

## Come Quickly, Lord Jesus: Advent 2020

Week 3 Text: John 1:6-8, 19-28

### Background

#### *Bible Translations*

*NET*: an “internet era” translation (published 2005) that includes extensive notes from the translators. The intent is to provide an idiomatic English translation in the main text, and then all the technical information related to Greek and Hebrew in the footnotes.

*NLT*: not the earliest, but definitely one of the classic “idiomatic English” translations. The language is not so idiomatic as to sound dated, but it definitely errs on the side of sounding like it was written originally in English, rather than a translation.

#### *People of God*

We take a break from the gospel according to Mark for the next 2 weeks, which gives us a chance to see how John (this week) and Luke (next week) handle the coming of Jesus into the world. In this week’s passage from the gospel according to John, we catch a glimpse of the variety of people that were around during Jesus’ time. In this little passage, we hear about John, priests, Levites, Pharisees, and the “Jewish authorities” (see definition of “Ioudaioi” below). There’s also an implication that there was a crowd of other people around: who was John baptizing after all? The diversity of labels is an indication of the diversity of Jewish sects at this period in history. God’s chosen people had developed a variety of ways of living in the Roman Empire!

John the Baptist defines his role for himself (as Mark defined his role for him last week) as “preparing the way for the Lord”. For John, this looked like baptizing people with water to symbolize repentance/forgiveness. And it also looked like bringing testimony to those people about the Messiah that was about to arrive. For John, even though he was a wild man who lived on locusts and honey, he was always concerning himself with God’s people.

#### *Some historical context*

*One important date*: 4BC/E Herod the Great dies

- Herod the Great is known for expanding and renovating the Second Temple in Jerusalem
- He met the magi and called for the massacre of Bethlehem babies in Matthew.
- When Herod the Great died, he left part of his kingdom to his son Herod Antipas, who is the “king Herod” that encounters adult Jesus and orders John the Baptist’s execution.

*One academic term*: Ioudaioi

- A Greek word literally meaning “Judeans”, or “Jews”
- The gospel according to John uses the term to refer primarily to Jewish authorities, especially ones who were opposed to Jesus
- Because John uses Ioudaioi with a negative connotation, it often seems like John, and by extension, Christian readers of the gospel, are against the Jewish people. This is one source of antisemitism in Christianity.
- The gospel according to John is not, in fact, anti-Jewish. John the Baptist is portrayed as a Jew, albeit perhaps of a different sect than the “authorities”. And Jesus himself was a devout Jewish man, keeping the various festivals (Passover, Hanukkah, and Sukkot are all mentioned in John’s gospel)

*One other fact*: It has been speculated that John the Baptist was a member of the Essene sect of Judaism, who lived in the desert wilderness, believed in the imminent coming of a singular Messiah, and also practiced ritual baptism.

## Questions

1. On a first read of the passage from John what stuck out at you? Was there anything surprising? What did you notice this time that you might not have noticed if you read this last year?

2. How do you think the original readers of John would have understood this passage? What is different between 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish Palestine and 21<sup>st</sup> century America? What is the same?

3. Where do you see God in this passage? How do you see God speaking through people today?

4. How are we providing testimony for God today? How are we being the people of God? What might God be calling you to do?

## John 1:6-8, 1:19-28 New English Translation

6 A man came, sent from God, whose name was John.[a] 7 He came as a witness[b] to testify[c] about the light, so that everyone[d] might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify[e] about the light.

### *The Testimony of John the Baptist*

19 Now[a] this was[b] John's[c] testimony[d] when the Jewish leaders[e] sent[f] priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"[g] 20 He confessed—he did not deny but confessed—"I am not the Christ!"[h] 21 So they asked him, "Then who are you?[i] Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not!"[j] "Are you the Prophet?"[k] He answered, "No!" 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you? Tell us[l] so that we can give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

23 John[m] said, "I am the voice of one shouting in the wilderness, 'Make straight[n] the way for the Lord,'[o] as the prophet Isaiah said." 24 (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.[p])[q] 25 So they asked John,[r] "Why then are you baptizing if you are not the Christ,[s] nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

26 John answered them,[t] "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not recognize,[u] 27 who is coming after me. I am not worthy[v] to untie the strap[w] of his sandal!" 28 These things happened in Bethany[x] across the Jordan River[y] where John was baptizing.

#### Footnotes

John 1:6 sn John refers to John the Baptist.

John 1:7 tn Grk "came for a testimony."sn Witness is also one of the major themes of John's Gospel. The Greek verb μαρτυρέω (martureō) occurs 33 times (compare to once in Matthew, once in Luke, 0 in Mark) and the noun μαρτυρία (martyria) 14 times (0 in Matthew, once in Luke, 3 times in Mark).

John 1:7 tn Or "to bear witness."

John 1:7 tn Grk "all."

John 1:8 tn Or "to bear witness."

John 1:19 tn Here καί (kaì) has been translated as "now" to indicate the transition to a new topic. Greek style often begins sentences or clauses with "and," but English style generally does not.

John 1:19 tn Grk "is."

John 1:19 tn Or "witness."sn John the Baptist's testimony seems to take place over 3 days: day 1, John's testimony about his own role is largely negative (1:19-28); day 2, John gives positive testimony about who Jesus is (1:29-34); day 3, John sends his own disciples to follow Jesus (1:35-40).

John 1:19 tn Or "the Jewish authorities"; Grk "the Jews." In NT usage the term Ἰουδαῖοι (Ioudaioi) may refer to the entire Jewish people, the residents of Jerusalem and surrounding territory, the authorities in Jerusalem, or merely those who were hostile to Jesus. Here the author refers to the authorities or leaders in Jerusalem. (For further information see R. G. Bratcher, "The Jews' in the Gospel of John," BT 26 [1975]: 401-9.)

John 1:19 sn "Who are you?" No uniform Jewish expectation of a single eschatological figure existed in the 1st century. A majority expected the Messiah. But some pseudepigraphic books describe God's intervention without mentioning the anointed Davidic king; in parts of 1 Enoch, for example, the figure of the Son of Man, not the Messiah, embodies the expectations of the author. Essenes at Qumran seem to have expected three figures: a prophet, a priestly messiah, and a royal messiah. In baptizing, John the Baptist was performing an eschatological action. It also seems to have been part of his proclamation (John 1:23, 26-27). Crowds were beginning to follow him. He was operating in an area not too far from the Essene center on the Dead Sea. No wonder the authorities were curious about who he was.

John 1:20 tn Or "the Messiah" (Both Greek "Christ" and Hebrew and Aramaic "Messiah" mean "one who has been anointed").sn "I am not the Christ." A 3rd century work, the pseudo-Clementine Recognitions (1.54 and 1.60 in the Latin text; the statement is not as clear in the Syriac version) records that John's followers proclaimed him to be the Messiah. There is no clear evidence that they did so in the 1st century, however—but Luke 3:15 indicates some wondered. Concerning the Christ, the term χριστός (christos) was originally an adjective ("anointed"), developing in LXX into a substantive ("an anointed one"), then developing still further into a technical generic term ("the anointed one"). In the intertestamental period it developed further into a technical term referring to the hoped-for anointed one, that is, a specific individual. In the NT the development starts there (technical-specific), is so used in the gospels, and then develops in Paul to mean virtually Jesus' last name.

John 1:21 tn Grk “What then?” (an idiom).

John 1:21 sn According to the 1st century rabbinic interpretation of 2 Kgs 2:11, Elijah was still alive. In Mal 4:5 it is said that Elijah would be the precursor of Messiah. How does one reconcile John the Baptist’s denial here (“I am not”) with Jesus’ statements in Matt 11:14 (see also Mark 9:13 and Matt 17:12) that John the Baptist was Elijah? Some have attempted to remove the difficulty by a reconstruction of the text in the Gospel of John which makes the Baptist say that he was Elijah. However, external support for such emendations is lacking. According to Gregory the Great, John was not Elijah, but exercised toward Jesus the function of Elijah by preparing his way. But this avoids the real difficulty, since in John’s Gospel the question of the Jewish authorities to the Baptist concerns precisely his function. It has also been suggested that the author of the Gospel here preserves a historically correct reminiscence—that John the Baptist did not think of himself as Elijah, although Jesus said otherwise. Mark 6:14-16 and Mark 8:28 indicate the people and Herod both distinguished between John and Elijah—probably because he did not see himself as Elijah. But Jesus’ remarks in Matt 11:14, Mark 9:13, and Matt 17:12 indicate that John did perform the function of Elijah—John did for Jesus what Elijah was to have done for the coming of the Lord. C. F. D. Moule pointed out that it is too simple to see a straight contradiction between John’s account and that of the synoptic gospels: “We have to ask by whom the identification is made, and by whom refused. The synoptic gospels represent Jesus as identifying, or comparing, the Baptist with Elijah, while John represents the Baptist as rejecting the identification when it is offered him by his interviewers. Now these two, so far from being incompatible, are psychologically complementary. The Baptist humbly rejects the exalted title, but Jesus, on the contrary, bestows it on him. Why should not the two both be correct?” (The Phenomenon of the New Testament [SBT], 70).

John 1:21 sn The Prophet is a reference to the “prophet like Moses” of Deut 18:15, by this time an eschatological figure in popular belief. Acts 3:22 identifies Jesus as this prophet.

John 1:23 sn This call to “make straight” is probably an allusion to preparation through repentance.

John 1:23 sn A quotation from Isa 40:3.

John 1:24 sn Pharisees were members of one of the most important and influential religious and political parties of Judaism in the time of Jesus. There were more Pharisees than Sadducees (according to Josephus, Ant. 17.2.4 [17.42] there were more than 6,000 Pharisees at about this time). Pharisees differed with Sadducees on certain doctrines and patterns of behavior. The Pharisees were strict and zealous adherents to the laws of the OT and to numerous additional traditions such as angels and bodily resurrection.

John 1:24 sn This is a parenthetical note by the author.

John 1:25 tn Grk “And they asked him, and said to him”; the referent (John) has been specified in the translation for clarity, and the phrase has been simplified in the translation to “So they asked John.”

John 1:25 tn Or “the Messiah” (Both Greek “Christ” and Hebrew and Aramaic “Messiah” mean “one who has been anointed”).sn See the note on Christ in 1:20.

John 1:26 tn Grk “answered them, saying.” The participle λέγων (legōn) is redundant in contemporary English and has not been translated.

John 1:26 tn Or “know.”

John 1:27 tn Grk “of whom I am not worthy.”sn The humility of John is evident in the statement I am not worthy. This was considered one of the least worthy tasks of a slave, and John did not consider himself worthy to do even that for the one to come, despite the fact he himself was a prophet.

John 1:27 tn The term refers to the leather strap or thong used to bind a sandal. This is often viewed as a collective singular and translated as a plural, “the straps of his sandals,” but it may be more emphatic to retain the singular here.

John 1:28 tn “River” is not in the Greek text but is supplied for clarity.

### **John 1:6-8, 19-28 New Living Translation**

<sup>6</sup> God sent a man, John the Baptist, <sup>7</sup> to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. <sup>8</sup> John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light.

#### *The Testimony of John the Baptist*

<sup>19</sup> This was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants from Jerusalem to ask John, "Who are you?" <sup>20</sup> He came right out and said, "I am not the Messiah."

<sup>21</sup> "Well then, who are you?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"

"No," he replied.

"Are you the Prophet we are expecting?"

"No."

<sup>22</sup> "Then who are you? We need an answer for those who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?"

<sup>23</sup> John replied in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

"I am a voice shouting in the wilderness,

'Clear the way for the Lord's coming!'"

<sup>24</sup> Then the Pharisees who had been sent <sup>25</sup> asked him, "If you aren't the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?"

<sup>26</sup> John told them, "I baptize with water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize. <sup>27</sup> Though his ministry follows mine, I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal."

<sup>28</sup> This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.