

# John the Baptist is Imprisoned

## Story Elements



- **Text:** John 3:22-4:4; Luke 3:19, 20
- **Setting:** circa AD 27 in Ænon near Salim.
- **Characters:** God, Jesus, John the Baptist and his disciples
- **Plot:** As Jesus' ministry began to grow, John the Baptist's began to decline until it was brought to a complete halt when he was imprisoned.
- **Key word(s):** "*he must increase, but I must \_\_\_\_\_*" – John's words reveal his wisdom and humility: he was wise enough to know the temporary nature of his mission as the Forerunner and humble enough to acknowledge when his mission was over. "As fades the morning star when the sun himself arises, so was it the joy of the herald of Christ to lose himself in the supreme radiance of his Lord's appearing."<sup>1</sup>

- **Climax:** **John 3:26** *And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.* It is evident from John's answer to his disciples' remarks that they were victims of party spirit, and in loyalty to their teacher their observation of Christ's popularity was colored somewhat green with envy. John's response to their statement is his last public testimony of the Messiah.

## Cleansing Questioned

- (v 22) After Jesus conversed with Nicodemus, he and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside where Jesus preached, and his disciples baptized (cf. John 4:2).
- (v 23) Meanwhile, John the Baptist and his disciples went to Ænon to preach and baptize.
  - The name Ænon "means a \_\_\_\_\_ and was doubtless given to this place because of the *fountains* there."<sup>2</sup>
  - The exact location remains a mystery, but "the oldest tradition, which places it a few miles to the south of Bethshean (Scythopolis), on the border of Samaria and Galilee, has this in its favour, that it locates the scene of John's last public work close to the seat of Herod Antipas, into whose power the Baptist was so soon to be delivered."<sup>3</sup>
  - John chose to baptize at Ænon because *there was much water there*. Contrary to the caviling of most pædobaptist commentators on this verse, this is indeed a strong argument for the mode of \_\_\_\_\_ baptism. For dipping, pouring, or sprinkling, any well in any village would suffice.
- (vv 25-26) While in Ænon, John's disciples and some of the Pharisees ("Jews") debated about some question of ceremonial cleansing – a conversation that probably started with the topic of \_\_\_\_\_ and eventually led to discussing Jesus, who also *baptizeth, and all men come to him*.

## Christ Exalted

- John's disciples were very obviously heated with zeal and loyalty for their rabbi, but John's response is not only a demonstration of humility, but a powerful \_\_\_\_\_ sermon.

APPLICATION → Such a persuasive grip over the hearts of men can lead a preacher down a prideful road, but John's humility moderates his disciples' zeal with a high view of Jesus. Matthew Henry notes, "The more others

<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon, "Jesus and His Forerunner," <https://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs2818.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Luke & John*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 209.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, <https://ccel.org/ccel/edersheim/lifetimes/lifetimes.viii.vii.html>

magnify us, the more we must humble ourselves, and fortify ourselves against the temptation of flattery and applause, and the jealousy of our friends for our honour, by remembering our place, and what we are.”<sup>4</sup>

- (a) (v 27) John starts by reminding his men that *a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven*. That is, as John’s ministry was blessed of God, so now Jesus’ ministry is also blessed.
- (b) (v 28) Then John reminded his followers that he has always denied that he was the Messiah, but that his mission was to be *sent before him*. Then John gave three distinguishing marks between the Forerunner and the Messiah:
  - i. (v 29) **Jesus is the \_\_\_\_\_; John is the bridegroom’s friend**. *He that has the bride is bridegroom* – If people flocked to Christ, then that is where they should go, for the bride belongs to the bridegroom, and the bridegroom’s friend is happy for him.
  - ii. (v 31) **Jesus is from \_\_\_\_\_; John is from earth**. *He that comes from heaven is above all* – Jesus comes down to us; John came from among us.
  - iii. (v 35) **Jesus is the Son of \_\_\_\_\_; John is not** - The Son has been given all things by the Father, including the Spirit without measure.
- (c) (v 36) John’s final public words about Christ are both are merciful promise and a solemn warning: *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him*.

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## John Imprisoned

- 5. What John’s gospel makes note of (v 4) Luke’s describes (Luke 19-20)
  - (a) Herod the tetrarch (also called Herod \_\_\_\_\_, the son of Herod the Great) ruled in Galilee and Perea. Herod walked in the ways of his father and was a very sinful ruler.
  - (b) John reprovved Herod for marrying \_\_\_\_\_ (his brother Philip’s wife) and *for all the evils which Herod had done*. But Herod added another terrible sin to his long list: *he shut up John in prison*.
  - (c) According to ancient historian Josephus, John the Baptist was imprisoned in \_\_\_\_\_ Castle (Mukawir, Jordan).

APPLICATION➔ Henry describes this tragic event: “Must he be silenced who is the *voice of one crying in the wilderness?* ...But thus the faith of his disciples must be tried; thus the unbelief of those who rejected him must be punished; thus he must be Christ’s forerunner in suffering as well as preaching; and thus, having been for about a year and a half preparing people for Christ, he must now give way to him, and, **the Sun being risen, the morning-star must of course disappear.**”<sup>5</sup>

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**Answer Key:** Key word(s): “decrease” • 2. a) fountain; c) immersive • 3. baptism • 4. gospel; b) i. bridegroom; ii. heaven; iii. God • 5. a) Antipas; b) Herodias; c) Machaerus

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1932.  
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1834.