



A Voice in the Wilderness

John 1:19-34

Notes: The *MacArthur Study Bible* by John MacArthur was used as a reference in developing this Bible Study. The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version.

1:19 Who was the John referred to in this verse and what do we know about him?

John the Baptist... the Apostle John did not refer to himself by name in his own gospel.

- John the Baptist was born into a priestly family and belonged to the tribe of Levi (Luke 1:5).
- He was the cousin of Jesus Christ and served as His prophetic forerunner (Matt. 3:3; Luke 1:5–25, 36).
- He boldly proclaimed the need for spiritual repentance and preparation for the coming of the Messiah in the Jordan valley.

Who inquired as to whom John the Baptist was?

The Jews...from Jerusalem may refer to the Sanhedrin, the main governing body of the Jewish nation. The Sanhedrin was controlled by the family of the High-Priest, and thus the envoys would naturally be priests and Levites who would be interested in John's ministry.

1:20 Why did John have to say, "I am not the Christ?"

Some thought that John was the Messiah (Luke 3:15–17) and the people were certainly anticipating the promised Messiah to deliver them from the Roman occupation.

What does the term "Christ" mean?

The term "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term for "Messiah", both mean "God's Anointed."

1:21 Why did the Jews from Jerusalem ask John if he was Elijah?

Because of the prophecy in Malachi 4:5 that promises the prophet Elijah will return before Messiah establishes His earthly kingdom.

If the Jews had accepted Jesus as Messiah, would John the Baptist have satisfied the prophesy about Elijah?

I believe that God knew all along that Israel would reject Jesus thus John was a spiritual type of Elijah for the establishment of a spiritual kingdom.

- This is reinforced in Luke 1:17 where the angel announcing John's birth said that John would go before Jesus "*in the spirit and power of Elijah.*"
- Jesus reinforced the spiritual role of John as Elijah in Matthew 11:14 – "*And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.*"
- I believe that one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 is Elijah who will literally return as a fore-runner to the return of the Messiah.

What is the next thing the Jews from Jerusalem wondered about John?

They wanted to know if he was "the Prophet." This is a reference to Deut. 18:15 where the Messiah is expected to be a prophet like Moses:

Deut 18:15 - The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear

What makes the Prophet in Deut 18:15 unique from all the other prophets God sent?

This is a Prophet that all people will eventually hear. In general, people have rejected God's prophets. There will come a time when all will acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah...

Phil 2:10 - at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth

1:23 Who did John say that he was?

John quoted and applied Isaiah 40:3 to himself ...

Isa 40:3 - The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

In the original context of Is. 40:3, the prophet heard a voice calling for the leveling of a path through the desert so that God could lead Israel home from Babylonian exile. This call was a prophetic picture foreshadowing the final return of Israel to God from spiritual darkness.

How did John demonstrate humility in calling himself a voice?

This focused attention on the message of the Messiah rather than the person bringing the message.

1:24 – What more do we learn about the Jews from Jerusalem?

They were Pharisees. This group was the fore-runners of modern Judaism which is basically a classic salvation-by-works religion. The Pharisees had taken God's Law adding their own rules as an interpretation of God's Law saying that salvation came from keeping the Law.

How had the Pharisees missed the point of God's Law?

It is not possible to earn salvation by keeping to the Law because God's standard is perfection...

Matthew 5:48 - Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

There is no grading on the curve by God. Everyone knows where they stand with Him...

James 2:10 - For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

Why did God give us the Law?

God gave us the Law to drive us to Him for salvation. If we are honest with ourselves, we'd have to admit that we can not save ourselves by meeting the requirements of the Law. Thus if we are to be saved, it is out of God's grace alone...

Galatians 3:24 - Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

1:25 What did the Pharisees question about John?

They questioned his authority for baptizing.

Why did they expect that baptism required the authority of the Messiah or Elijah?

The baptism of John was a traditional expression of repentance and spiritual cleansing. The need for repentance and spiritual cleansing was associated the coming of Messiah in the Old Testament (Ezek. 36, 37; Zech. 13:1).

How was the baptism of John different than our baptism in the church today?

At the time of John's baptism, Jesus had not died or rose from the grave. His baptism represented a public profession of repentance and being open to the coming of the Messiah. Our baptism today is a public profession of our identifying with Christ's death and resurrection. It is symbolic of our dying to our old nature and being born again as a child of God.

1:26 What did John meant that there was One among them that they did not know?

The Messiah that would come was a Jew who was already in their midst but they did not know who He was.

1:27 What did John have to say about the Messiah?

John the Baptist made it clear that the Messiah was so great that even a prophet like himself was nothing in comparison. He likened himself to a slave that was not worthy to do even the most menial of tasks for his Master.

1:28 Where did John practice his ministry?

Bethabara. This word has been substituted for "Bethany" which is in the original text because some feel that John incorrectly identified Bethany as the place of these events. The solution is that two Bethany's existed, i.e., one near Jerusalem where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived (11:1) and one "beyond the Jordan" near the region of Galilee. Since John took great pains to identify the other Bethany's close proximity to Jerusalem, he most likely was referring here to that other town with the same name.

The Lamb of God

1:29 What happened the next day after John responded to the Jerusalem delegation?

John saw Jesus and declared Him to be the one who would make it possible for our sins to be forgiven.

Why did John call Jesus the Lamb of God?

The use of a lamb for sacrifice was very familiar to Jews. A lamb was used as a sacrifice during Passover and was offered in their daily sacrifices. John the Baptist used this expression to refer to the ultimate sacrifice Jesus would make on the cross to pay our sin debt.

Does this verse say that Jesus paid the sin debt for all people in the world?

In this context "world" refers to humanity in general, not every person including unbelievers. The use of the singular "sin" with "of the world" says that Jesus' sacrifice potentially reaches all people regardless of their relationship to Him...

I John 2:2 - And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. However, passages like this have to be harmonized with others which make it clear that Jesus' sacrifice had no value to those who have rejected Him...

John 3:18 - He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

1:30 What is John saying in this verse?

He is reinforcing his own insignificance in comparison to the Messiah and making a reference to His deity: "*He was before me*" means that He existed before John was created.

1:31 What did John mean by, "I did not know Him?"

Although John was Jesus' cousin, he did not know Jesus as the "Coming One" or "Messiah" when He began his ministry. John only knew that the coming of the Messiah was imminent so he preached about the coming of the Kingdom of God.

1:32-33 What enabled John to identify the Messiah?

God had given John a revelation that he would see the Spirit descend and remain on the Messiah (v. 33). So when John witnessed this, he knew the Messiah was Jesus.

1-33 What does it mean that the Messiah baptizes with the Holy Spirit?

This is a reference to the Spirit of God indwelling believers who have had their sins forgiven by trusting in the Messiah.

1:34 What did John testify about Jesus?

John testified that Jesus was the Son of God.

What is significant about the term "Son of God," aren't all believers called "sons of God" (John 1:12; Matt. 5:9; Rom. 8:14)?

The singular use of the word "Son" attests to the uniqueness of the relationship between the Son and the Father. Also, the Jews understood this distinction to mean, "the same as God." We'll see this due to their reaction to Jesus claiming this title for Himself in John 10.