

John the Baptist

The Prophesied Forerunner

Introduction

John the Baptist stands as the bridge between the Old and New Testaments—the last of the prophets and the herald of the Messiah. His ministry was not an accident of history but the careful fulfillment of divine prophecy spoken centuries before his birth. Mark opens his Gospel by immediately connecting John to Old Testament promises, establishing that God's redemptive plan unfolds exactly as He declared. This study traces the prophetic foundation of John's ministry through its powerful fulfillment, examining his life, death, and lasting impact on the early church.

I. The Old Testament Prophecies

A. Malachi's Promise of the Messenger

[Malachi 3:1](#) — "Behold, **I will send** my messenger, and he shall prepare the way **before me**: and the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in: behold, he shall come, says **Jehovah of hosts**."

- Malachi, the final voice of Old Testament prophecy, speaks of a messenger who will prepare the way. The Hebrew word for "messenger" is mal'ak (Strong's #4397), meaning one sent with a commission. This messenger's task is specific: to prepare the way before "**Jehovah of hosts**" visits His people. The prophecy anticipates both a forerunner and the sudden arrival of **Jesus, our Lord**, to His temple.
- Note that the word "**hosts**", often refers to angels. From the following texts, we see that Jesus is in charge of the angels => [2Thes1:7](#); [Mt13:41](#); [16:27](#); [24:30-31](#); [1Pet3:22](#)

B. Isaiah's Voice in the Wilderness

[Isaiah 40:3](#) — "The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, Prepare you the way of **Jehovah**, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

- Isaiah's prophecy, written some 700 years before John's birth, provides the location and message of this herald. The wilderness becomes the unlikely platform for proclamation. The call is to prepare—to make ready the hearts of people for the coming of **Jesus**. The imagery of preparing highways suggests removing obstacles and making a clear path for a king's arrival.
 - Due to the previous text in [Mal3:1](#), we know that this reference of Jehovah is the Son of Jehovah, rather than Father Jehovah. We also know that Father Jehovah has never been seen by humans, according to => [Jn1:18](#); [6:46](#); [1Jn4:12](#); [1Tim6:16](#); [Ex33:20](#); [Deu4:12](#)
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II. The Gospel's Declaration of Fulfillment

A. Mark's Opening Identification

[Mark 1:2-3](#) — "As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, which shall prepare your way before you. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare you the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

- Mark intentionally begins his Gospel not with genealogies but with prophecy fulfilled. He combines [Malachi 3:1](#) and [Isaiah 40:3](#) to establish John's prophetic credentials. The centuries-old promises now find their fulfillment in a living

person, demonstrating God's faithfulness to His Word.

B. John's Appearance and Preaching

[Mark 1:4-6](#) — "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, **confessing their sins**. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey."

- John's austere appearance recalls the prophet Elijah ([2 Kings 1:8](#)), signaling to Israel that prophetic ministry had returned after 400 years of silence. His location—the wilderness—and his message—repentance—precisely match Isaiah's prophecy. The response is remarkable: crowds from Jerusalem and all Judea stream out to hear him.
 - Notice how the people were publicly "**confessing their sins**". See => <https://youtu.be/PcmQQjyBmF4> - my 4-minute talk about public confession.
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III. The Heart of John's Ministry

A. The Message of Repentance

[Luke 3:7-9](#) — "Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of **repentance**, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

- John's message was confrontational and urgent. **He demanded genuine repentance**—a complete turning from sin—not mere religious ritual. He stripped away false security based on heritage, insisting that relationship with God requires personal transformation. The imagery of the axe at the root emphasizes the immediacy of judgment.

B. The Testimony About Jesus

[John 1:29-34](#) — "The next day John sees Jesus coming unto him, and says, **Behold the Lamb of God**, which **takes away the sin** of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man which is preferred before me: for **he was before me**. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom you shall see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I saw, and bare record that **this is the Son of God**."

- John understood his entire ministry pointed beyond himself to Jesus. His identification of Jesus as "the Lamb of God" connects to the entire sacrificial system—Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice for sin - **our Passover Lamb**([1Cor5:7](#)). John testifies to Jesus' preeminence, divine identity, and mission to baptize with the Holy Spirit, not merely water.

C. The Humility of the Forerunner

[John 3:27-30](#) — "John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that has the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

- When John's disciples expressed concern about Jesus' growing popularity, John reveals the heart of true ministry. He understood his role completely—not the Christ, but the **Christ's messenger**. Using the metaphor of a wedding, John positions himself as the friend of the bridegroom who rejoices at the groom's success. His famous statement, "**He must increase, but I must decrease**," captures the essence of servant leadership.
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IV. The Martyr's Death

A. Confronting Sin in High Places

[Mark 6:17-20](#) — "For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. For **John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.** Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man..."

- John's commitment to truth extended even to confronting political power. Herod Antipas had divorced his wife to marry Herodias, his brother Philip's wife—a violation of Levitical law ([Leviticus 18:16, 20:21](#)). **John publicly rebuked this sin**, demonstrating that God's Word applies to rulers as much as common people. This boldness cost him his freedom. Herod's conflicted response—fearing John yet holding him prisoner—reveals the tension between conviction and compromise.

B. The Tragic Execution

[Mark 6:21-29](#) — "And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever you will, and I will give it you. And he swore unto her, Whatsoever you shall ask of me... And she said... I will that you give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother. And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb."

- A moment of drunken foolishness and pride became the instrument of murder. Herod's rash oath, made to impress his guests, trapped him. Herodias seized the opportunity to destroy the prophet who had exposed her sin. John's death was brutal and unjust—a godly man executed to satisfy personal vengeance and save political face. His disciples retrieved his body and provided proper burial, a final act of love and respect.

C. Jesus' Response to John's Death

[Matthew 14:12-13](#) — "And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities."

- Jesus' response to John's death was deeply personal. He withdrew to a solitary place, suggesting grief and the need for time with His Father. John was Jesus' cousin, His forerunner, and a faithful servant. This moment also foreshadowed Jesus' own fate—rejection by religious and political powers leading to execution. John's death marked the end of one phase of ministry and the intensification of Jesus' journey toward the cross.

V. The Continuing Testimony

A. Jesus' Witness About John

[Matthew 11:7-11](#) — "And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went you out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went you out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went you out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, which shall prepare your way before you{ [Mal 3:1](#) }. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

- **Jesus offered the highest commendation of John's ministry.** He was no compromiser ("reed shaken with the wind"), no seeker of comfort, but a true prophet—and more. Jesus identified John as the prophesied messenger of [Malachi 3:1](#), affirming his unique role in redemptive history. The statement that **none born of women was greater than John** places him at the pinnacle of Old Testament figures. Yet Jesus notes that even the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater—not in character or faithfulness, but in privilege, living in the era of the kingdom's fulfillment.

B. John's Disciples in the Early Church

[Acts 19:1-7](#) — "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit. And he said unto them, Unto what then were you baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, **they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve."

- More than two decades after John's death, Paul encountered disciples in Ephesus who had received only John's baptism. This reveals the widespread and lasting impact of John's ministry—his message had spread across the Roman world. Yet these disciples needed to understand that John's baptism was preparatory, pointing to Jesus. Once they grasped this and were **baptized in Jesus' name**, they received the Holy Spirit. John's testimony continued to bear fruit long after his death, as people who had heard his message came to full faith in Christ.
- Note that the only record we have of Christ's disciples baptizing was always **in the name of Jesus**. See => <https://sidnash.org/docs/BaptismalFormula.html>

IV. Practical Summary

John the Baptist's ministry demonstrates several vital principles for pastoral leadership:

1. **Prophetic fulfillment matters.** God's Word, spoken centuries earlier, came to pass exactly as promised. This builds confidence in all biblical prophecy and reminds us that God works according to His declared plan, not our timeline.
2. **Preparation precedes visitation.** John prepared hearts for Jesus. Our ministries likewise prepare people to encounter Christ—removing obstacles of unbelief, confronting sin, and creating spiritual hunger.
3. **Message over popularity.** John's confrontational preaching risked offending his audience, yet he refused to soften the truth. Effective ministry speaks God's Word faithfully, regardless of the response.
4. **Truth-telling has costs.** John's willingness to confront Herod's sin led to his imprisonment and death. Faithful ministry sometimes requires speaking uncomfortable truth to powerful people, and we must count the cost of obedience.
5. **Christ-centeredness is essential.** John constantly pointed away from himself to Jesus. Every sermon, every conversation, every ministry activity should ultimately magnify Christ, not the messenger.
6. **Humility sustains ministry.** John's willingness to decrease as Jesus increased models the heart attitude that prevents pride and preserves effectiveness. Our joy should be found in Christ's success, not our own prominence.
7. **Faithful influence outlasts life.** Decades after John's death, people were still responding to his message. Ministry impact cannot always be measured in the moment—faithful seed-sowing produces harvests long after we're gone.

John fulfilled his calling by preparing the way, proclaiming the truth, pointing to the Lamb, and dying for righteousness. May our ministries reflect the same faithfulness.

Desiring to live by every word that comes from the mouth of Jehovah ([Deut8:3; Matt4:4](#))

-[Sid Nash](#): 05/02/2026. Latest version: <https://sidnash.org/docs/JnTheBaptist.html>