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The First Disciples (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this discourse by Steve Gregg, he analyzes the first 18 verses of the Gospel of John, known as the prologue. He discusses the events of four separate days, focusing on the baptism of Jesus, and how it follows chronologically in the Gospel. Gregg also delves into the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah and how John the Baptist fits into it, as well as the questioning by the Pharisees about John's baptism practices. Overall, the discourse offers a detailed and insightful analysis of the events and prophecies surrounding Jesus' arrival.

Transcript

Let's turn to the book of John and verse 19 of chapter 1. The first 18 verses of the Gospel of John are what we call the prologue to the book. The story of the life of Jesus doesn't really begin before verse 19. And when it does begin at verse 19, it begins kind of the same way it begins in most of the Gospels.

It begins with John the Baptist, not Jesus. John the Baptist is the forerunner for Jesus, and as such, he is inseparably attached to the story of Jesus. It's interesting because each one of the four Gospels begins by saying something about John the Baptist before it really gets into the story of Jesus.

This is probably because John was the transitional guy. He was a prophet of the Old Testament order, but he introduced Jesus who brought the New Covenant. John lived and died, spent his entire life before the New Testament came into being.

In other words, he died before Jesus did. But he saw Jesus, recognized Jesus, pointed him out, and actually gave Jesus some of his own disciples to be Jesus' first disciples. And that is really what we read of in this portion that we have before us in John chapter 1, and we're going to be taking verses 19 through 51 in this lecture.

And what we have here, it's broken up quite neatly into the events of four separate days. There's basically four paragraphs, I guess, I mean not that John divided it into paragraphs, but what would naturally be divisible into paragraphs. There are four paragraphs, each one has to do with the events of a certain day.

Now, not much is given about any one of these days, but the fact that he says in verse 29, after he's given the first paragraph, verse 29 he says, the next day, and then again in verse 35 he says, again the next day, meaning the day after the one he's just been discussing, and then in verse 43, the following day, this is, it's not that common in the gospels to string the chronological relationship of events in the life of Christ together quite as exactly as John does in this case. It certainly is evidence that we've got the witness of somebody who was there, who remembers not only that certain events took place at a particular general time, but the exact sequence of days in which they occurred. Now John is not mentioned actually by name in this chapter, but that's not surprising, John doesn't mention himself by name in all the book of John.

He does sometimes refer to himself, but not by name. In the book of John he'll sometimes call himself the other disciple whom Jesus loved, or the disciple whom Jesus loved, or that other disciple, or he'll refer to himself as a disciple, but he won't refer to himself by name. And there is a likelihood that he is one of the characters in this chapter, though he is not named, and it would not be necessarily obvious that he is.

The fact that he has such exact information about this happened this day, and then the next day this happened, the next day this happened, the next day that happened, suggests that he's not just in possession of a distant legend, or far removed from the situation, so that he would know that generally early sometime in Jesus' ministry these things happened, but rather this happened on such and such a day, and this happened the next day, and so forth. It sounds like the record of someone who is really a participant and keeping track of, okay, these two things didn't happen on the same day, this was the day after that. And so this is what we read, the events of four days.

Now the time frame, well let me read verses 19 through 28, and then I'll tell you from that information how we determine the time frame in terms of the chronology of the life of Jesus. In John 19, excuse me, 119, it says, Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you? He confessed, and he did not deny, but he confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Are you Elijah? He said, I'm not.

Are you the prophet? And he said, No. Then they said to him, Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord. As the prophet Isaiah said.

Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, saying, Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water, but there stands one among you whom you do not know. It is he who coming after me is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.

These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan where John was baptizing. We need to read a few more verses before we set the chronological setting here. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who is preferred before me, for he was before me. I did not know him, but that he should be revealed to Israel. Therefore I came baptizing with water.

And John bore witness, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and he remained upon him. I did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, Upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God. Now, the reason I had to read that far is we need to decide where does this actually fit in the chronological sequence of things in comparison with the other Gospels.

Now, the other Gospels don't all start at the same place. Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus and then goes into the birth of Jesus. Luke starts with actually the birth of John the Baptist and then talks about the birth of Jesus.

But both of those Gospels, Matthew and Luke, after they've given the birth stories, jump immediately to the 30th year, approximately 30th year of Jesus' life, and not with Jesus, but with John the Baptist ministering. We read in both Matthew chapter 3 and Luke chapter 3, the earliest information in the Gospels concerning the adult life of Jesus is that John came baptizing in the wilderness, and it gives, in each of those two cases, a specimen of John's preaching. And both of those places also tell us that Jesus came and was baptized.

Now, Mark's Gospel, which gives no information of Jesus' childhood or birth at all, it begins with the adult life of Jesus, but it really begins with John. It begins, again, as the other Gospels do, with John the Baptist baptizing. But Matthew, Mark, and Luke, therefore, introduce Jesus in his adult life only after introducing John the Baptist in his adult life.

And the first appearance of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, and Luke in his adult years is when he comes to be baptized by John. Now, this we have in common with all of the three other Gospels, other than John, that they all record Jesus appearing and being baptized by John. This story that we've just read in John obviously follows that chronologically.

How can I know that? Well, obviously. He tells about the baptism. He says, I saw this happen.

I saw the dove come down on his head. We know that happened when he baptized Jesus. So, John is referring back to this as something that has already happened.

This story occurred after the baptism of Jesus, and at least more than a day after, because on the day that he says, I saw the dove come, that's already the day after a previous day that we've read about here. So, when John testifies, I saw the dove come down on Jesus, that's at least two days after the baptism, and possibly more. Now, how would we know if it's more? Well, the other Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, after recording the baptism of Jesus, go immediately to what? The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, which was for 40 days, almost six weeks.

Now, according to the Gospels, especially Mark, it says immediately after Jesus was baptized, the Spirit had him go into the wilderness where he was tempted for 40 days. Now, these days, these four days we read of in this section of John, do they occur before Jesus went into the wilderness or after he came back from the wilderness? The answer must be after he came back from the wilderness. That's why you've already studied the temptation of Jesus, because chronologically that comes before this.

How do I know that? Well, there's a couple of reasons. One is that the other Gospels suggest that Jesus immediately went into the wilderness after his baptism, which does not allow, if we take immediately very seriously, does not allow four days, such as we read of here, to occur between the baptism and his temptation. So, these four days did not occur prior to the temptation in the wilderness.

Another reason we know that is, although we have not read that far, we read later on in this chapter, verse 43, the following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and in fact did so. So, not only do we have these four days given here, but on the fourth of them, he embarks on a trip to Galilee. Now, if this was, for example, after his baptism, but before the temptation, it would mean that he was baptized, then there were these four days spent around the places of baptism, and then he went up to Galilee, and all this before he was tempted in the wilderness.

And by the way, we never get a break after this point for him to take 40 days out for a temptation in the wilderness. The 40-day temptation must have been before this. Now, the only reason this would be important is that it's often difficult to know where the stories found in the Gospel of John fit in connection, chronologically, with the stories in the other Gospels.

I dare say that we would have to place this story immediately after the temptation. Jesus has just come back from almost six weeks of fasting in the wilderness. He has overcome temptation there.

He, apparently, first place he goes when he comes back to civilization is to the place he left from, that is, where John was baptizing in Bethabara. And, although he's back, he remains somewhat nondescript. He remains rather obscure.

He's not doing anything. He's not preaching. He's not working miracles.

He's just hanging out where John is. And John points him out, and Jesus doesn't even make a big splash. He just walks by, and we'll find later that some of the disciples of John follow him.

But what we find then is that after the forty days of temptation in the wilderness and the fasting, Jesus came back to where he had been baptized by John, and just kind of hung around, and didn't do anything immediately. No doubt he soon was to begin ministering in Galilee, but he did not do so immediately. He just kind of hung around for a few days.

What was he doing that for? Apparently, to do exactly what he ended up doing, collecting a few disciples. Jesus eventually collected disciples from a number of sources, but his first disciples were people who had been disciples of John the Baptist, as we shall see when we read further. However, we need to talk about the verses we've already read before we anticipate what comes up in the verses we have not yet read.

So, this is the time frame. Jesus has come back from his temptation in the wilderness. Although, the first day we read of, in verses 19-28, apparently he has not reappeared.

The next day he appears, and John sees him, and says something about him. Now, the focus of this first day is the interaction between John and a delegation of leaders who were sent from the Jews in Jerusalem. We are told in verse 24, they were from the sect of the Pharisees.

Now, this name, Pharisee, is going to become quite ominous in the later Gospels, but we have not yet had any problems from them. They became the chief opponents of Christ and his disciples during the earthly ministry of Jesus, but Jesus has not yet done any public ministry, and therefore the Pharisees are not yet even aware of him. But they are aware of John the Baptist, and they are not altogether favorable toward him.

We know from the other Gospels that earlier, before Jesus even came and was baptized, great multitudes came out to be baptized by John, and among them came some Pharisees and priests and so forth, and John had just blasted them. He said, you snakes, you generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? So, we do not get it from this Gospel, but from the other Gospels, we find that John the Baptist already was railing on the Pharisees before Jesus had any conflicts with them. And that is because the Pharisees were corrupt men.

It was not just that they became bad by resisting Jesus, they resisted Jesus because they were bad people. They were hypocrites. They were power hungry, they were proud, they were self-righteous, and they were not eager to see somebody else come along with a different message and gain popularity.

Now, John the Baptist was such a person, and as the Pharisees at a later date were threatened by Jesus, so at this earlier date they were threatened by John the Baptist.

John was popular. He was the leader of a popular movement.

People said he was a prophet. And so, the Jews in Jerusalem decided to find out, well, what does John say about himself? It says in verse 19, the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him who you are. Now, we are told in verse 24 they were Pharisees, which is interesting because the priests and Levites as a group were more heavily weighted with not Pharisees but Sadducees.

These are two religious parties, like denominations in Judaism. The Pharisees believed strongly in the scriptures of the Old Testament and also in the traditions of the rabbis, and were very strict in their observance. The Sadducees, sort of a rival denomination in Judaism, were much more what we call liberal.

They didn't believe in the supernatural quite as much. They didn't believe in resurrection or angels or spirits. And according to Josephus, apparently, they didn't believe in all of the Old Testament scriptures either.

They believed only in the first five books, the books of Moses. So, these were very different kinds of people. But the priesthood and the Levites were largely heavily weighted with Sadducees.

Most of the priests were of the Sadducean denomination. But these ones were not. They were Pharisees.

Now, in the later life, of course, it was the priesthood in the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees, although not always those Pharisees who were in the Sanhedrin, who were problems to Jesus. Some Pharisees in the Sanhedrin later sided with Jesus, Nicodemus being one that John records a couple of chapters hence. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and in the Sanhedrin.

And he was not an opponent of Christ. He was a supporter. Anyway, these people were not sure what John was making of himself.

They probably had some idea of what people were making of him. He was clearly being discussed as a prophet. Some might have even speculated maybe he's the Messiah.

There was a high level of expectation among the Jews at this time that the Messiah would appear. They had good reason to expect this. There were a number of factors that would have indicated that the Messiah was due to appear.

One of which is that in Genesis chapter 49 and verse 10, there had been a prediction made by Jacob on his deathbed about his son Judah. And of course, the Messiah came eventually from the tribe of Judah. But on his deathbed, Jacob had said while prophesying over Judah, he said, The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people

be.

That's Genesis 49, 10. Now, Jacob predicted that Shiloh would come, and until he did, the scepter, which would be kingly rule, an emblem of kingly rule, would not depart from the tribe of Judah. Shiloh is a word which means him whose it is.

He whose it is. So the actual statement could be made like this. The scepter will not depart from Judah until he whose it is comes.

Whose what is? The scepter. The kingly rule. The scepter is that rod that's held in the, it's a symbolic image of sovereignty that a king possesses, and whoever possesses the scepter is, by virtue of having the scepter, the king.

And so the prophecy was that the kings of Israel would be all of the tribe of Judah, right up until the time that he to whom it really belonged would come, and of course the Jews understood that he to whom the scepter really belonged is the Messiah. Now, about 40 years before Jesus was born, roughly 40 years before, well, let me put it this way. 70 years before Christ, the Romans had conquered the territory of Palestine, of Israel.

70 years before Christ, or 63 really. Not quite 70, 63 years. In the year 40 BC, the Roman emperor had appointed a man to be the king of that region, the king of the Jews.

That man was Herod the Great. He was not a Jew. He had some Jewish blood, but he was Edomite.

In fact, his family are the last known Edomites in history, the Herod family. He was an Edomite. The Edomites were not Jewish.

In fact, not only were they not Jewish, they were a group of Gentiles that were particularly historically hostile to the Jews. And for the Romans to appoint an Edomite man over Israel to be the king of the Jews was a great affront to Israel. Prior to that, the Jews had had no king who was not of the tribe of Judah, except for their first king, which was Saul.

The first king they ever had was of the tribe of Benjamin, King Saul. But after that, David came along, who was of the tribe of Judah. And every king they ever had after that was of the tribe of Judah.

Now, when Herod was made king, he actually had to fight to gain the throne, because the Jews made war against him. They wouldn't accept him. And from the year 40 B.C. until 37 B.C., for three years, the Jews actually fought to keep Herod out, but he won.

And in 37, he took his seat as king in Jerusalem. One of the things he did as a Roman ruler over the Jews was he denied the Sanhedrin the right to exercise capital punishment over criminals. The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews, a Jewish court made

up mostly of the priesthood and others.

And they were the lawmakers and law enforcers within Israel for the most part, and they were given a lot of autonomy by the Romans, but they were not permitted to execute a man. And yet the right to execute criminals in the Jewish law was a right that the Jews required, I mean, the law required them to have. They were supposed to put to death all kinds of people, blasphemers, Sabbath breakers, whatever.

And so by denying the Jews their sovereignty in this area, Herod basically brought to an end their time of Judean kings. And it is said that the rabbis in those days, when Herod became king and deprived Israel of this sovereignty, some of the rabbis are known to have said, Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed from Judah, and Shiloh has not yet come. Now the prophecy was that the scepter will not depart from Judah until Shiloh comes, and yet they said the scepter has departed from Judah, because it had now passed to this Edomite man.

But Shiloh has not yet come. Well, of course, Shiloh did come before that Edomite man died. In the very lifetime of Herod, Jesus was born, probably just a couple, three years before he died.

But in the very generation that the scepter passed from Judah, that generation, Shiloh, came, and the Jews were looking for him. The very fact that the scepter had passed from Judah was an indication to them that Shiloh should be here, and many of them were still looking for him. In addition to this, there was a prophecy in Daniel, chapter 9, which we will not take the time to look at in detail, but it's usually referred to as the prophecy of the 70 weeks, for good reason.

That's the subject matter of the prophecy. In Daniel 9, verses 24 through 27. Essentially, that chapter, that prophecy, was that from a certain time, generally in Daniel's day, until the coming of Messiah, the Prince, would be a total of 69 weeks.

Now, each week is actually seven years in the prophecy, as all scholars agree. A week, actually, in the Hebrew just means seven, seventy-sevens. And it is understood by virtually everybody that this means 70 weeks of years, that is 70 periods of seven years each, which altogether makes 490 years.

Well, there were, this 400, actually for 69 of these weeks, would be 483 years. And the prophecy was, from the going forth of the decree to build and restore Jerusalem, until Messiah, the Prince, shall be, and then, basically, 69 weeks, 483 years. Now, there were three such decrees to restore and build Jerusalem, from which you might measure the 483 years.

One of them was by Cyrus. And that was by this time, by the time Jesus was born, that time was long past, the 483 years had passed, because Cyrus made his decree back in

536 B.C. So, from the time that Cyrus made that in 536 B.C., or, excuse me, 538, 539, somewhere around there, there had been more than 483 years passed. So, they knew that that didn't wash, that couldn't work, you couldn't measure from that date.

But there were two additional decrees that had been made, both of them by Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, which had allowed, first Ezra, and then Nehemiah, to take some people back to help restore Jerusalem and the temple. These decrees were made in just the right time. They were just a few years apart each, but if you would measure 483 years from either of them, you would fall somewhere between the year 25 A.D. and 30-something A.D. In other words, the generation that was alive in the day of the birth of Jesus had reason to believe the Messiah would come in that generation, because Daniel's prophecy that the Messiah would come 483 years after this decree, even though they couldn't be sure which decree it was, because there were more than one decree, but there was one decree that was already too far past, there were two remaining, and both of them were close to each other within a few years.

And therefore, the 483 years would pass within the lifetime of those born around the time of Jesus. So the Jews had reason to expect at that time that there would be a Messiah coming within that generation. And so when John the Baptist appeared, it's not too surprising that they wondered if he was him.

Let me give you the dates of those decrees. I shouldn't just be talking so vaguely about it. Cyrus' decree to restore and build Jerusalem was in 536 B.C. Artaxerxes' first decree, which was the second of the three decrees, the first one Artaxerxes made, was the one that released Ezra to go back.

That was in 458 or 457 B.C. Yeah, 458 or 457. Those years are right next to each other, and it's not sure which of those it was. And the second decree of Artaxerxes was in 444 or 445.

It was about 444 or 445, about 13 years later than the other one. Now, depending on which of those decrees of Artaxerxes you use and depending on what length of year you use, is it 360 days or 365 days? It makes a difference, because the Jews used the former, and I think a lot of nations use the latter. But the two decrees of Artaxerxes were different from each other by about 13 years, but if you measured forward 483 years from them, it's going to fall somewhere around the time either 26 A.D. or somewhere between that and 39 A.D. is when it's going to come.

Now, Jesus began his ministry in 26 or 27 A.D. So it would seem like the first decree of Artaxerxes is the one that it meant. But that's not for us to look in detail at right now. The point is, the Jews knew that Daniel had made his prediction and that Jacob had made a prediction.

Both of them pointed to about the same time. The scepter had departed from Judah,

therefore one expected the Messiah to show up. Furthermore, Daniel's 69th week was about to run out, and the Messiah was going to appear at the end of 69 weeks, 483 years, and therefore it was quite clear the Messiah couldn't wait much longer to show up.

That's why when Jesus was born and taken to the temple, there was a group of people led by Anna, the prophetess, who expected the Messiah. They were looking for him. And old Simeon, who was apparently one of their number, God had actually told him that he wouldn't die until the Messiah showed up.

So this generation of Jews had many reasons to expect the Messiah to show up, and there was a very high degree of expectation. They frequently speculated in Jesus' ministry whether he was the Messiah, and before he showed up, they speculated the same things about John. So, there was a question as to whether John would admit to being the Messiah.

Is that who he is? He was very clearly behaving like a prophet, but did he consider himself the Messiah? Well, they asked him, but he confessed in verse 20 that he was not the Christ. He was not the Messiah. The word Christ and Messiah are the same word.

Messiah is Hebrew and Christ is Greek. Same word. Both mean the anointed one.

So, verse 21, John 1, 21, they asked him, What then are you Elijah? Now, the reason they asked this is because Malachi said Elijah would come before the Messiah, or before the great and terrible day of the Lord, actually. In Malachi 3, 1, it said, Behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare the way before me. And in Malachi 4, verses 4 through 5, it says, no, verse 5 through 6 I think it is, it says, Behold, I send Elijah the prophet before that great and terrible day of the Lord to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers, and so forth, lest I smite the earth with a curse.

So, the Jews were expecting Elijah to show up before the Messiah. And since John said he wasn't the Messiah, they asked, Well, are you Elijah then? Now, what's surprising here is that John said no. And the reason that's surprising is because according to Jesus, he was Elijah.

If you look over at Matthew 11, in Matthew 11, verses 12 and 13, Jesus said, From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent people take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And then verse 14, And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

Now, Elijah who is to come refers to Elijah who Malachi said would come. Jesus said, If you will receive it, John is Elijah. He is who Malachi said was coming.

He's the one that Malachi predicted. If you will receive it. Now, why did he say, If you will receive it? Paul said, in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, and verse, 1 Corinthians chapter 2, and

in verse 14, he said, But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

The natural man, who is not spiritual, cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. Jesus said, If you will receive it, John is Elijah. Now, why would it require someone being able to receive it for John to be Elijah? Wouldn't he be Elijah whether people receive it or not? Well, that depends on how you understand the prophecy of Malachi.

If, in fact, Malachi's prediction means that the literal man, Elijah, who lived in the Old Testament was going to come back, then, of course, that would be an objective reality that no one could deny. I mean, here he is. He's back.

He's got the hairy garment on again. He's got the Nazarite vow on him. He's Elijah.

He's got even some smell of smoke on him from growing up in the flaming chariot. But, John was not that person, because that person was not who Malachi was talking about. Now, the Jews didn't understand that.

The Jews believed that Elijah, the Tishbite, the man who lived in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, was supposed to come back. And when they asked John, Are you Elijah? That's what they meant. Are you the Tishbite? Are you that guy that we're expecting? He said, No, I'm not.

He didn't explain what was really the case of who he was, and he didn't lie. According to their understanding of Elijah coming, no, of course he wasn't. He was not Elijah.

He was another man. He was John. He had different parents than Elijah had.

He was not a reincarnation of Elijah. He was not the man, the historic man, Elijah. And that's what they meant when they asked, Are you Elijah? If somebody asked me, Are you a member of a church? My answer will depend on whether we're using their definition or my definition of what it means to be a member of a church.

Are you part of a local church? Well, it depends. I could say yes or no and be equally true depending on whose definition I was using. If they mean a man-made institution that calls itself a local church, then at the moment I'm not a member of such a group.

And I could say, No, I'm not a member of a local church. In another situation, though, if someone asked if I thought I was a member of a local church, I'd say yes. The way I understand local church, all the Christians in town are local church.

I can't help but be a member. The Holy Spirit has made us all members of that. And I'm a Christian.

I'm a member of the body of Christ in this locality. That makes me a member of a local

church. But yes or no, as a correct answer, depends on the definition that a person means by the term.

When the Pharisees said, Are you Elijah? They meant, Are you the man Elijah? Come back again. And the answer was, No, I'm not that Elijah. But Jesus said, If you can receive it, he's Elijah.

Because although Malachi said Elijah would come, he didn't mean the man Elijah would come back, but another would come in the spirit of Elijah. And this is made plain in Luke chapter 1, where Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, is told by an angel that John will come in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. It's quite obvious that the angel is referring back to Malachi and saying, John will be the one who is fulfillment of that.

But he'll come in the spirit of Elijah. He'll have an anointing like Elijah. He's going to have a ministry like Elijah.

But he's not Elijah. Now Jesus said, If you will receive it, he is Elijah. Because if you can receive the things of the spirit, which the natural man cannot do, but if your spirit is spiritual and willing to accept the spiritual fulfillment, then yes, it has been fulfilled.

Yes, he is Elijah who is to come. Seen one way, he is Elijah. Seen another way, he's not.

The way the Pharisees anticipated Elijah to come, no, he isn't. The way Malachi really meant, however, when he said Elijah, yes, John is. But you have to receive it spiritually, Jesus said.

If you can receive it, he is the fulfillment of that. Jesus received it that way. He hoped his disciples might.

And as far as I'm concerned, I do too. I accept it. I accept John as the fulfillment of Malachi.

Yes. That's Matthew 11, 14. Okay? Okay.

Let's look back at John again now. Move along here. Just tearing this material right up.

Are you Elijah? He said, no, I'm not. They said then in verse 29, Are you the prophet? And he answered, no. Now, the prophet is different than a prophet.

He certainly would not say no if they said, Are you a prophet? Jesus also said John was a prophet. In the same passage in Matthew 11, he said, What did you go out to see when you went out to hear John? A reed shaken in the wind? Or a man dressed in smooth clothing? Nah. That's not what he is.

Did you go out to see a prophet? This is Matthew 11, 9. What did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes. I say to you, and more than a prophet. He was a prophet, but he was more than an ordinary prophet.

He was the voice of one crying in the wilderness that Isaiah spoke about. That's what Jesus said about him, and that's what John said about himself. But, the people said, Are you the prophet? And the prophet is a reference to a particular prophet that the Jews were anticipating based upon Moses' prediction back in Deuteronomy 18, 15.

And again, Deuteronomy 18, 18. In Deuteronomy chapter 18, twice there is a prediction. Deuteronomy 18, 15 says, The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me, Moses said, from your midst, from your brethren, him you shall hear.

That's Deuteronomy 18, 15. Then in the same chapter, verse 18, God says, I will raise up for them a prophet like you, Moses, from among their brethren. Now, that prophet that would be raised up like Moses was not fulfilled in any of the Old Testament prophets.

There never was a prophet like Moses in all the Old Testament times. In fact, the closing verses of Deuteronomy make it very clear. Deuteronomy chapter 34.

It says in verse 10, after it relates the death of Moses, in Deuteronomy 34, 10, But since then, there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses. Okay, so, Moses and God predicted that a prophet like Moses would come, but as the book of Deuteronomy closes, it says, so far, it hasn't showed up. There hasn't been a prophet like Moses.

So, the Jews expected another prophet like Moses to come. Now, they weren't sure how this particular prediction related to the Messiah. We know, because the New Testament writers tell us, that Jesus was not only the Messiah, but also that prophet.

That prophet of whom Moses spoke and the Messiah were one and the same, but the Jews weren't clear on that. All they knew is that Moses predicted a prophet, Malachi predicted Elijah, and many prophets predicted the Messiah. Now, we know, in hindsight, that Elijah was a reference to John the Baptist, and both the Messiah and the prophet were references to Christ, but the Jews weren't clear on that.

They're just all these different figures in their theology that, based on separate predictions, they weren't sure what to make of them. So, they said, are you the prophet? Now, John, of course, could say no to that, because Jesus was. Then they said, who are you, then, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself? Okay, we're going to stop making suggestions and let you tell us.

You know, we're drawing blanks all across the board here. You just tell us who you are. We have to give an answer to those who sent us.

Who do you say you are? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make

straight the way of the Lord. The prophecy is Isaiah 40, verse 3, and it is quoted in Mark chapter 1 about John the Baptist. It is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 11 and applied to John.

I mean, virtually everyone inspired applies this prophecy to John. Make straight a way of the Lord in the wilderness suggests that Israel was, at that time, in a spiritual wilderness. They were unfruitful.

They were just thorns and thistles instead of the vineyard of the Lord producing fruit. And they were a wasteland, spiritually speaking. But God was going to build a highway, a king's highway through there.

And he would send someone to prepare the way for the king to come. And that was John the Baptist. The king came shortly afterwards.

Verse 24, Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees and they asked him, saying, why then do you baptize if you're not the Christ or Elijah or the prophet? Now baptism was practiced by the Jews at least in the second century. We don't know if it was practiced by them in this time or not. There is documentation that in the second century A.D. the Jews would baptize proselytes.

Those that were Gentiles who wished to become Jews had to go through ceremonies like circumcision and baptism was part of the proselytization process. So now it is by extrapolation backward we may assume the probability that they were baptizing even back in the days of John and Jesus and maybe before that time. Now if that is true, the Jews used baptism as a means of cleansing Gentiles who wanted to become Jews.

The fact that someone had to be baptized suggested that they were unclean and needed to start all over and have a whole new identity as a Jew from their Gentile background. But John was baptizing Jews implying that they were as unclean as Gentiles and needing as much cleansing as the Gentiles do. And this was a radical suggestion to the Jew who just assumed themselves to be clean by virtue of being Jewish.

And now he is calling them to repentance and to baptism and the people thought you must consider this to be a prophetic function of some sort. If you don't claim to be the prophet or messiah, why are you doing this? Why are you doing this strange thing? And he said, well, I baptize with water but there stands one among you whom you do not know. It is he who coming after me is preferred before me whose sandal strap I am not worthy to lose.

Now, he had said something very much like this quoted in the other gospels but he had followed it up saying he who comes after me will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Here he doesn't mention that Jesus will do that because he is not talking about Jesus yet here. He is talking about himself.

They said, who are you? Why are you baptized? He said, well, I am baptizing only in

water but another is coming after me that you don't know but I am not that important. I am not claiming great things for myself. My baptism is inferior to that which this other person will bring but he doesn't specify what that baptism is.

That is, he doesn't mention the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire here as he does in Matthew 3 and in Luke 3 which was chronologically earlier than this. He says, these things were done in Bethabara or beyond Jordan where John was baptizing. So the next day John saw Jesus coming toward him.

Now this may have been the first appearance of Jesus coming back from the wilderness after his temptation there. And said, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now, to refer to Jesus as a Lamb has become quite customary among Christians.

We frequently think of Lamb as a typical symbol of Jesus, the Lamb of God. But actually it is very rare in Scripture to speak of Jesus directly this way. Now in the Old Testament Passover lambs and sacrificial lambs and like a lamb before he shears his dung so he opened his mouth.

In the Old Testament we do have types and imagery that liken lambs to Jesus or Jesus to lambs. But in the New Testament Jesus is never called the Lamb except in two books of the Bible both written by the same author. That is, this Gospel and the book of Revelation.

In the book of Revelation the Lamb is the typical way of speaking about Jesus. The name Jesus, of course, does appear several times in the book of Revelation but he is more commonly referred to as the Lamb. And if we didn't have these words of John the Baptist that would be quite peculiar to come to the book of Revelation and there would have been no reference to him previously in the Bible as the Lamb.

And continually he is referred to as the Lamb, the Lamb. He is depicted as a Lamb with seven eyes and seven horns and so forth. Very symbolic.

But John the Baptist has prepared the way for us to see Jesus in this light. And to say that Jesus is the Lamb that takes away sin in the world doesn't mean... Well, let me just say what does it mean? It could mean a number of things. We know that lambs, for example, follow their shepherds.

Is that what it means that Jesus is a follower? Maybe. He followed his father's will. But more often he refers to himself and he is referred to as our shepherd.

We're the sheep. He's the shepherd. So in calling him the Lamb it's probably not... the metaphor does not call to mind the nature of lambs to follow.

What is it? Is it that he had wool? Did Jesus have woolly hair? No, I doubt it. I doubt if that

was it either. What about the disposition of a lamb in terms of its meekness and harmlessness? As a lamb is done before its shearers.