

JOHN

John: The Gospel of Gospels

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John 1:6-8

Lesson No. 7: A Forerunner & A Witness

All rise: the world court is in session. ‘The Word’, God’s Son, is the presiding Judge. He is coming on the World stage of history.

A bailiff makes an announcement before a judge enters the courtroom so that people can stand as a sign of respect to him. Similarly, John the Baptist, fulfills the role of a bailiff. He announces to the world the coming of the Messiah, God’s Son, the Supreme Judge. World: arise God’s Son is entering the court....

We need to follow The Apostle John’s train of thought. First, he affirms that ‘the Word’ in John 1:1 is God. Second, he asserts in v. 3 that every creation, inanimate or animate has their origin in Him. And third, in verses 4 and 5, he identifies God’s Son as both the source of life and light to the world. Then, in verses 6-8, he inserts John the Baptist in his dissertation.

John is not alone. All three synoptic Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke used John the Baptist as the backdrop in their narrative of Jesus’s ministry. This is important. The Baptist, who wore two hats, a forerunner and a witness, played a unique role in the introduction of God’s Son to God’s people.

1. The Baptist as a Forerunner

God is not a God of confusion. All the way back in eternity past, God knew that His thought ‘the Word’ would take on human flesh and look like an ordinary man in the streets of Galilee. Who would identify Him beyond a shadow of a doubt as God in the flesh? God sent John the Baptist as a forerunner to announce the coming of His Son into the world, and also to identify Jesus as God’s Son.

This was prophesied in Mal. 3:1. We read “Behold, I will send My messenger, who will prepare the way before Me. Then the Lord whom you seek will **suddenly come to His temple**—the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight—see, He is coming,” says the LORD of Hosts” (BSB).

John the Baptist was the forerunner that Israel knew would come before the Messiah as per Malachi’s prophesy.

Remarkably, for over 400 years, Israel had been in spiritual darkness, and in dire search for light. Centuries had come and gone with no sight of God’s promised Messiah. No light in the country. God’s silence for all these years complicated their life. After Malachai’s announcement that God would send a messenger to prepare the way, there was silence for 400 years.

During Israel’s wandering in darkness in quest for light, a voice was finally heard in the wilderness according to Matthew 3:1-12. It was John the Baptist's voice: “Prepare the way for the Lord” (v. 3). Imagine, it was the first time in over 400 years that anyone had heard God’s voice through one of His messengers! It must have been very refreshing. All those 400 years there had not been a divinely inspired dream, nor vision, nor word from the Lord.

John the Baptist was divinely empowered. His message was so dynamic that the people thought he was the Messiah. In John 1:19, enquirers asked him, “Who are you?” Knowing what people were saying, he answered them in v. 20, “I am not the Christ.” He told them that his job was to announce the coming of the Messiah. He added in v. 27, “the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” This brings us to examine the Baptist’s second role.

2. The Baptist as a Witness

As a forerunner the Baptist announced the coming of the Messiah. And as witness he points the nation to the light and life giver, Jesus Christ: 1:29 “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.” The Baptist speaks to his audience as a witness. He witnesses to the truth about who Christ is. His aim was to

convince Israel to trust their Messiah to forgive them their sins and to grant them eternal life.

Let us pause and examine the word witness and consider its importance to the Jewish people.

“Witness” Defined

The Apostle John uses the word “witness” as both a noun and a verb extensively in his Gospel, more than any other New Testament writer. We will get to his reason later. According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, the verb *martyreo* means “to be a witness,” while *martyria* means “bearing witness.”¹

To be a witness was a serious matter in the Old Testament, especially in judicial courts (Num. 5:13). A witness played a big role in the conviction of the guilty and acquittal of the innocent. The Law required two or three witnesses before a judgment could be rendered. Moses wrote in Dt. 17:7, “On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death.” False witness is strictly forbidden and does incur punishment (Dt. 19:16-21).

The Baptist’s witness of God’s Son was like no other. He was the forerunner and he was the man who identified God’s Son. In John 1:33-34 the Baptist recounts his amazing experience:

“I did not recognize Him, but He [the Father] who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' **‘I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.’**”

The Baptist witnessed the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on Christ and the Father’s voice saying, “This is My beloved Son” This fueled his role as a witness of Jesus Christ. It fueled his resolve to point people to Christ, telling them, He is the Man of the hour. He must increase, I must decrease.

The Baptist’s witness was important to the Apostle John in his effort to prove that Jesus Christ is God and John the Baptist was the first to identify Jesus as God’s Son. So, in his gospel, John uses the Baptist’s witness like concrete poured for the foundation of his work. Later John will add other witnesses to build upon his

¹ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing 2000, 1985), p. 565

foundation to prove that Jesus Christ was more than a Man, that He was God in the flesh.

According to Jewish law, two witnesses are enough to authenticate a matter. But John the apostle provided eight witnesses in his Gospel as proof that Jesus Christ was who He claimed to be, God's Son. He will use:

1. The witness of John the Baptist (1:33-34). 2)
2. The Father's witness of His Son (John 5:32, 37; 8:18); 3)
3. The witness of the Son Himself (8:14; 17, 18); 4).
4. The witness of the Holy Spirit (15:26); 5)
5. The witness of the works of Christ (15:36; 10:25); 6)
6. The witness of the Scriptures (5:39); 7)
7. The witness of the disciples (15:27); 8)
8. The witness of himself (19:35; 21:24).

The Apostle John's supreme purpose is to build an airtight case that Jesus is God's Son and consequently bring people to accept it as undeniable fact. John 20:31, "but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

Again, John 1:6-8: "There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light."