

Yochanan ~ Part 2

This section describes a crisis in the **Baptist's** ministry. He had already attracted the attention of the **Sanhedrin**. It was a time of excitement and expectation regarding the **Messiah**. **Yochanan** evidently spoke with an authority greater than that of other teachers, and his success was greater than theirs. The miracle attending his birth, connected with the public ministry of **Zacharias** in the **Temple**, was probably well known. He had proclaimed that a new dispensation was at hand (Matthew 3:2), and this was believed to refer to the **Messiah**. But what was **Yochanan's** own position? Was he the **Messiah**? This uncertainty led the authorities in **Yerushalayim** to send and question **Yochanan** himself about his mission. No formal deputation from the **Sanhedrin** seems to have been sent. The **Sadducee** members, acquiescing in the **Roman** dominion, would not feel much interest. But to the **P'rushim** members, who represented the religious and national hopes of their countrymen, the question was vital; and they seem to have sent an informal though influential deputation of ministers of religion (v. 19) from their own party (v. 24). **Yochanan** (the author) was probably among the **Baptist's Talmidim** at this time, and heard his master proclaim himself not the **Messiah**, but **His Herald**. It was a crisis for him as well as for his master, and he records it accordingly.

Yochanan the Baptist's Testimony

¹⁹ Here is Yochanan's testimony: when the Judeans sent Cohanim and L'vi'im from Yerushalayim to ask him, "Who are you?"²⁰ he was very straightforward and stated clearly, "I am not the Messiah."²¹ "Then who are you?" they asked him. "Are you Eliyahu?" "No, I am not," he said. "Are you 'the prophet,' the one we're expecting?" "No," he replied.

"I am not the Messiah." **Yochanan the Baptist** is explicitly denying that he is the **Messiah**, but their questioning continues through multiple layers of Jewish messianic expectation. *Are you Eliyahu?* The prophet **Eliyahu's** miraculous ascent into heaven on a fiery divine chariot (2 Kings 2:11) fueled the belief that he would return as a forerunner of the **Messiah**.

²² So they said to him, "Who are you?—so that we can give an answer to the people who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?"²³ He answered in the words of Yesha'yahu the prophet, "I am The voice of someone crying out: 'In the desert make the way of Adonai straight!' "

Yochanan was *a voice ... crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord* in keeping with **Yesha'yahu's** words (**Yesha'yahu** 40:3). This messenger of **God** was to prepare the way for **Adonai** coming by preaching repentance and divine judgment. **Yesha'yahu's** vision in **Yesha'yahu** 40–55 drew heavily on exodus typology and envisioned a new exodus of **God's** people in which **God's** glory would be revealed, and **His** people delivered. This would be accomplished by the coming of the **Servant of the Lord** (see esp. **Yesha'yahu** 52:13–53:12).

²⁴ Some of those who had been sent were P'rushim. ²⁵ They asked him, "If you are neither the Messiah nor Eliyahu nor 'the prophet,' then why are you immersing people?"²⁶ To them, Yochanan replied, "I am immersing people in water, but among you is standing someone whom you don't know. ²⁷ He is the one coming after me—I'm not good enough even to untie his sandal!"²⁸ All this took place in Beit-Anyah, east of the Yarden, where Yochanan was immersing.

Yochanan does not fully answer their question until the next day, in 1:32–34. The purpose of his baptism was to prepare people for the **Messiah**.

²⁹ The next day, Yochanan saw Yeshua coming toward him and said, "Look! God's lamb! The one who is taking away the sin of the world!"

God's lamb. Yochanan identifies **Yeshua** with the dominant sacrificial animal used in **Temple** ritual, particularly in the sin offerings, since he is the one who takes *away the sin of the world*. Elsewhere in the **Brit Hadashah**, **Yeshua the Messiah** is equated with the **Passover** lamb. The figure of the lamb connects **Yeshua** with the passage identifying the **Messiah** as the **Suffering Servant** in Isaiah 53; and **His** sacrificial death by execution on a stake is compared with *"that of a lamb without a defect or a spot"* (1 Kefa 1:19), as required by the **Torah** (e.g., Exodus 12:5, 29:1; Leviticus 1:3, 10; 9:3; 23:12). In the book of **Revelation** **Yeshua** is referred to as the **Lamb** nearly thirty times. On **God's** requiring a human sacrifice for sins, see 1 Corinthians 15:3, Messianic Jews 7:26–28, and indeed the entire book of **Messianic Jews**.

³⁰ This is the man I was talking about when I said, 'After me is coming someone who has come to rank above me, because he existed before me.'³¹ I myself did not know who he was, but the reason I came immersing with water was so that he might be made known to Isra'el."³² Then Yochanan gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove, and remaining on him."³³ I myself did not know who he was, but the one who sent me to immerse in water said to me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining, this is the one who immerses in the Ruach HaKodesh.'³⁴ And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God." ¹

This is **Yochanan's** version of the events reported in the **Synoptic Gospels** at **Mattityahu 3:11–17**, **Mark 1:7–11**, and **Luke 3:15–17, 21–22**.

When you're out in public, it's easy to feel like your testimony is diluted among the noise of everyday life. Reflect on **Yochanan's** decisive declaration of **Yeshua** as the **Lamb of God**. Look for opportunities to affirm your faith in casual conversations. For instance, next time someone asks about your weekend, share how you served in your church or a ministry project. This simple act of narrating your faith can inspire others and create openings for deeper discussions about spirituality.

In our next post, we will continue to explore the **Gospel of Yochanan**.

¹ Yochanan 1:19-34.