

LESSON 3

THE PURPOSE OF JOHN AND THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

Before we can appreciate the message of John the Baptizer and the significance of the life of Jesus, we need to understand some things revealed to us in John chapter 1.

John tells us that “the Word” (notice the capital letter W) was in the beginning, “the Word was with God” and “the Word was God”. The “Word” John is speaking of is Jesus. We can go back to the book of Genesis, chapter 1, and verse 26 for proof that John was accurate. The verse reads, “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’” Notice “us” and “our”. Those are plural words and show us that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit were all present at creation. We see further proof in John 17:11 and 21. Jesus, in His prayer, prays that everyone will “be one, as we are,” speaking of God and the Holy Spirit. In verse 21, in His plea for unity, He says, “That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”. This is important, because it is proof that this Messiah was sent from God. He was part of God, but He took on a physical life for a divine purpose.

The Messiah had been promised from the book of Genesis all through the Old Testament. John’s coming had also been promised. In Malachi 3 the description of the forerunner of the Messiah was announced. “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” (Malachi 3:1-2).

John wrote in John 1 verse 6, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.” This is the fulfillment of Malachi 3. John the apostle then lays out the purpose for the coming of John the Baptizer. He came as a witness, verse 7. Verse 15 says that John did bear witness of Jesus, that Jesus was preferred over John, and that grace and truth came through Jesus (verses 15-16).

There were those who thought that John was the Messiah (verse 20). When he denied that he was the Messiah, they asked him if he was Elijah. John told them he was not Elijah. They continued to push him about who he was, and this is the answer he gave them. “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias” (or Isaiah).

Isaiah 53 is a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah says some interesting things about Jesus, starting when He was young.

- He grew up like a young plant.
- He was not majestic or handsome so anyone would be attracted by His looks.
- He was despised and rejected by men.
- He was acquainted with grief.
- He was a man of sorrows.
- He was smitten by God.
- He was afflicted.
- He was pierced for our sins.
- We are healed by His wounds.
- He carried all our sins.
- He was oppressed and afflicted but did not retaliate.
- He was judged by man.
- He was buried by a rich man.
- He did no violence.
- He was not deceitful.

These ideas are simplified from the first few verses of Isaiah 53, but all of them came to pass. We will deal with these specifically as we study through Jesus' ministry and ultimately His death.

John identifies those who were questioning John in verse 24. The Pharisees had already begun causing problems for Jesus. Remember that they knew the Law of Moses, but they tried to bind laws on the people that even they did not obey. They questioned John about why he was baptizing since he was neither Elijah nor the Christ. John's answer was plain and simple. "I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

We aren't told how the Pharisees reacted to this, but I would suppose they just shook their heads and walked away. They saw a man that spent his time in the wilderness, dressed in clothes made from skins, and proclaiming to be a forerunner of the promised Messiah.

Chapter 1 continues with what happened the next day. Jesus was approaching John the Baptizer, and John reacted by saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes

away the sin of the world!” John identifies Jesus for the people. He continues by saying Jesus outranks him, and he tells them why. He says “he was before me”. John was born before Jesus, but Jesus existed before John in heaven. This is further proof that Jesus was with God and the Holy Spirit in heaven.

FOR DISCUSSION: WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS LESSON?

1. How were John the Baptizer and Elijah alike?
2. How do we see John fulfilling the angel’s instructions to Zacharias about his appearance, diet, etc.?
3. Would the Pharisees have known about the prophecy of Isaiah, and how would they have been able to ignore that Jesus fulfilled that prophecy?
4. How do you think the Pharisees felt about the promise of a new king for the Jews?