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John the Baptist Denies Being the Messiah John 1: 19-28

John the Baptist denies being the Messiah DIG: Why did the Jews ask John if he were Elijah? What prophet did they refer to? What do these questions reveal about why they were sent? Why did John cry out in the wilderness rather than in the Temple? Why do you think He responds so abruptly? What was His goal?

REFLECT: What is your goal in life? Have you ever felt ostracized because of your faith? Yochanan spoke the truth and boldly stood apart from his world in order to reach it more effectively (John 17:15-18). What opportunities do you have to do the same? Have you been baptized? Why or why not?

With these verses the inspired apostle **John** begins the account of **his** gospel. **He** has already shown us what **he** intends to do (**to see link click Af – The Memra of God**); **he** is writing to demonstrate that **the Memra** (the Word) has come into this world. Having set down **his** central thought, **he** now begins the story of **the life of Christ**. No one is more careful about the details of time as **Yochanan** is. Starting from these verses and going to **2:11 he** tells us, step by step, the story of the first momentous week in the public life of **Jesus**. The events of **the first day** are here in **John 1:19-28**; the story of **the second day** is **1:29-34**; **the third day** is unfolded in **1:35-39**. The three verses **1:40-42** tell the story of **the fourth day**; the events of **the fifth day** are told in **1:43-51**. **The sixth day** is not recorded for some reason. And the events of **the seventh day** of the week are told in **2:1-11**.[288]

The first stage of observation was over (see **Bf – You Brood of Vipers, Who Warned You to Flee the Coming Wrath**). **The Pharisees** and **Sadducees** had reported back to the Sanhedrin (see **Lg – The Great Sanhedrin**) and all agreed that **John's** movement was significant. But, was **he the Meshiach**? That was the question that needed to be answered. However, that would be determined in **the second stage of interrogation**. Therefore, an official delegation was sent out so they could ask **him** questions.

The first day: Now this was John's testimony when the unbelieving **Jews** (Greek: *Ioudaioi*), or **Jewish leaders (NIV), in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was (Yochanan 1:19). He** was outside the pharisaic Judaism of **his** day. **He** had not been trained in the schools of the rabbis, **he** had held no position of honor in the Temple, and **he** was not identified with either **the Pharisees**, **Sadducees** or Herodians. **He** was a strange looking enigma to the religious elite. Although **the Baptist** came from a priestly family **(Luke 1:5)**, **he** did not conform to pharisaic dogma. **John** was a puzzle to **them**.

So, **they** had many questions. From whom did **he** receive **his** authority? Who had commissioned **him** to tell anyone to repent? By what right did **he baptize**? The word **Jews** (*Ioudaioi*) appears in the gospel of **Yochanan** seventy times, and those **Jews** are always in opposition to **Jesus**. Flattery always follows success, and when **John's** fame peaked the rumor spread that **he** was **the Messiah**. **The Jews** were waiting, and are waiting to this day, for **the Messiah**. **The Baptist**, however,repeatedly denied any messianic claims.

Frequently, messianic pretenders arose and caused rebellions. **Yeshua's** day was an exciting time. So it was quite natural to ask **John** if **he** claimed to be **the Meshiach**. But, **he** completely rejected the claim. **Yochanan** could have simply written, "And **he** said." Instead, the inspired author records, that **he did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah" (John 1:20). His** reply was strengthened by the use of the emphatic pronoun **I**. It is as if **Yochanan** was saying, "***I, I* am not the Messiah**, but, if you only knew, **the Messiah** is here."[289] There *was* a **Christ**, but it certainly wasn't **Yochanan**.

They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" Why would **they** have **asked him** that? **The rabbis taught that before the Messiah came, Elijah would return to herald His coming and to prepare Isra'el for the messianic Kingdom.** The last verses of **Malachi** read: **Look, I will send to you Eliyahu the**

prophet before the coming great and terrible Day of ADONAI. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers; otherwise I will come and strike the land with complete destruction (Mal'akhi 4:4-6 CJB).

The rabbis also taught that Elijah would resolve all disputes. He would settle what things and what people were clean and unclean; he would clear up who were Jews and who were not Jews; he would bring together again families that were estranged. So much did **the Israelites** believe this that the traditional law said the money and property whose owners were disputed, or anything found whose owner was unknown, must wait "until **Elijah** comes." **It was also believed that Eliyahu would anoint Messiah to His kingly office, as all kings were anointed, and that he would raise the dead to share in the messianic Kingdom.** However, **Yochanan** clearly denied being **Elijah himself**. At first **he confessed, "I am not the Messiah."** Now **he** was down to only three words, saying: **I am not (John 1:21a).** As **the Baptizer** grew more and more impatient with their questioning, **his** responses shortened.

Yochanan's denial provoked a third question: **Are you the** expected and promised **Prophet? The Israelites** seem to have expected all sorts of prophets to appear before the coming of **the Meshiach (Matthew 16:14; Mark 6:15; Luke 9:19)**. But, this was particularly a reference to the assurance that Moshe gave to **the Israelites** at the foot of Mount Sinai, when he said: **ADONAI will raise up for you a prophet like me from among yourselves, from your own kinsmen. You are to pay attention to Him (Deut 18:15 CJB)**. That was a promise that no **Jew** ever forgot. They waited and longed for the appearance of **the prophet** who would be the greatest **prophet** of all. Impatient with the questions of **his** interrogators, **his** terse answer was: **No (John 1:21b). His** patience was gone and **his** responses went from five words, to three words, and now to one word.

This put **John's** inquisitors in a tough spot. All **they** had gotten from **the Immerser** was a string of denials. **Yochanan** was preaching, drawing large crowds in the wilderness, and baptizing. **They** needed something more definitive that **they** could **take back** with **them**. **Finally** exasperated, instead of making another futile suggestion, **they** asked **him** what **he** thought about **himself.** We can only imagine the tone in which **they** said to **him,** "**Who are you?" Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself (John 1:22)?**

The Baptizer replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am a voice of

one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of ADONAI' (Yochanan1:23)." When **John** referred to himself as **a voice**, **he** used the exact term that **the Ruach HaKodesh** had used of **Him** seven hundred years earlier when speaking through **Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3)**. The point of the quotation is that it gives no prominence to the preacher whatsoever. **He** was not an important person, like **Elijah**, **the prophet** or **the Messiah**. **He** was no more than **a voice**. Not only that, **he** was **a voice** with only one thing to say – **his** was a one-point sermon. Look for **the Meshiach**.

It is interesting that the Qumran community interpreted the same passage from **Isaiah** in a different way. They withdrew and separated themselves, quietly reading the Scriptures in the desert **to prepare the way of the LORD.** Whatever happened to the people outside of their sect, *they* would be ready when **the Messiah** came. **Yochanan**, on the other hand, understood the words of **Isaiah** as a wake-up call to the nation. **John** was not concerned with **himself** or **his** own safety at all. **He** was trying to prepare **the way of ADONAI** with his back to **God** movement.

I am a voice crying out in the wilderness (Yochanan 1:23a). Why then did **John the Baptizer** not cry out in the Temple? Because Judaism was a hollow shell. It had outward pretense, but there was no life within. It had become a nation of legalists (see **Ei – The Oral Law**). **John** came to a **Pharisee** ridden nation that neither demonstrated the faith of Abraham, nor produced his works. Therefore, **God's** herald appeared *outside* the religious circles of that day, and **the wilderness** symbolized *the barrenness* of the Jewish nation.[290]

Make straight the way of the Lord (John 1:23b). An ancient monarch (just like a national leader today) rarely traveled to any region without some planning. The city would be prepared and the route cleared of anything that might slow his chariot or make the journey unpleasant. **The Immerser** called himself **a herald**, a person announcing the imminent arrival of the king, a voice having no authority of its own. If the people chose to heed **his** message, it would be because they revered the coming king.

But the Pharisees who had been sent, were puzzled about one thing – what right had **John** to **baptize**? If **he** had been **the Messiah**, or even **Elijah**, or **the prophet**, **he** might have had that authority. **Isaiah** had written: **So He will sprinkle many nations (Isaiah 52:15a). Ezeki'el** had said: **I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean (Ezeki'el 36:25). Zechariah** wrote:

When that day comes, a spring will be opened up for the house of David and the people living in Yerushalayim to cleanse them from sin and impurity (Zechariah 13:1 CJB). But, why should **Yochanan baptize**? Consequently, **they questioned him** asking: **Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet (John 1:24-25)?**

What made the matter more confusing to **them** was the fact that baptism was not for **Israelites** at all. It was proselytes, the Gentiles, who were baptized. Was he suggesting that **God's** chosen people had to be cleansed? But, that was exactly what **the Baptist** believed. **He** was calling **Jews** to a baptism of repentance, saying, in effect, "Because of your **sin**, your are outside of Abraham's covenant with **ADONAI**. You must repent like a Gentile and come to **YHVH** like it was the first time."[291]

By this time **Jesus** had returned from the forty days of fasting and temptation, and was standing in the midst of the crowd. **John** recognized **Him**, and then dropped the subject of **baptism** to focus on the greatness of **Yeshua**. **Baptism** was important, but, it was only a means to an end. Its purpose was to point people to **the Lord**. **John's** interest was in **the Messiah** and in nothing else. **I baptize with water, John** replied: **but among you stands One you do not know (John 1:26). John** admitted that **his baptism** was merely symbolic and quickly turned the discussion away from **water baptism** – which pointed to **the Meshiach** – to **the One he** had come to herald. **He** was only the shadow, **the Substance** had arrived.

He is the One who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie (John 1:27). Here **John** describes the *chalitzah* ceremony in **Deuteronomy 25:5-6.** The Torah dictates that if a married man dies childless, the widow is to marry her dead husband's brother, preferably the eldest. The firstborn son they produce is considered a continuation of the dead husband's line. The practice is known as *Yibum*, or levirate marriage. The brother-in-law is called the *Yavam*; and the widow is called the *Yevamah.*

However, if the dead man's brother does not wish to marry the widow, or if she does not want to marry him, a standard divorce is insufficient to sever their bond. Instead, they perform a procedure known as *chalitzah*, which means *removal*; in this case, the *removal* of the brother-in-law's shoe. Only after the *chalitzah* ceremony has been completed is the widow free to marry someone else.

The widow must wait ninety-two days after the death of her husband before proceeding with the *chalitzah* ceremony. This is in line with the commandment that a widow or divorcee must wait three months before remarrying, enough time for it to become obvious whether or not she is pregnant from her first husband, thus avoiding the possible confusion over the identity of the baby's father. In the case of *chalitzah*, the three-month waiting period is in order to ascertain whether *the chalitzah* ceremony is even necessary at all, for if the woman is pregnant, then her deceased husband is not childless.

The widow and the deceased brother both appear in front of **the** local **elders** of the city usually consisting of three judges, two witnesses (as typically required during rabbinical proceedings), and the widow and the brother of the deceased.

If he persists in saying, "I do not want to marry her," his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals by untying the leather straps. **The sandal** was, and continues to be, a sign of authority or ownership. And then **she spits in his presence and says, "This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line." That man's line shall be known in Isra'el as "the household of the one whose sandal has been removed" (Deuteronomy 25:7-10).**

So when **the Baptizer** said, **"The One who comes after me (the Messiah), is the One whose straps** on **his sandals I am not worthy to untie," he** was referring to the authority of **the Messiah** compared to **his** lowly position. In this way **he** denied being **the Meshiach**.

This all happened at Bethany, which is identical to **Beth Barah** (*the house of passage*) mentioned in **Judges 7:24, on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing (John 1:28).** It memorialized the crossing of **the Jordan** by **Joshua**. Therefore, separated as **the Baptizer** was from the corrupted sham in Jerusalem, it was a *house of passage* for those **he immersed.** They joined the little remnant who were **prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17). Remember . . . what happens to the herald will happen to the King.**