

The Failure of John the Baptist

Please read for me

The Second Coming of Elijah and John the Baptist

The Jewish Belief in the Return of Elijah

The Direction the Jewish People Would Choose

The Faithlessness of John the Baptist

The Sense in Which John the Baptist Was Elijah

Our Attitude toward the Bible

I've had so many heated discussions about this topic. The title is deliberately confrontational to encourage you to check out the evidence here. If long standing preconceived ideas can be successfully challenged then I believe there's a greater chance that the Lord at His Second Advent will be recognised. After all, as I explained in an earlier post, Jesus Himself stated that even for faithful Christians to identify and connect with the Lord at His Second Coming would not be an easy thing at all.

Here is how the Exposition of the Divine Principle elucidates this topic:

THE SECOND COMING OF ELIJAH AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

The prophet Malachi foretold that Elijah would come again: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes." (Mal. 4:5) Jesus testified that the prophesied coming of Elijah was realized in none other than John the Baptist:

"I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. . . ." Then the disciples

understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist (Matt. 17:12-13)

THE JEWISH BELIEF IN THE RETURN OF ELIJAH

Elijah ascended to heaven in a whirlwind and a fiery chariot (2Kings 2:11) before he could complete his divine mission. Satan's power revived and continued to plague God's providence. The way of the Messiah could not be made straight until Satan's influence was removed. Hence, before Jesus could realize the ideal of the incarnate Temple, another prophet should inherit and complete Elijah's unfinished mission of breaking people's ties with Satan. Due to this providential necessity, the prophet Malachi foretold that Elijah would come again. (Mal. 4:5)

The Jewish people who believed in the prophecies of Scripture fervently hoped for the advent of the Messiah. Yet we should know that they longed just as eagerly for the return of Elijah. This was because God had clearly promised through the prophet Malachi that He would send the prophet Elijah prior to the advent of the Messiah to prepare the way of the Lord. Just as there are Christians today who are resolutely looking to the sky with the expectation that Jesus will come in the clouds, Jews of Jesus' day were looking up at the sky, anxiously awaiting the coming of Elijah.

Nevertheless, before any news was heard about Elijah having come again to fulfill Malachi's prophecy, Jesus suddenly appeared and claimed to be the Messiah. It is no wonder that Jesus' appearance and proclamation stirred up all of Jerusalem in great confusion. Wherever Jesus' disciples went, they were bombarded with the question about Elijah, who was supposed to come first. Lacking an adequate answer themselves, the disciples turned to Jesus asking, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" (Matt. 17:10) Jesus replied that John the Baptist was the very Elijah whom the people were awaiting. (Matt. 17:12-13) Since the disciples already believed that Jesus was the Messiah, they willingly accepted his testimony that John the Baptist was Elijah. Yet how could others who did not know Jesus accept this controversial claim?

THE DIRECTION THE JEWISH PEOPLE WOULD CHOOSE

Jesus made it plain that John the Baptist was the very Elijah whom the people were so anxiously awaiting, while on the contrary, John

the Baptist himself flatly negated this claim. Whose words were the Jewish people to believe? This matter obviously depended on which of the two, Jesus or John, appeared more credible and respectable in the eyes of the people of that time.

Let us examine how Jesus must have appeared to the Jewish people. Jesus was an uneducated young man who grew up in the poor and lowly home of a carpenter. This unknown young man suddenly appeared and called himself the “Lord of the Sabbath” while apparently defiling the Sabbath, which pious Jews kept with utmost reverence. (Matt. 12:1-8) Jesus thus gained the reputation of one who wanted to abolish the Law, which for the Jews was the basis of salvation. (Matt. 5:17) Therefore, the leaders of the Jewish community persecuted Jesus. Jesus was compelled to gather disciples from among simple fishermen and to befriend tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners, with whom he would eat and drink. (Matt. 11:19)

Moreover, Jesus seemed to place himself on an equal footing with God (John 14:9) and asserted that no one could enter God’s Kingdom except through him. (John 14:6) He insisted that people should love him more than they love their own parents, brothers and sisters, spouses or children. (Matt. 10:37 - Luke 14:26) From all this, we can gather that Jesus was far from credible in the eyes of the Jewish people of his time.

How did John the Baptist appear to the Jewish people of that time? John the Baptist was born to a prominent family; he was the son of Zechariah, a priest. The miracles and signs surrounding John’s conception and birth surprised all the hill country of Judea. One day, when Zechariah was burning incense in the Temple, an angel appeared before him and announced that his wife, who was old and barren, would soon conceive a son. When he did not believe the angel’s words, he was struck dumb, and his tongue was loosed only upon the birth of the child. (Luke 1:9-66) Furthermore, John led an exemplary life of faith and discipline in the wilderness, surviving on locusts and wild honey. For these reasons, many Jewish people wondered whether perhaps he was the Christ, and a delegation of priests and Levites came to him and asked him this directly. (Luke 3:15 - John 1:20) The Jewish people respected John to this extent.

When the Jewish people of Jesus' day compared Jesus and John the Baptist, who appeared more credible to them? Without a doubt, John's words had more credibility. Therefore, they naturally believed John the Baptist when he denied being Elijah more than they believed Jesus' testimony that John was Elijah. Since the people believed John, they considered Jesus' words to be a fabrication concocted to support his dubious claim to be the Messiah. Consequently, Jesus was condemned as an impostor.

As long as the Jewish people kept their faith in the prophecy of Malachi, they had to reject Jesus, who claimed to be the Messiah, because from their viewpoint Elijah had not yet come. On the other hand, to believe in Jesus they would have had to deny the biblical prophecy which asserted that the Messiah would come only after the return of Elijah. Since pious Jews would not even consider denying the prophecies of Scripture, they were left with no other choice but to disbelieve in Jesus.

THE FAITHLESSNESS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Many among the Jewish leadership and people of Jesus' day had the highest respect for John the Baptist; some even thought of him as the Messiah. Had John the Baptist announced that he was Elijah, as Jesus had testified, those who were eagerly waiting for the Messiah would have readily believed John's testimony and flocked to Jesus. Instead, John's ignorance of God's providence, which led him to insist that he was not Elijah, became the principal reason why the Jewish people did not come to Jesus.

John the Baptist testified to Jesus at the Jordan River:

I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Matt. 3:11)

I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God. (John 1:33-34)

God had directly revealed to John that Jesus was the Messiah, and John bore witness to this revelation. Moreover, he said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" (John 1:23) and declared that he was the one who had been

sent before the Christ. (John 3:28) Therefore, John should have realized through his own wisdom that he was the returning Elijah. However, John was ignorant of God's Will. He negated Jesus' testimony concerning him; moreover, he separated from Jesus and went his own way.

In truth, John the Baptist's mission as a witness ended when he baptized Jesus and testified to him. What should his mission have been after that point? In this light, after John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus, he more than anyone, should have served Jesus with ardent devotion as a disciple for the rest of his life. However, John left Jesus and went about baptizing independently. It is no wonder that the Jewish people were confused to the point of even supposing that John was the Messiah. (Luke 3:15) Their leaders were confused, too. (John 1:19-20) What is more, in one incident, a Jew who followed Jesus and the disciples of John the Baptist quarreled with each other over whose teacher was giving more baptisms. (John 3:25-26)

We can also discern from John's statement, "He must increase, but I must decrease," (John 3:30) that in his heart John did not regard himself as sharing the same destiny as Jesus. Indeed, John the Baptist should have been Jesus' foremost apostle, zealously proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus. Yet, due to his blindness, he did not fulfill his mission. His precious life, which was meant to be offered for Jesus' sake, was eventually lost over a relatively insignificant affair. (Mark 6:14-29)

When the mind of John the Baptist was focused on God, he recognized Jesus as the Messiah and testified to him. Later, when the inspiration left him and he returned to a mundane state, his ignorance returned and exacerbated his faithlessness. At one point, John tried to resolve his doubts by sending his disciples to Jesus, asking, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3)

When Jesus was confronted with this question from John, he answered indignantly, with an air of admonition: Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me. (Matt. 11:4-6)

Since Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, he was more in need of one leader who could guide a thousand than a thousand who would follow a leader. Did he not first preach the Gospel to the priests and scribes in the Temple? He went there in search of prepared and capable people.

Jesus expressed his sorrow in these words of judgment: “Blessed is he who takes no offense at me.” (Matt. 11:6) Though John was greatly admired in his day, Jesus judged John’s life by saying obliquely that one who took offense at him would not be blessed, no matter how great he might be.

After the disciples of John the Baptist finished questioning Jesus and left, Jesus remarked that although John may have been the greatest of all prophets, he failed to complete the mission God had entrusted to him: Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Matt. 11:11)

If testifying to the Messiah was the main mission of the prophets, then John the Baptist was surely the greatest of prophets. Nevertheless, in terms of attending the Messiah, he was the least of all. Everyone in the kingdom of heaven, no matter how lowly, knew that Jesus was the Messiah and served him with devotion. Yet John the Baptist, who had been called upon to serve the Messiah more closely than anyone else, separated from Jesus and walked his own way. In terms of his devotion to Jesus, therefore, he was less than even the least in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus continued, “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.” (Matt. 11:12 NIV) John the Baptist was chosen from before his birth and led an arduous ascetic life in the wilderness. Had he attended Jesus with a sincere heart, the position of Jesus’ chief disciple was surely reserved for him. However, because he failed in his mission to serve Jesus, Peter, a “forceful man,” laid hold of the position of chief disciple. We can deduce from the expression “from the days of John the Baptist until now” that Jesus spoke the verses that follow (Matt. 11:16-19) in reference not primarily to the people in general but specifically to John the Baptist. Jesus concluded, “Wisdom is justified by her deeds.” (Matt. 11:19) Had John acted wisely, he would not have left Jesus, and his deeds would have been remembered forever as righteousness. Unfortunately, he was foolish.

He blocked the Jewish people's path to Jesus, as well as his own path. Here we have come to understand that the main reason why Jesus had to die on the cross was the failure of John the Baptist.

THE SENSE IN WHICH JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS ELIJAH

We have stated previously that John the Baptist was to inherit and complete the mission which Elijah had left unfinished on earth. As recorded in the Bible, he was born with the mission to go before the Lord, "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 for the Lord a people prepared." (Luke 1:17) Hence, in terms of his mission, John was the second coming of Elijah.

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE BIBLE

We have been reading the Bible based on the unquestioned belief that John the Baptist was a great prophet. Our new insight into John the Baptist teaches us that we should dispense with the conservative attitude of faith which makes us afraid to question conventional beliefs and traditional doctrines.

This is especially important in this time in which we are now living which is truly the Last Days! Praise God!!!

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[Back to top](#)

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