the gospel but it was necessary that the 'hearts be tilled' so that they will be more willing to receive the Word. The message of John the Baptist was that of the repentance and the remission of sins. Repentance literally means to make a 180° turn to turn around. John preached the depravity of sin and the need for a saviour so that people would experience the godly sorrow that leads to repentance or change in direction for their lives. Realization of our need for forgiveness of our sins and the desire to seek righteousness of God is the birthplace of repentance.

2 Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

After centuries of silence from God, there was this man from wilderness who, with authority was teaching all the sinners to repent from heart for their sins and seek God's forgiveness.

Matthew 3:2 - ²and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

JOHN The Baptist's FOREWARNING

Matthew and Luke gospels talk about John the Baptist forewarning the people about the Messiah who was about to come. John the Baptist likened Jesus to the axe and then talked about His work. The first one was stated in Luke 3:9 and the latter in Luke 3:17.

*AMP version: ⁹ Even now **the axe** [of God's judgment] is swinging toward the root of the trees; so every tree that does not produce good fruit is being cut down and thrown into the fire."*

John was crying out to people to ask forgiveness from God for the sins they had committed against Him. Verse 9 clearly states not "an axe" is laid but "the axe" is laid to the root of the trees. "The axe" is the one and only Jesus, the Messiah. What does an axe be used for in general? It's used in cutting down trees and chopping the woods for burning or for carpentry usages. Similarly, this verse teaches that the axe is (*already, ready to be*) laid right on the root of the trees that do not bear good fruit. It is cut down and thrown into the fire. So John starts warning the people at the beginning of his ministry.

Moreover, he also added that Messiah would thoroughly clean His threshing floor. How does He clean it? Jesus cleans His threshing floor with His winnowing fan that separates the wheat grain and the chaff. The wheat grain is stored in His barn but the chaff is burnt in the unquenchable fire.

AMP version: ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat (believers) into His barn (kingdom); but He will burn up the chaff (the unrepentant) with unquenchable fire."

The prophet Jeremiah also had mentioned about the chaff in *Jeremiah 23:28,29*

*²⁸ "The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream;
And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully.
What is the chaff to the wheat?" says the Lord.
²⁹ "Is not My word like a fire?" says the Lord,
"And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"*

The above verses were from God through Jeremiah reminding the Israelites that the chaff had nothing to do with the wheat.

In spite of such forewarnings from God through John the Baptist, did everyone in Israel heed to him and to the Messiah who came after him? Did they take those forewarnings seriously? Did they follow or act according to the things spoken by John the Baptist? Before trying to answer those questions, let us ask ourselves these questions:

- What about us now – have we accepted Jesus totally as our Saviour? If so, do we keep His commandments?
- Are we doing what Jesus taught/asked us to do?
- Are we living according to the word of God?
- Are we loving one another truly as Jesus loved us?
- Are we ready to put God before anything on this earth and lay our lives for our God as Jesus and apostles, and some disciples did?

If those questions have similar answers as the former ones in John the Baptist's time, then it is not too late to repent and realign ourselves to Godly thoughts and teachings.

John 3:34-36 - ³⁴For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. ³⁵The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. ³⁶He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

JOHN The Baptist's MINISTRY

The scriptures tell us that people from Jerusalem, all Judea and the entire region around Jordan went out to listen to John the Baptist and be baptized in the Jordan River. His meetings were drawing much attention and were attracting large crowds. John the Baptist was becoming hugely popular and this did not sit right with the Pharisees. They sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to John the Baptist to find out who he really was and probably to estimate how big a threat was he to their religious agenda? They accosted John the Baptist in Bethabara (John 1:24-26) and he provided them the context for his mission by referring them back to the scriptures "...as prophet Isaiah said..." and confirmed that he was the one whom Isaiah was prophesying concerning.

John 1:20 - He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

When they persisted him to give an answer, John the Baptist replied that he was a man who came to bear the witness to the Light and make the path of God straight. All the popularity did not tempt John and prevent him from confessing. Then, men from Pharisees came to him and asked why he was baptising them in water if he wasn't Christ or Elijah or a prophet. He replied to them:

John 1: 26, 27 - ²⁶John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. ²⁷It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."

John also confirmed that he was only the forerunner but the real way-maker was already there. John knew the Messiah had arrived into this world perhaps because of the association Mary had with Elizabeth and the events that transpired and written concerning John and Jesus's birth in the gospel of Luke. However, John later also said that He had not seen Jesus. So, John knew that Jesus was the One but he had never met Jesus.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were not satisfied and came in person to the meetings that John the Baptist was holding by the Jordan River. And he simply addressed them (Pharisees and Sadducees) as "brood of vipers"! Why do you think that he called them so? He could see that their hearts were full of rebellious attitude. He told them to repent instead of reasoning that they had Abraham as their father;

they were talking about their fleshly descendants of Abraham and hence they implied that they were righteous or right with God.

At one time, John the Baptist had to reply to three kinds of people who questioned him about what they should do. They were

1. General public – to share their tunic and food with others who have none.
2. Tax collectors – to collect not more than the appointed amount.
3. Soldiers – to not threaten or force or accuse falsely to get money from others but to be satisfied with their wages.

Luke 3:10-14 - ¹⁰ So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"

¹¹ He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

¹² Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"

¹³ And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."

¹⁴ Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?"

So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

When people were murmuring amongst themselves about these hearings and reasoning if he was the Messiah, John the Baptist added the vital message to them. The coming of Messiah!

*Luke 3:15-16 ¹⁵ Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, ¹⁶ John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but **One mightier than I is coming**, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.***

John the Baptist spoke out loud proclaiming the coming of Messiah. Messiah was mightier than him whose sandal strap he was not worthy even to untie. Moreover, John baptised in water but the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

As John the Baptist was preaching and baptising all sorts of people who came to him at the river of Jordan, he also taught his followers how to pray (Luke 11:1).

These were happening in the Bethany across the Jordan. Next day, Jesus came from Galilee to John the Baptist at the Jordan River to get baptised. God had promised already that he would get a sign when the Messiah, Jesus came to him (**John 1:33**).

John 1:29-31 ²⁹ The next day John 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 is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ ³¹ I did not know Him; but that **He should be revealed to Israel**, therefore I came baptizing with water.”

John 1:33 - I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’

When John hesitated to perform the baptism, as he was sinful and Jesus was the One who should baptize him, Jesus answered

Matthew 3:15 - But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him.

Why did Jesus say so? The act of baptism made Jesus identify Himself with sinners whose sin He was to bear ultimately and to impart or share His righteousness with them. He humbled Himself to accept what was right on the grounds of righteousness. Only sinners had to repent and had to be baptised. But, He lived as a role model for all the humankind (sinners) by taking John’s baptism though He wasn’t a sinner. In other words, a perfect flesh became imperfect for the sake of His Father’s love for mankind. He paved way for the mankind to have the right standing before God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Moreover, as John 1:31 states that John the Baptist had not seen Jesus before, He should have to be revealed to the people of Israel as Messiah by the act of baptism. When Jesus came out of the waters of Jordan River after baptism, the heavens were opened and John the Baptist saw the Spirit of God descending on Him as a dove and alighting upon Him. Also, he heard a voice from heaven.

Matthew 3:17 - And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." – (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22)

The baptism, the descending of Holy Spirit in the form of dove remaining on Jesus as well as the voice from heaven were the signs to John the Baptist to reveal the Messiah to Israelites and the world.

Apostle John wrote in his gospel about Jesus again the next day.

John 1:35,36 - Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. ³⁶ And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

Upon hearing it, the two of John the Baptist's disciples (Andrew and John) followed Jesus that day, wanting to know where He lived. John the Baptist was a man filled with the Holy Spirit; but Jesus filled with the Holy Spirit is the Lamb of God. Jesus is the way and we follow Him. There may be many preachers and teachers in our lives but we shall follow only Jesus and not any of them. Some of the disciples of John the Baptist got very upset that the disciples of Jesus were also baptizing beyond the Jordan. More crowds were coming to the place where Jesus' disciples were baptizing. Jesus had greater fan following than John the Baptist and that did not sit right with John the Baptist's disciples. But John the Baptist had absolute clarity concerning his ministry and purpose. He was to make the way but he was NOT the way. He did not let his flesh glory and did not allow pride to come against his purpose. In fact, he was joyful that God's purpose was fulfilled in him and Jesus was above all and any great preacher. Hence, he was able to respond to his disciples:

John 3:27-31 - John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' ²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease. ³¹ He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.

As John the Baptist told his disciples, Jesus was increasing and he was decreasing.

JOHN The Baptist in Doubt

In the meantime, John the Baptist got arrested and was in the prison because he rebuked Herod to have taken his brother's wife as Herodias and also, for doing all wicked things.

Mark 6:17,18 - For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

While John the Baptist was in the prison, his disciples reported him about Jesus' miracles; one of the latest was raising the dead in Nain city. After hearing them, he sent his two disciples to Jesus asking if He was the Messiah or had they to look for another. Jesus at that time cured many people of their sicknesses, afflictions and evil spirits, and also to blind people their sights. So, Jesus replied to John the Baptist's disciples to tell him what they had heard and saw.

Matthew 11:2-6 - ² And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" ⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

Jesus sent the message that was needed for John the Baptist at that situation. In other words, the verse 6 meant blessed was he who was not caused to stumble because of Him. Why did Jesus say so? Jesus explained to those disciples about His miracles starting with

Eyes – seeing – blind eyes opened

Leg – walking – lame walked

Skin – touching – lepers cleansed

Ears – hearing – deaf heard

Body – living – dead raised to life and finally, poor people get the gospel message preached to them. After seeing or listening to all these miracles that could only be performed by God's anointed man, (here it is performed by Jesus), it was not right to doubt or give way for unbelief. Moreover, John the Baptist witnessed everything - heard the voice of God confirming that He was the Son of God whom He

had approved and also the Holy Spirit descending and remaining on Him. In other words, Jesus told John the Baptist not to get stumbled because of his doubt on Jesus – doubting if Jesus was the Messiah or not. Jesus said so because He was a stone rejected which became a chief cornerstone as well as a stumbling stone and a rock of offense for the people as written in

Isaiah 8:14, 15

*He will be a holy place;
for both Israel and Judah he will be
a stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.
And for the people of Jerusalem he will be
a trap and a snare.
¹⁵ Many of them will stumble;
they will fall and be broken,
they will be snared and captured.”*

Both Apostle Paul and Peter have quoted the same subject in

Romans 9:32,33

Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written:

*“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,
And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”*

1 Peter 2:4-8

⁴ Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

*“Behold, I lay in Zion
A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,
And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” (Isaiah 28:16)*

⁷ Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient,

*“The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone,” (Psalm 118:22)*

⁸ and

*“A stone of stumbling
And a rock of offense.” (Isaiah 8:14)*

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

Jesus was assuring John the Baptist to believe that He was the Messiah by adding this comfort statement: “Do not get stumbled about the Messiah; stay blessed”. That was the strengthening statement needed for John the Baptist at that stage of his imprisonment.

Note the verse 6 (AMP), “*Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me*” is not only for John the Baptist but also for all, for everyone. Blessed is anyone who doesn’t stumble on account of believing that Jesus is the Messiah and accepting Him as the Saviour. The faith mentioned in Romans 9:32 is the belief in action. When you believe in Jesus, you accept Him as your Saviour that in turn should be seen in action.

You may wonder, why then did John the Baptist send his disciples to Jesus though he witnessed that He was the Messiah?

Firstly, we must admit that John the Baptist was also an imperfect man like us even though he was a chosen messenger of God to bring His people to Jesus Christ.

Secondly, his state of imprisonment at that time was adding more to his unbelief. He served imprisonment for no crime committed but for pointing the wrong doings of the Herod. Hence, John the Baptist might have sought a re-confirmation from Jesus to be at peace in that situation.

Thirdly, like Jesus’ disciples, John the Baptist might have thought that the Kingdom of Israel would be restored immediately as in

Acts 1:6 - Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Once the disciples had left, Jesus turned towards the crowd and questioned them about what did they go into the wilderness to see? A reed tossed in the wind? A man clothed in a soft garment? If so, they could have seen people clothed in the soft garment in the king's houses. What then did they go into the wilderness to see? A prophet! He confirmed the crowd that John the Baptist was more than a prophet. Why did He say that or what did He mean by that? Let us look into it in detail below.

Matthew 11:7-15 – ⁷As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. ⁹But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰For this is he of whom it is written:

*‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.’*

*¹¹ “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has **not risen one greater than John the Baptist**; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

Let us break the above verses one by one to understand the meaning of what Jesus had said.

¹¹ “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Jesus pointed out two truths in this verse. First, He confirmed that no man or a woman born on the earth until then was greater than John the Baptist. Secondly, He pointed out that the least in the Kingdom of heaven was greater than John the Baptist. What does that mean? There were many major and minor prophets in the Old Testament who were chosen by God to send His warnings to His people. But, there was none on the earth who got the privilege of being a messenger of God to proclaim the arrival of the Messiah and preparing the people's heart to accept the Messiah who was going to come (Malachi 3:1). Moreover, John the Baptist was the one who identified Jesus as the Messiah and introduced Him to the world. Only he was blessed

to be the forerunner of Messiah in all ways. Hence, he gets the credit of being the greater one as a human in doing the work of God before the arrival of Jesus Christ.

Coming to the second part of the verse, where it talks about the kingdom of heaven, what is “the kingdom of heaven” mean? It means the Kingdom of God (Luke 7:28). God has no partiality among any of His creations. So “the least in the kingdom of heaven” meant that a person who did little work for God or a smaller or a younger person in the kingdom of heaven. Hence, Jesus is relating that person in the kingdom of heaven to be greater than John the Baptist. How and why? The answer is in *John 3:3* - *Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* The people belonging to the old covenant were still in the Law and were condemned because of sin. But, those who accept Jesus as their Saviour are born again (in the spirit) and belong to the new covenant; they were not in the Law but were fulfilled in the Law through Christ Jesus. Moreover, they are set free from all the bondages of sin or condemnation and are called the sons of God.

One has to be born again to see the kingdom of God. To be in the kingdom of God, one has to live as Jesus lived on the earth (1 Peter 2:21). The new covenant fulfils the old covenant (the Law) and it comes into effect for us through Christ Jesus. During those times, the people lived under the Law and were judged under the Law. So, the Old Testament people were not able to see the kingdom of God until they believed in the Messiah who had arrived after John the Baptist’s cry. (The Kingdom of God is Jesus Christ who had come to the earth as a ransom sacrifice for mankind. **Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15**)

¹² And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

Jesus added that from the days of John the Baptist’s crying out in the wilderness by preaching to repent as the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2; 4:17) and baptising people, the true hearts or people who truly repented started to come into the kingdom with full enthusiasm. They were pressing on into the Kingdom of God. It is well explained in *Luke 16:16* - *“The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is **pressing into it**.* For example, if there was a Black Friday sale in the Best Buy shop, you can see people queuing overnight before the shop opens the next day for sale. Once the shop opens, they flood in to buy things that they needed or wanted. This doesn’t mean that the people were

behaving violently, but were pressing on to buy their stuffs at a better price on a deal rather than at a full price. Imagine, if people press on for the perishable goods of little value, how much more will they press on for the imperishable life that Jesus had bestowed upon us when they come to know about it?

¹³For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. ¹⁴And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

Jesus confirmed that the prophets and the law prophesied until John were from God and were also about the Messiah and his forerunner, John the Baptist. He also assured that John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come (foretold in Malachi 4:5,6). Jesus added that who had spiritual ears to hear this profound truth to hear and understand them.

Malachi 4:5,6

*⁵Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.
⁶And he will turn
The hearts of the fathers to the children,
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."*

After the transfiguration of Jesus in the mount, His disciples (John, Peter and James) asked Jesus why then the scribes told that Elijah must come first? In reply, Jesus answered that Elijah must come first and restore all things; and he had already come but the people did not know him. Then the disciples understood that He was talking about John the Baptist (Matthew 17:10-13). Jesus pressed on again saying those who have ears to hear to understand what He spoke.

After Jesus spoke to the crowd, all the people including the tax collectors justified God and got baptised in John's baptism. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the message of God and did not get baptised. This shows the hardened or stubborn heart of the Pharisees and lawyers who rejected the will of God similar to that of the Pharaoh in those days in Egypt.

Luke 7:29,30 - ²⁹ And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

Jesus likened the generation to careless and irresponsible children who played on the streets in the market places. They looked at John the Baptist who was in the wilderness neither eating nor drinking but only on locusts and honey as a demon. But when Jesus came eating and drinking, they called Him a glutton, a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 11:16-19).

The Death of John The Baptist

Until then, John the Baptist was not put to death. It was Herodias who wanted to kill him but she couldn't; Herod feared John the Baptist because he was a holy and a just man. Herod protected him and heard gladly about John the Baptist's works (Mark 6:17-20).

On Herod's birthday feast, Herodias' daughter danced and pleased Herod and others. So, Herod said to her to ask anything that she would want and in return, under the influence of her mother Herodias, she asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter. Herod felt very sorry and without a choice, he had to execute his word against John the Baptist. The executioner brought the head of John the Baptist to the daughter and she gave it to her mother. A vengeful act of Herodias! On hearing this, his disciples took his corpse away and placed it in a tomb. Thus, John the Baptist's life ended!

Mark 6:21-29 - ²¹ Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee. ²² And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you." ²³ He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom." ²⁴ So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!"

²⁵ Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

²⁶ And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, ²⁸ brought his



head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.

FOUR GOSPELS about John the Baptist

The gospels of Matthew and Mark talk about John the Baptist, mainly the events like his ministry and baptism of Jesus.

The gospel of Luke talks about the story of John the Baptist in detail. The background history helps in understanding more about where John the Baptist came from, what was his purpose even before he was born, his ministry and baptism of Jesus. This book alone mentions that John the Baptist as the son of Zacharias and about the word of God coming to John (the Baptist) in the wilderness.

The gospel of John points John the Baptist as a witness of the Messiah – Jesus Christ. The gospel of John talks about the testimony of John the Baptist. John the Baptist bore witness or testimony to the following:

1. To the Light:

John 1:6-9

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. ⁸He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. ⁹That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

The above verses use “witness” thrice. The word “witness” means “evidence or proof”. So, John the Baptist is the evidence or proof that came to people.

What was the witness (evidence or proof) for?

He was the witness was for the Light that was going to come into the world, which is going to give life to every man.

Why did he become the witness?

John the Baptist became the witness because he had to prepare people’s heart to repent of their sins and all people to believe in the Messiah who is going to come.

2. To confess that he was not Christ:

John 1:19-23

¹⁹ Now 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 Then they said to him, “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?”

²³ He said: “I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Make straight the way of the Lord,” ’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

Verse 19 states that it was the testimony of John when Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to know who he was. His testimony was that he was a man sent to make the way of the God straight – meaning making the people’s heart ready to believe in the Messiah, Jesus Christ who is to come. Testimony means to solemnly declare about something. Here, John the Baptist solemnly declares about the arrival of Messiah and making His path straight was his mission on this earth.

John 10:41 - Then many came to Him and said, “John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.”

The above verse is talking about John the Baptist who performed no sign but whatever he spoke about Jesus Christ (this Man) was true. This is a proof or evidence that John the Baptist fulfilled his purpose of coming into this world in order to make people believe in Jesus Christ.

3. To the Spirit of God:

John 1:32,33

³² And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. ³³ I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

John the Baptist bore witness to the Spirit of God descending from heaven like a dove and remained upon Him. Why does he term this as a witness?

Because John the Baptist has never seen or met Jesus Christ before. The one who sent John the Baptist to baptize with water had told him that on whom he saw the Spirit descending and remaining, that one was the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

4. To the Son of God:

John 1:34 - And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

The verse on its own speaks about the witness or testimony John the Baptist has – the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ Himself pointed John the Baptist as His witness in

John 5:33 - You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.

5. To the Lamb of God:

John 1:36 - And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

The verse of John the Baptist testified that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God.

6. To certify God is true:

John 3:31-33 AMP

³¹ "He who comes from [heaven] above is above all others; he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks [about things] of the earth [his viewpoint and experience are earthly]. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² What He has [actually] seen and heard, of that He testifies; and yet no one accepts His testimony [as true]. ³³ Whoever receives His testimony has set his seal [of approval] to this: God is true [and he knows that God cannot lie].

These words are John the Baptist replying to his disciples when they tell him about Jesus' disciples baptising people in the Judean countryside. His joy was fulfilled as a friend of bridegroom greatly rejoices hearing bridegroom's voice. He was satisfied with his mission and testified that Jesus is the Son of God, who came from heaven was above all. He also testified that Jesus testifies what He has seen and heard and no man accepted His testimony as true. The person who receives Jesus's testimony also testifies that God is true.

JOHN The Baptist AND ELIJAH

Elijah lived many centuries before John the Baptist. But God used both of them for His work. Let us see some of the similarities.

	JOHN the Baptist	ELIJAH
Place of birth	Born in a city of Judah and grew up in the wilderness (in spirit).	Elijah initially lived in Tishbeh, in Gilead. So he was addressed Tishbite many times in the Old Testament.
Place of Ministry	<p>His ministry was around the river of Jordan as he was baptising people who came to him for repentance.</p> <p><i>Luke 3:3 - And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins</i></p>	<p>God asked him to move to east of the river Jordan and his ministry was around the Jordan river.</p> <p><i>1 Kings 17:3,4 - "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. ⁴And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."</i></p>
Called by God	<p>The word of God came to him.</p> <p><i>Luke 3:2b - the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.</i></p>	<p>The word of God came to him.</p> <p><i>1 Kings 17:2 - Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying</i></p>

<p>Purpose of ministry</p>	<p>To prepare the way for the Messiah – to make the hearts of the people to repent their wrongdoings and get ready to accept Jesus Christ, the Messiah.</p>	<p>To warn the Israelite kings in particular to repent from their false worships and turn towards the true God.</p>
<p>Outfit used</p>	<p>He was clothed in the camel’s hair and leather belt around his waist.</p> <p><i>Mark 1:6 - Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.</i></p> <p>It shows that he was a very simple human with basic needs.</p>	<p>He was clothed in the camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist.</p> <p><i>2 Kings 1:8 - So they answered him, “A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist.” And he said, “It is Elijah the Tishbite.”</i></p>
<p>Focus of the person</p>	<p>His heart was only after God and to serve God’s commission was his focus. He was sent as a messenger of God to prepare the way of the Messiah. He fulfilled his mission faithfully, honestly and finished his course successfully.</p> <p><i>Luke 1:80a - So the child grew and became strong in spirit</i></p>	<p>To serve as God’s spokesman to bring back the heart of His people to the true worship. He served God from heart and was faithful till the end.</p>
<p>Miracles or signs</p>	<p>He didn’t perform any miracles but he himself was</p>	<p>Elijah performed 8 great miracles.</p>

	a sign for the arrival of the Messiah.	
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John the Baptist comes in the spirit and power of Elijah

Luke 1:17 - He will also 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 a people prepared for the Lord."

John the Baptist was prophesied as one who comes in the spirit and power of Elijah. Elijah means "YHWH is my God". Elijah was the first major prophet sent by God to Israelites after they entered the Promised Land. Israelites wanted human kings to rule over or lead them. God blessed them with King Saul, David and Solomon and so on. In spite of serving the true God, Israelites started to worship Baal and other false gods. During that time, God talked to the Kings of Israel through the first major prophet, Elijah warning them to turn to the true God worship. God was the pillar of strength to Elijah during those times of intense Baal worship and the ruling of King Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah was also a very zealous godly person who yielded to the will of God and thus, was blessed. He performed major eight miracles, which included the resurrection of a dead son and the nature - it stopped raining when prayed and it rained when he prayed again. What a connection he had with God! His commitment, faithfulness and honesty proved him a powerful prophet of God.

In the same way, John the Baptist was so zealous right from birth as he was filled with the Holy Spirit from womb that he grew stronger in spirit. He was crying out in the wilderness to the people to repent for their sins committed against the Law and God. He was a messenger of God who prepared the way for the Messiah. As the above verse says, he turned the heart of a father to a child like heart to accept the Messiah and the disobedient people to become obedient to accept the Messiah. He was very committed, faithful and very zealous yielding to the will of God like Elijah had been centuries ago.

Both of them had the same obedient heart and proved in their actions what God intended them to do even amidst the death situation. Their focus was only God. Both had the same driving force or the same attitude in serving God to the fullest. Elijah was carried away in the chariot while his descendent, Elisha was watching. So it wasn't Elijah who came back in person again into this world as a forerunner or a

messenger of God to prepare the way of the Messiah. John the Baptist was another man born for this purpose but he had the very same driving spirit and power and the prevailing attitude as that of Elijah. In other words, John the Baptist had the same type of ministry anointing as the prophet Elijah during those days.

“Elijah - Restores all things”

Matthew 17:10-13 - ¹⁰ And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” ¹¹ Jesus answered and said to them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. ¹² But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.” ¹³ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

*Mark 9:11-13 – ¹¹ And they asked Him, saying, “**Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?**” ¹² Then He answered and told them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? ¹³ But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him.”*

Let us first understand the meaning of the word “restore”. The word “restore” means “to give (something stolen or taken away or lost) back to the original owner or recipient”. Now, let us understand in detail.

It was after Jesus’ transfiguration on the mount; the disciples and Jesus were coming down the mountain and they asked Jesus **why** the scribes (the Jewish writers who copy the manuscripts) had said that Elijah must come first? Let us understand clearly the question asked by the disciples. Their question was why scribes said so and not why Elijah must come first. So, Jesus answered, emphasising strongly that they were written in the Old Testament (Malachi 4:5) and that is why scribes said that Elijah must come first. What would he restore or what were “all things” that he was going to restore?

First of all, let us remind ourselves what happened in the Garden of Eden. The dominion and the authority that God gave Adam (mankind) to enjoy had been taken away through deception by Satan. The same dominion and the authority that Adam lost had to be given back to the original owner, right? Who is the original owner? The

original owner is God. Only the Son of God, Jesus Christ can do this complete restoration. So in order to prepare the way for the restoration (or to prepare the way of the Messiah), John the Baptist, in the spirit and power of Elijah, had to be the forerunner in getting people's hearts to repent from their sins committed against the Law and prepared their hearts to be receptive in accepting the Messiah.

God is a very loving God that He never does things on the earth without letting the mankind know about it. We read that in

*Amos 3:7 AMP - Surely the Lord God does nothing
Without revealing His secret plan [of the judgment to come]
To His servants the prophets.*

God had always warned people about His plan through His prophets like in Noah's time, to Abraham and Lot about Sodom and Gomorrah, to Joseph about the famine, to Moses about the plagues, to Jonah about the Nineveh and so on.... What was the warning about? The warning was about the heart of the people that turned away from the true worship of the God and to repent for their sins committed against the Law given by God through Moses. In similar manner, after 400 years, God sent His messenger John the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elijah to warn the people to repent from their sins against the Law and also to accept the Messiah. It was all in the Law and the Prophets until John the Baptist as it is written in

Luke 16:16a - ¹⁶The Law and the [writings of the] Prophets were proclaimed until John;

We know that the Law was given for Israelites. The prophets in Old Testament brought message from God in order to warn the Israelites. The Israelites were restored in the Law during those periods. But, the arrival of Messiah was to bring salvation to all the mankind and not to Israelites alone. Hence, John the Baptist became the forerunner to make way for the restorer, the Messiah who not only restored all things in the Law but also fulfilled all things in Him through the grace of God. So "all things" meant "all mankind". All mankind was restored back to God in the righteousness of Christ and also, the dominion and the authority lost was restored back to the man through the Christ.

Matthew 5:17,18 - ¹⁷ “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

Romans 10: 4 - For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

And then, Jesus went on saying that the Son of Man had to suffer many things and be treated with contempt by His own people. He added that Elijah had already come and he too was treated similarly. Later, the disciples (John, James and Peter) understood that he was talking about John the Baptist.

So, to sum it up, Jesus was the restorer who restored not only the dominion and authority lost by Adam but also restored the eternal life to the mankind, which he had lost in the Garden of Eden. John the Baptist was used as a messenger of God to make the path straight for the Messiah, Jesus Christ to accomplish His mission committed to His Father God.

CHARACTER TRAITS of John The Baptist

- Love – He loved God truly which was reflected in his life journey.
- Meekness – When he was approached by people questioning about him, he stayed meek and explained to them in clear ways.
- Boldness – When he was questioned by Pharisees and Sadducees, he replied back in boldness.
- Authoritative – He operated in authority as Jesus did when it came to the works of the Kingdom of God.
- Perseverance – He persevered amidst the threats or oppositions from the priests in Jerusalem. He pressed on in his mission until the end of his life period.
- Selflessness – He was rejoicing when Jesus was increasing and he was decreasing. He never felt a threat towards Jesus. He never sought recognition for himself.
- Simplicity – He led a very simple life on the minimal needs.
- Joyful – He said that his joy was fulfilled in Jesus.
- Relentless – He never ceased working on his mission God had sent him on even after introducing the Messiah to the world.
- Focus – He was a one vision man, focusing on doing what was he called for – making the way straight for the Messiah.

INSIGHTS

- ❖ In a nutshell, John the Baptist denounced the sin and pronounced the Messiah.
- ❖ John the Baptist was sent to the people of Israel. This is one of the manifestations of God’s love for His people. He was a messenger of God before Messiah’s arrival. (**Malachi 3:1**)

Matthew 11:10

For this is he of whom it is written:

*‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.’*

- ❖ John the Baptist is likened to the doorkeeper as in John 10:2,3. He was an honest and faithful doorkeeper to the Israelites turning them over to the fine shepherd (Jesus Christ).

²But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

- ❖ John the Baptist is likened to a friend of the bridegroom.

John 3:27-29

²⁷John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ ²⁹He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

John the Baptist called himself a friend of the bridegroom, Jesus Christ. He rejoices greatly in the voice of the bridegroom and his joy is fulfilled in the bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

- ❖ When John the Baptist was baptising in Salim, Jesus' disciples were baptising in the Judean countryside. He didn't feel jealous instead he was joyful.

John 3:28-30

²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' ²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.

- ❖ John the Baptist and Jesus Christ addressed the same God. They had the same filling of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist's reply to the authorities was the same as that of Jesus. We read in

John 3:27 - John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.

John 19:11 - Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

- ❖ John the Baptist's mission was to prepare the way. He consecrated himself and prepared himself in the wilderness by focusing on the one vision that God commanded him to do. He spent his whole life for the time of Messiah, the six months of his ministry which was the prime time of his life. As a start, are we looking into our lives and preparing our lives in the same way as John the Baptist focusing only on one vision – God's commission?

Note: John the Baptist lived away from drinking, associating with people and keeping his life needs very simple – clothing and food. The world called him a "fool". Jesus Christ came down eating and associating with the sinners. Even then, the world blamed Him. Both of them were doing their work for the Kingdom of God that were commanded by God. Indeed, God was pleased with their work. Hence, notice that the world is going to criticize whatever you do for the Kingdom of God. But be sure that our forerunners have focused on what

God said and not on what the world commented about them. Fix your eyes on God and His words!

❖ Why did John the Baptist not go behind Jesus Christ?

Let us take an example of a ground (soil), seed and labourers. A ground that has been not used by a farmer for many years first needs to be tilled well before sowing the seed. Once the seed is sown, it needs to be watered in order to grow into a plant and to bear fruit. Then, the field needs labourers for harvest.

In Matthew 9:37,38, Jesus talks about the harvest and the labourers.

Matthew 9:35-38 ³⁵ Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. ³⁶ But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. ³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. ³⁸ Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

How can a ground be ready for harvest if it hasn't been tilled first? The ground was completely waste for centuries. So, it needs to be tilled well. Here, the ground was Israelites' heart (which was hard without God's intervention for nearly four centuries) needed to be tilled (preached and taught so that the heart is ready to repent of their sins). That tilling work was the mission of John the Baptist. The seed (God's word) was sown by Jesus Christ (sower). He saw the harvest was ready for the labourers to reap them. The labourers are us now.

Hence, if John the Baptist had followed Jesus as his disciples did, then, the ground would not have been tilled. It would have been just laid bare and the seed sown would have been easily destroyed by the external factors. A way can lead to a destination, but it can't become the destination.

This is the reason, from the scriptures, we understand that John the Baptist did not follow Jesus Christ as his mission was to make the true Way Maker's path straight.

❖ What is John's baptism?

John's baptism means "baptism of repentance for the redemption of sins" (with water as a symbolic washing). John's baptism was not cleansing them of sins, but showing a sincere and a determined change at heart in repenting over their sins committed against the Law over one's lifetime. This repentant attitude led them to Jesus Christ later.

Galatians 3:24 – ²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor (guardian) to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith

Acts 19:3, 4 - ³ And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

In a nutshell, John the Baptist began to effect reconciliation through his baptism of repentance and in that way prepared the people for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who is John the Baptist?
- What was significant about John the Baptist's birth?
- What was John the Baptist's mission?
- Where did John the Baptist go baptising the people?
- How and why was John the Baptist so influential during those times?
- Why did John the Baptist choose to live in the wilderness and eat locusts?
- What do you understand by "coming in the spirit and power of Elijah"?
- Who was John the Baptist baptising at Jordan River while he saw and heard something from heaven? What did he see and hear?
- Why do you think John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus asking for the confirmation of the Messiah?
- How did Jesus reply and what was the message to John the Baptist?
- How is John the Baptist bringing the restoration for all?
- What is an important character from John the Baptist's life do you think we should reflect in our own lives?
- Why do you think that John the Baptist didn't follow the Messiah, Jesus Christ even when his disciples followed Him?

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