

BENCHMARK OF SPIRITUAL GREATNESS: JOHN THE BAPTIST

[Jesus Christ](#) referred to John the Baptist as the greatest "among those born of women" ([Matthew 11:11](#)). If we're truly seeking how to follow Jesus, it only makes sense that we should strive to attain what our LORD set as the benchmark for spiritual greatness. Amen? Who was this man? What was he like? What does the [Holy Bible](#) say about him? The answers to these and other questions appear herein.

Who Was John the Baptist? A Humble Heart and a Fiery Message

An itinerant preacher, John the Baptist lived in the Judean desert. Crowds came from afar to hear him preach a fiery message of repentance and baptism, but he humbly told them he was but a mortal man preparing the way for the One who was and is to come. Whenever people tried to elevate John, he regularly pointed to Jesus (ex. [John 1:19-27](#), [John 1:29-37](#)).

What Were Some of His "Nicknames"?

The Forerunner. The Baptist. The Baptizer.

What Was He Known For?

While still in his mother's womb, John the Baptist was ordained with a God-appointed mission: to prepare the way for the coming of the LORD, Jesus Christ (*explore "John is Filled..." below*). Once in adulthood, thousands came to hear John preach in the wilderness of Judea about repentance (to change direction) and he baptized them with water in the Jordan River. He preached to all who would listen that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Fulfilling an [Old Testament](#) prophecy (see [Isaiah 40:3](#) below), John exhorted everyone to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. The attention John's Ministry was receiving caused an uproar with many of the religious leaders of his time, for they were not adhering to John's message.

John's mission was fulfilled when he baptized Jesus. When the time came for Christ to start His ministry, John pointed his disciples to Christ and encouraged them to follow Him. Sometime later, when John was told Jesus was now baptizing others, he receded, saying, "That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less" (see [John 3:22-36](#) below).

What Was He Like?

One of the more colorful men and women mentioned in the Bible, John the Baptist dwelled in the desert. [Matthew 3](#) tells us his clothing was made of a camel hair and he wore a leather belt (similar

What Was He Like? (continued)

to Elijah in [2 Kings 1:8](#)). He ate wild locusts and honey. John was the real deal. Whenever his name is mentioned in biblical circles, people tend to sit up a little more and pay closer attention. The momentum of the discussion seems to change. Why? Because John didn't pull any punches. He called it the way he saw it- and it didn't matter who he was talking in front of, about or speaking to. Right was right and wrong was wrong.

He publicly admonished those religious leaders who lived their lives however they desired as they hypocritically instructed everyone else to live in accordance with the Law. They believed that they didn't need to repent since they were directly descended from Abraham. But John righteously scolded them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" ([Matthew 3:7-10](#)).

These unswerving principles of character ultimately led to John's arrest and subsequent beheading at the hands of Herod Antipas, the underhanded Tetrarch (sub-king) of Galilee and Perea.

John Is Filled with the Holy Spirit while in His Mother's Womb! ([Luke 1:39-45](#))

Talking about an up close, long lasting, personal relationship with Jesus, John the Baptist wasted no time in starting his! John's relationship with Jesus started while they were in the wombs of their mothers. Wow! Here's how it happened...As Scripture shares the account of John the Baptist's Birth being Foretold (see [Luke 1:5-25](#)), we know that John was filled with the Holy Spirit before he was even born ([Luke 1:15](#)). After being visited by the angel Gabriel (see [Luke 1:26-38](#)), Mary set out on a journey to visit her relative, Elizabeth (John's mother). Mary was carrying Jesus in her womb and Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John. When Mary arrived, she greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, John leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice, she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her!"

Can you picture little John- already filled with the Holy Spirit- in Elizabeth's womb, leaping for joy in knowing his Savior and King is present? Amen! We know from all the Scriptural accounts included herein that John's excitement for Jesus never wavered. Now THAT'S a relationship!

John's Miraculous Birth

[The Gospel of Luke, chapter 1](#) shares with us that John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, were advanced in age. Descended from the priestly family of Aaron, they were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly.

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John's Miraculous Birth (continued)

But they were childless, as Elizabeth was unable to conceive (similar to Abraham and Sarah in [Genesis 11:30](#) & [Genesis 21:1-7](#)).

One day Zechariah, who was on duty serving as a priest before God, saw an angel. Zachariah was startled by what the angel told him. Elizabeth would bear a child in her old age! They were to name him John, and he would be set apart for a special purpose. The angel Gabriel told him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

But as Zechariah was shocked at what he had been told and doubted the angel's words, Gabriel silenced him for the duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy. He wouldn't be able to talk until the birth of his son. Nine months later, John the Baptist was born...

What John's Example of Discipleship Means to Us 2,000 Years Later

The account of John the Baptist recorded in the Bible still speaks to us 2,000 years later. His life story and his message point only to [Jesus Christ](#), shows God's miraculous power and teaches the importance of repentance from sin.

Before Jesus arrived on the scene, John was looked upon with high regard by those desiring to repent and be baptized. But, with great humility, he proclaimed, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes One who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" ([Matthew 3:11-12](#)).

The above Scripture mentioning the 'carrying of sandals' is commonly gleaned over while the reader's focus naturally falls upon the baptism portion. It's important to recognize that what John was conveying here was the ultimate surrender, as the job of carrying sandals was the duty of the lowliest slave. John the Baptist- recognized by Christ Himself as greatest "among those born of women" - did not deem himself worthy of even the lowest of jobs in serving Christ. What a tremendous example of humility for all to follow!

Listed on page 4 are all Scriptures which include a reference to John the Baptist. Share this document far and wide- spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to the ends of the Earth!

JOHN THE BAPTIST IN SACRED SCRIPTURE

~ OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES ~

700 Years Before Jesus Christ and John the Baptist Were Born

[Isaiah 40:3](#)

Prophecy of John the Baptist Preparing the Way

[Malachi 3:1](#)

Judgment and Covenant Renewal

[Malachi 4:1-6](#)

~ NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES ~

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

[Luke 1:5-25](#)

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

[Luke 1:26-38](#)

Mary Visits Elizabeth

[Luke 1:39-45](#)

The Birth of John the Baptist

[Luke 1:57-66](#)

Zechariah's Song

[Luke 1:67-80](#)

The Word Became Flesh

[John 1:1-18](#)

A Voice Crying Out from the Wilderness

[Matthew 3:1-17](#), [Mark 1:1-8](#),

[Luke 3:1-20](#), [John 1:19-28](#)

John Testifies About Jesus

[John 1:29-34](#)

The Baptism of Jesus

[Matthew 3:13-17](#), [Mark 1:9-13](#),

[Luke 3:21-38](#), [John 1:29-34](#)

John's Disciples Follow Jesus

[John 1:35-42](#)

The Final Witness of John the Baptist

[John 3:22-36](#)

Testimonies About Jesus

[John 5:31-47](#)

Jesus and John the Baptist

[Matthew 11:1-19](#), [Luke 7:18-35](#)

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

[Luke 9:1-9](#)

Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah

[Matthew 16:13-20](#), [Mark 8:27-30](#)

Further Conflict Over Jesus' Claims

[John 10:22-42](#)

John the Baptist Arrested

[Matthew 4:12](#), [Mark 1:14](#), [Luke 3:19-20](#)

John the Baptist Beheaded

[Matthew 14:1-12](#), [Mark 6:14-29](#)

The Apostle Paul Speaks About Baptisms

[Acts 18:24-19:6](#)

Jesus: Elijah and John the Baptist

[Matthew 11:11-15](#), [Matthew 17:11-13](#)