

# John the Baptist — The Prophet Who Prepared the Way

Series: 30 Prophets of the Bible - Dr. Randy White

## I. Identity of John the Baptist

### Name and Known Facts

- John was the son of Zacharias the priest and Elisabeth, both connected with Israel's priestly line (Luke 1:5).
- His birth was announced before conception, and his name was given by divine instruction rather than family custom (Luke 1:13, 60–63).
- He was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb and separated by a distinctive prophetic calling (Luke 1:15).
- Scripture calls him "the prophet of the Highest" and places him in Israel's prophetic expectation (Luke 1:76).

### Prophetic Role

- John was the forerunner sent to prepare Israel for the coming of the Lord (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1; Matt. 3:3).
- His ministry centered on Israel, repentance, the kingdom of heaven, and the public manifestation of Jesus as Messiah.
- Jesus said John was "more than a prophet" and identified him with the promised messenger who prepared the way (Matt. 11:9–10).

## II. Historical Setting

### Israel Under Rome

- John ministered in the days of Herod and in the early public setting of Jesus' earthly ministry.
- Israel had the temple, priests, synagogues, and Scriptures, but remained under Gentile dominion.
- John's wilderness setting recalled Israel's prophetic history and placed his message outside the polished religious centers of Jerusalem.

### The Wilderness and Jordan

- John appeared in the wilderness of Judaea, preaching and baptizing in Jordan (Matt. 3:1–6).
- His clothing and manner were intentionally prophetic, recalling Elijah (2 Kings 1:8; Matt. 3:4).
- The people came from Jerusalem, Judaea, and the region around Jordan, showing a wide public response.

## III. Nature of John's Ministry

### A Call to National Repentance

- John's message was direct: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2).
- His baptism was "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" in connection with Israel's preparation (Mark 1:4).
- He demanded "fruits meet for repentance" and warned against trusting merely in descent from Abraham (Matt. 3:8–9).

### A Witness to Christ

- John did not present himself as the Christ, Elijah in person, or "that prophet" (John 1:19–23).
- He identified Jesus as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).
- His own summary of ministry was humble and exact: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

## IV. Major Themes

### Preparation for the King

- John prepared the way of the Lord by calling Israel to repentance before the appearing of Messiah.

- His ministry belongs to the prophetic program concerning Israel and the kingdom, not to the later revelation of the mystery given through Paul.
- This distinction helps keep John's baptism, message, and audience in their proper historical setting.

### Judgment and Separation

- John warned that the axe was laid unto the root of the trees (Matt. 3:10).
- He spoke of the One coming after him who would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire (Matt. 3:11).
- His wheat, garner, chaff, and fire imagery presents Messiah as Judge as well as Deliverer (Matt. 3:12).

### Moral Courage

- John rebuked religious leaders who came without evident repentance (Matt. 3:7).
- He gave practical answers to publicans and soldiers without softening the call to righteousness (Luke 3:10–14).
- He reproved Herod for unlawful marriage and other evils, leading to imprisonment and execution (Luke 3:19–20; Mark 6:17–29).
- From prison, John sent disciples to ask Jesus, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3). Jesus answered by pointing to His works, then publicly defended John's prophetic greatness (Matt. 11:4–11).

## V. Structure of John's Prophetic Ministry

### Luke 1 — Birth Announced and Interpreted

- Gabriel announces John's birth and mission to Zacharias (Luke 1:5–17).
- Zacharias prophesies that John will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways (Luke 1:76–79).

### Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3 — Public Preaching

- John preaches repentance and announces the nearness of the kingdom.
- He baptizes in Jordan and confronts empty religious confidence.
- He baptizes Jesus, and Jesus is publicly identified with approval from heaven.

### John 1; 3 — Witness and Withdrawal

- John testifies that he is the voice crying in the wilderness.
- He identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Son of God (John 1:29–34).
- He rejoices as the friend of the bridegroom and willingly steps back as Christ's ministry becomes public (John 3:25–30).

### Matthew 11; Mark 6 — Question, Vindication, and Death

- John's prison question shows the difficulty of waiting for kingdom fulfillment while the King is present and rejection is growing (Matt. 11:2–6).
- Jesus does not rebuke John as a false prophet; He calls him greater than those born of women and connects him again with Malachi's messenger (Matt. 11:7–11).
- John's death under Herod shows the cost of prophetic faithfulness and anticipates Israel's rejection of the greater Prophet, Priest, and King.

## VI. Why John the Baptist Matters

### The Prophet at the Threshold

- John stands at the threshold between Old Testament prophetic expectation and the appearing of Christ in Israel.
- He confirms that the promises of Isaiah and Malachi had not been abandoned.
- He shows Israel's spiritual condition at Messiah's appearing: interest, crowds, religious resistance, and the need for repentance.
- He is not the founder of the church; he is the God-sent forerunner of the King, calling Israel to be ready for the Lord.