

CHRIST'S EVALUATION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist couldn't understand why he was languishing in prison if Jesus was the Messiah. It didn't add up intellectually. We are all human, including John. We wrestle with life and the "why" questions. Jesus did privately apply a mild rebuke to John, but He also publicly affirmed him.

Matthew 11:7 (NKJV)

7 As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"

Jesus privately sent a "mild rebuke" to John the Baptist, exhorting him to not be offended because of Him. John, in effect, needed to be strengthened in his faith. Jesus told Peter before his fall, "When you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." (Lk. 22:32). We all need to be strengthened. James says, "We all stumble in many things" (Ja. 3:2). And to strengthen John the Baptist at this point, Jesus sent him right back to the Scriptures, showing him how He, as the Christ, is fulfilling them (Matt. 11:4-6).

Yet, at the same time, Jesus publicly defended John as a stable man of conviction by asking a series of rhetorical questions in relation to him.

First, Jesus asks them (referring to John) if they went out to the wilderness to see "**a reed shaken in the wind**" – metaphorically speaking. A reed shaken in the wind is a picture of compromise – bending any which way the winds of human opinion are blowing. It pictures a person who lacks strong conviction. It portrays a double-minded person vacillating on everything (cf. Ja. 1:8). John was not a fickle person tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine or with every emotion or every whim (cf. Eph. 4:14).

A reed was a tall, slender-leaved plant that would bend and bow in the wind. It is a picture of being unstable or fickle. That was NOT John. John was confused and puzzled, but he was not a man given to compromise. He was a man who would not bend, and he would not bow to compromise. That had not changed. There is a difference between being confused and having character issues. John was confused – not compromised.

Matthew 11:8 (NKJV)

8 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

John was not a softy like the politically elite who never had a real job in their life. John had lived an austere lifestyle. He was a “man’s man” if there ever was one. The word translated “soft” here is the same word translated “homosexual” in 1 Corinthians 6:9. It connotes softness or effeminacy. John was not a femmie kind of guy. He was tough and rugged.

Matthew 3:4 says John was clothed with “***camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist***”. John was no spoiled softy. Rather, he was a rugged prophet in the line of Elijah of OT fame.

“His question arose not from personal weakness or failure but from misunderstanding about the nature of the Messiah.” – ***D.A. Carson***

“John was neither one who bowed to popular opinion nor one who sought an easy life.” – ***The New Bible Commentary***

Matthew 11:9 (NKJV)

9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

Jesus here answers His own question. Yes, John was a prophet, but he was more than a mere prophet. John not only prophesied, he was himself the fulfillment of the forerunner prophecies in the OT Scriptures. That made him special over all other prophets.

Matthew 11:10 (NKJV)

10 For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’

Jesus here quotes Scripture to show who John the Baptist was as seen in the prophecy of Malachi 3:1.

Malachi 3:1 (NKJV)

1 “Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the Lord of hosts.

John was not merely a prophet but rather Christ’s messenger or forerunner who went before Him to prepare the way by calling the people to repentance.

Mark, in his gospel, in Mark 1:2-3, combined the prophecy from Malachi 3:1 with that of Isaiah 40:3.

Isaiah 40:3 (NKJV)

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.

“Other men had prophesied the Coming of Christ, but John was the one chosen to announce His actual arrival. It has been well said, ‘John *opened the way* for Christ, and then he got *out of the way* for Christ.’” – **William MacDonald**

John had the unique privilege of being the prophesied forerunner of the Lord. His ministry was prophesied 700 years in advance by Isaiah (cf. Isa. 40:3). He lived up to his calling in spite of his struggles. We are all human. We all struggle. We are all in process. But God is ever faithful! He looks at the heart and knows those who are sincere in their commitment, in spite of human weakness. We serve a wonderful God!