

**John the Baptist**  
**Matthew 11:7—14**

Jesus confronts the crowd with exactly who John the Baptist really is. At this point in time John has been in prison for perhaps one year and there was no outrage from Israel. John was soon to be killed and again Israel is complacent. Just before John is killed Jesus spells out exactly why John is the greatest prophet and why it was critical for Israel to accept his message.

**John, the greatest prophet** (verses 7—11)

John began his public ministry by preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom in the Judean wilderness. His message was also preached by Jesus and His Disciples and included repentance and baptism (Luke 16:16; Matthew 3:1—2; 4:17, 23; 10:5—7). It's interesting to note that baptism and the acceptance of the message concerning the Kingdom were interconnected. Those who believed the message had to be baptized while the act of not being baptized by John was a rejection of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 7:28—30). Being baptized or not being baptized was how they accepted or rejected John's Kingdom Gospel. This is not true today. We are not subject to the ordinances of the Law including baptism (Colossians 2:14), which is why Paul said he was not sent to baptize (1 Corinthians 1:17). We who are in the Body of Christ have experienced only one baptism (Ephesians 4:5), that of being in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27). Water baptism has no place in this Age of Grace.

So why did John draw great crowds into the desert? Did they go out there to see a reed blowing in the wind? Did they go out there to see royalty dressed in fine garments? Jesus said they went out not only to see a prophet but were drawn to John because he was more than a prophet. In fact Jesus says that John is the greatest of all born of a woman.

The key to understanding this is to look at the verse 10 where Jesus quotes from Malachi 3:1

**Malachi 3:1** Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

John is not only a prophet but is also the forerunner for Jesus. As forerunner he preceded Christ in birth, in the preaching of the Kingdom and even in death. Most importantly he announced the coming of Israel's Messiah. He is called the greatest, not because he was the best human born of a woman but because he was given the task of announcing Christ and the coming Kingdom. The prophets before him foretold of the coming of a glorious Kingdom but it was John who announced the Kingdom was at hand (Matthew 3:1—2). Old Testament prophets foretold of John's coming and he was born already filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15). He also marked the end of the 400-year "famine of God's word." (Amos 8:11) He was indeed a special prophet but only because God chose to work through him.

**Is John Elijah?** (verses 12—15)

There is a strong connection between John and Elijah. Luke 1:17 says John came in the power of Elijah. Elijah was a great prophet that did great miracle, as was John. They both were sent to turn the hearts of the children of Israel back to that of their fathers. The children are called disobedient while the fathers are righteous. John was given the task of preparing Israel for the soon-to-come Messiah. This prophetic utterance by the angel that appeared to Zacharias was a fulfillment of Malachi 4:5.

According to Matthew 17:12—13 Jesus says that John is Elijah while John himself knows he is not Elijah (John 1:21). This is best understood by looking at Matthew 11:14 and seeing that John was coming in the likeness and power of Elijah but was not the person Elijah. The important point in verse 14 is to understand

that the people of Israel needed to accept John's message and by so doing were accepting John as Elijah, which is what Jesus did.

### **The coming of Elijah marks the coming Tribulation**

In Matthew 17:10 the Disciples ask Jesus why the Scribes say that Elijah must come first then all things will be restored. This restoration of all things is the Millennial Kingdom when Israel will be restored to her former glory (Ezekiel 39:25; Joel 3:1; Nahum 2:2), Israel will be physically healed and the earth will experience a restoration when the desert will bloom and the animal kingdom will no longer be wild (Isaiah 11:6—9; 35:1—7). Their hearts would also be restored (Malachi 4:6). This is the restoration that Peter promised to Israel if they would only accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah (Acts 3:21).

According to Malachi 4:5 Elijah will be sent before the coming of the Tribulation. The Tribulation cannot happen until Elijah has come. When Jesus declares that Elijah has now come in the person of John the Baptist He is telling Israel that the time is short and that they need to accept the John's message of repentance and baptism. Those who reject John have also rejected Elijah and Christ. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 11:14 that if they were willing to accept it, John is Elijah. The righteous remnant will accept the message John was preaching.

This coming of Elijah is a warning to the people of Israel that the Tribulation has to be very close. According to Matthew 17:12 Israel did not recognize Elijah's message nor did they receive the one who was warning Israel of the coming Tribulation to be killed (John). Jesus predicted that just as Israel rejected and killed John He would also be rejected and killed.

### **Today's customs**

Israelites who observe Passover today often set out a chair or leave the door open for the prophet Elijah as a gesture of inviting him to return. They understand, even to this day, that after Elijah comes that their Messiah will return and restore Israel. They turn to Malachi 4 to show Old Testament support for this idea. They do this during the Passover Seder meal thinking that if Elijah comes the Messiah couldn't be far behind.

Unfortunately, they missed His first coming so now they are not looking for His Second Coming but are expecting Him to come in power and might to defeat Israel's enemies and set them in the land promised to them through Abraham. The Feast of Passover prophetically points to Christ's death on the cross. If Israel understood that their Messiah already came they would understand that the Tribulation is the next event on the prophetic calendar, which will happen after the Rapture. The Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah) points to the coming Tribulation. The Jews understand this day to be the Day of Judgment and I believe Joel 2 confirms this. They do not view this Day of Judgment to be the Tribulation but to be an individual time of judgment and repentance in getting ready for a new year. The Feast of Trumpets is about sounding an alarm and is NOT the calling of the Church home at the Rapture. The Rapture is not contained in any Old Testament prophecy. This is the feast day that Israel should use to invite Elijah to come back because according to Malachi 4:5 he will come before the day of the Lord (the Day of the Lord can refer to the entire Tribulation or to the Second Coming. I believe Elijah will come at the beginning of the Tribulation).

### **Conclusion**

John was the embodiment of Elijah in his works and message. Both performed miracles and both called Israel to repentance. If Israel had accepted John the Baptist they would have accepted Elijah. With their rejection of John and their complacency in his death, Israel will have another chance to accept a call to repent when Elijah comes as one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. Since Moses and Elijah came with Jesus at His transfiguration (Matthew 17:1—8) there is a good chance that these two men will be brought back to earth at the beginning of the Tribulation demonstrating those same miracles they did the first time around. If not, they will be men who come in the power and authority of these two men.

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit [www.MidActsTruths.com](http://www.MidActsTruths.com)