

ELIJAH AND JOHN THE BAPTIST**Malachi 3:1; 4:1-6; Luke 1:5-17, 57-58, 67-80;****Mark 1:1-11; John 1:19-28; Matthew 11:2-15; Mark 6:14-29**

Memory Verse: *“Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”* (Matt. 11:11 ESV).

Background Helps:

For our last two lessons in “The Gospel According to Elijah and Elisha,” we turn to the New Testament. While Elisha is mentioned by name only once in the New Testament (Luke 4:27; but see also Hebrews 11:35a), Elijah is mentioned by name thirty times! In the final Old Testament book of prophecy, Malachi, the LORD said, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me” (cf. Isa. 40:3-5); and in Malachi 4:5 the LORD promised to “send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” The Gospels, and particularly Jesus himself, claim that these prophecies were fulfilled in the coming of John the Baptist: see Luke 1:16-17, 76; Mark 1:2-4 (cf. Matt. 3:1-3; Luke 3:1-6); John 1:23; Matthew 11:10, 13-14; 17:10-13. John even dressed like Elijah ((cf. 2 Kings 1:7-8 with Matt. 3:4; Mark 3:6)! In John 1:21 John the Baptist denies that he is Elijah. Perhaps he did not realize his own significance (that he was a fulfillment of Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6), or he may have denied that he had come to fulfill false Jewish expectations of the “Elijah who was to come.”

In our memory verse (Matt. 11:11), Jesus makes a superlative statement about the greatness of John the Baptist. This statement in turn reflects backward on the greatness of Elijah, the prophet, who was a type of John.

Read *Faith in the Face of Apostasy*¹, pages 9-13, where the author draws a number of parallels between the ministry of Elijah and the ministry of John the Baptist. Other references to this comparison are sprinkled throughout the book, which you can find by checking out the “Index of Scripture” on pages 165-166.

Lesson Helps:

Possible lesson aim: My students will learn about the ministry of John the Baptist as the “Elijah who was to come,” so that they will seek to prepare others for the second coming of the Lord. Introduce your lesson with the prophecies of Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1; 4:4-6. Show from the New Testament how, hundreds of years later, John the Baptist fulfilled these prophecies (see Background Helps above). Show your class that the whole aim of John the Baptist’s ministry was to prepare the way for the coming of Christ, so that people would believe in him. Include the memory verse, indicating the greatness of John the Baptist, whose whole purpose in life was to prepare the way for the Messiah. Challenge your class to follow the example of John the Baptist. Make it your goal in life to prepare people (your friends, neighbors, relatives, etc.) for the second coming of Christ, by urging them to believe in him (and be baptized!). As citizens of the kingdom of heaven, we have an even greater privilege than John the Baptist (see memory verse).

¹ Raymond B. Dillard, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1999).

Home Assignment:

 Read Matthew 16:13–17:13; Mark 15:33-39; Revelation 11:1-13.

 Memorize Matthew 17:5b ESV.

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