

Passing the Baton
John the Baptist & Jesus
John 1:19-37 (11/13/2022)

The Apostle John is the author of the Gospel of John. He states his purpose for this Gospel in [John 20:31](#). John's purpose is to prove this by bringing forward a number of witnesses beginning with John the Baptist. God had a distinct purpose for John's life.

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah.

Jesus said of him, "For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist," [Luke 7:28](#). There had been no prophet in Israel for over four centuries until John. His birth was announced to his father by the angel Gabriel before John was born, [Luke 1:5-25](#). The last recorded visitation of an angel to men was in the time of the prophet Zachariah, five hundred years earlier. John the Baptist burst upon the scene of Israel with a powerful message. [Mark 1:6-8](#). God did not send John into Jerusalem to preach in the Temple. John identified himself with the poor people of that area of Israel. There was a great sense of expectation in the nation of Israel at that time, [Luke 3:15](#).

The religious authorities in Jerusalem sent a delegation to investigate John (19).

When the Gospel of John refers to "the Jews" it is usually a reference to the religious establishment in Israel. Their goal was to protect Israel from false Messiahs. However, when the true Messiah, Jesus, came they refused to acknowledge Him. In fact, they continued to oppose Jesus which eventually led to His crucifixion. Literally "multitudes" [Luke 3:7](#) was coming to John to be baptized. [Mark 1:5](#), "Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins." Anyone threatening their influence over the people was troubling. They first wanted to know John's true identity (19) "Who are you?"

➤ **Are you the Messiah?** (20)

John's answer was forthright and clear. He did not come to try to usurp Jesus' ministry or identity. Truth is one of the themes of John's Gospel. (17) "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

➤ **Are you Elijah?** (21)

There was an expectation of Elijah's coming before the Messiah based upon [Malachi 4:5](#). John was denying that he was Elijah resurrected as some Jews expected because he had been taken up into heaven. The angel told his father that "He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah," [Luke 1:17](#).

➤ **Are you the Prophet?** (21)

It is possible this was a reference to Moses' prophecy in [Deuteronomy 18:15](#), "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me..."

John's message was to prepare the hearts of the nation of Israel for the coming of Jesus their Messiah.

At this point the delegation was frustrated and demanded an answer that they could take back to their leaders. (22-23) "...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 quoted from [Isaiah 40](#) which is a passage concerning the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah used the imagery of preparing a highway for the King. The Synoptic Gospels all state that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of this prophecy. [Matthew 3:1-2](#), "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'"

➤ **John's ministry was preaching and baptizing.**

The rite of baptism suggested that he had some kind of authority to do this (24-25). The Pharisees were the defenders of legalistic Judaism. They would have been particularly interested in examining the credentials of any new teacher. John points them again to One Who is coming after him and is greater than him (26-27).

▪ **John's baptism is not the same as believers' baptism.**

The Jews did not baptize except for Gentiles who were coming into the faith. The fact that these Jews were submitting to baptism was significant, [Matthew 3:5-6](#). They in effect were saying that their national heritage was not sufficient for salvation. This public act showed their repentance along with the confession of their sins. It did not save a person any more than believers' baptism does. It was an outward sign of an inward spiritual work. John baptized Jesus to identify with sinners, [Matthew 3:14-17](#). A Christian is baptized to identify with Jesus. John did not respond to the temptation to make what was happening all about him. (26-27) He understood that it was all about pointing men to Jesus (29-31). We are so familiar with the image of the lamb that we cannot appreciate how unfamiliar this may have sounded to those who heard John the Baptist. The Apostle John is the only Gospel writer who uses this imagery. (35-37) "...And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him speak, **and they followed Jesus.**"

John's purpose was to transition spiritual leadership from himself to Jesus.

One verse sums up his person and his ministry (3:30).

Chuck Swindoll in his commentary on the Gospel of John points out five things we can apply to ourselves from John's ministry.

1. John was an extraordinary person, but he was only human.
2. John was a lamp, but he was not the light.
3. John was a voice, but he was not the Word.
4. John was useful, but he was not indispensable.
5. John was effective, but he remained humble.

We like John the Baptist have the privilege to point people to Jesus with our life and our testimony.