



# Lesson 17: Is Jesus the Son of God?

## The Testimony of John the Baptist

### THE STRENGTH OF JOHN'S TESTIMONY

In studying the evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, many modern Bible students neglect to consider the testimony of John the Baptist. Yet John's testimony is some of the strongest evidence presented in Scripture; it was especially powerful for those who lived in New Testament times and knew first-hand about John's work and ministry. Some of Jesus' most faithful disciples became followers of Christ based on John's say-so (John 1:35-37).

John's testimony should be given considerable weight still today for the following reasons:

1. **He was the chosen forerunner of the Messiah.** All four gospel accounts preface the narrative of Christ's ministry by presenting John as His forerunner, as prophesied in Scripture (Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 1:1-3; Luke 3:3-6; John 1:20-23).

The Old Testament prophets had predicted that the one who would prepare the way of the Lord would do so by purifying God's defiled people. Malachi prophesied that the Christ's forerunner would "sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness" (Malachi 3:1-3). Malachi also compared him to Elijah who would come to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6). Using figurative language, Isaiah had said that "Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth" (Isaiah 40:3-5).

In perfect fulfillment of these prophesies, John's ministry focused on demanding total repentance from his hearers (Luke 3:7-14). His baptism was a baptism of repentance which required people to confess their sins and turn from them (Mark 1:4-5).

As the divinely designated herald of the Messiah, John's testimony as to the identity of the Messiah is powerful evidence.

2. **He was a prophet, and regarded as such by the people.** Luke 3 records that "the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness." This description qualifies John as a prophet, and that is how Jesus portrays him as well (Matthew 11:7-9; Luke 7:28). The people of his day also regarded Him as a prophet (Matthew 21:25-26; cf. Mark 11:30-32). If we accept John as a prophet of God, his testimony concerning Jesus *must* be true!
3. **He was given direct confirmation of Jesus' identity from above.** John's identification of Jesus rests firmly on what he witnessed when he baptized Jesus (Mark 1:9-11). John explains it this way,

*And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. 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.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."* (John 1:32-34)

4. **Jesus Himself referenced John as a witness.** In John 5:33-35, Jesus pointed the Jews to the testimony of John as evidence to Jesus' identity. Jesus says of John, "He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light" (John 5:35). Elsewhere, Jesus identified John as His messenger and as "Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:10-14).

#### THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN – TEN THINGS JOHN SAID ABOUT JESUS

John the Baptist possessed unassailable credentials as a witness for Jesus. Here is the testimony he offered:

1. Jesus is "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).
2. He is "preferred before me" (John 1:30), indicating the exalted position of Jesus.
3. "He was before me" (John 1:30), indicating that Jesus is eternal.
4. "This is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (John 1:33).
5. "This is the Son of God" (John 1:34).
6. "He must increase" (John 3:30).
7. He "comes from heaven and is above all" (John 3:31).
8. He testifies "what He has seen and heard" (John 3:32).
9. He "speaks the words of God" (John 3:34).
10. The Father loves Him, "and has given all things into His hand." (John 3:35).

#### SHOULD WE LOOK FOR ANOTHER?

Both Matthew and Luke record that when John was in prison, he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3; Luke 7:19). Jesus' answer was to tell John of the mighty miracles that He was performing (Matt. 11:4-5; Luke 7:22). This evidence was even stronger than John's testimony (John 5:36).

Because of this incident, some have questioned whether John believed his own testimony. But the evidence we've already examined shows beyond question that John was absolutely certain that Jesus was indeed the Messiah to come. The motivation for John's question was probably either to benefit John's remaining disciples by pointing them to Jesus, or more likely it was prompted by the fact that Jesus was not the kind of Messiah John was expecting. Like many others, including Jesus' own disciples, John may have had the idea that the Messiah would be an earthly King who would restore Israel as a nation. This simply was not what Christ came to do. In Jesus' response to John, the last thing He said was, "And blessed is *he* who is not offended because of Me" (Matthew 11:6; Luke 7:23). The true nature of the Kingship of Christ was a stumbling block to many people. In essence, Jesus is telling John, "Don't let the fact that I am a different Messiah from the one you expected cause you to stumble."

#### QUESTIONS:

1. In your own words, explain why John's testimony should be regarded as very strong proof of Jesus' identity as the Christ, the Son of God.

2. Do you think that John's question; "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" indicates that John doubted his own testimony? Why or why not?