

## Research: John the Baptist in prison

Luke 7:19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26,28

19¶ And John calling *unto him* two of his disciples sent *them* to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?

“**When John had heard in the prison.** The position of the Baptist was so far that of a prisoner treated with respect. Herod himself observed him, and heard him gladly. Herodias had not yet found an occasion of revenge. His disciples came and went freely. Some of these we have seen ([Matthew 9:14](#)) as present when our Lord was teaching, and certain to hear of such wonders as those narrated in Matthew 8, 9. He himself, in the prison of Machærus, was languishing with the sickness of hope deferred for the Messianic kingdom, which he had proclaimed. His disciples brought back word of what they had seen and heard ([Luke 7:18](#)), and yet all things continued as before, and there was no deliverance either for himself or Israel. Under the influence of this disappointment, he sent his two disciples with the question which the next verse records” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“*Now when John had heard in the prison* (into which he had been cast by Herod Antipas, a little after he began his public ministry, chap. [Matthew 4:12](#), and [Matthew 14:3](#), &c.) *of the works of Christ* — That is, of some of his many miracles,— *He sent two of his disciples* — Not, as is probable, because he doubted himself, but to confirm their faith. And said, *Art thou he that should come* — Namely, the Messiah? *Or look we for another* — Under that character?

“Considering what clear evidence John had received by a miraculous sign from heaven that Jesus was the Messiah, (see [John 1:33](#),) and what express and repeated testimonies he himself had borne to this truth, it cannot reasonably be supposed that he now doubted of it. But some of his disciples, offended and discouraged by his long imprisonment, as well as the freedom of Christ’s conversation, so different from the austerity used by their master and his disciples, might begin to call it in question, and therefore John might think it necessary to put them in the way of obtaining further satisfaction.” (Benson Commentary).

“John was in prison. Herod had thrown him into confinement on account of his faithfulness in reproving him for marrying his brother Philip's wife.

“It is not certainly known why John sent to Jesus. It might have been to satisfy his disciples that he was the Messiah; or he might have been desirous of ascertaining for himself whether this person, of whom he heard so much, was the same one whom he had baptized, and whom he knew to be the Messiah” (Barnes’ Notes).

21And in that same hour he cured many of *their* infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many *that were* blind he gave sight.

**“And in that same hour he cured . . .** The statement of the facts is peculiar to St. Luke, and obviously adds much force to our Lord’s answer. He pointed to what was passing before the eyes of the questioners” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“cured many of their infirmities; bodily weaknesses and disorders: and plagues; which were inflicted on them as scourges and corrections for sin, very severe diseases, as epilepsies, leprosies, palsies, &c. and of evil spirits; or devils, which he dispossessed and commanded out of the bodies of men; though sometimes evil spirits, with the Jews, signify some kinds of bodily diseases” (Gill’s Exposition).

**22Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.**

“Go and show John again ... - Jesus referred them for an answer to these miracles. They were proof that he was the Messiah. Prophets had indeed performed miracles, but no prophet had performed so many, or any so important. Jesus, moreover, performed them "in his own name" and by his own power. Prophets had done it by the power of God. Jesus, therefore, performed the works which none but the Messiah could do, and John might easily infer that he was the Christ” (Barnes’ Notes).

**“The blind receive their sight.**—Apparently no facts were stated which might not have already come to the ears of the Baptist. At least one instance of each class of miracle has already been recorded by St. Matthew, the blind ([Matthew 9:27](#)), the lame ([Matthew 9:6](#)), the leper ([Matthew 8:2](#)), the dead ([Matthew 9:25](#)). The raising of the widow’s son at Nain, which in St. Luke follows closely upon the healing of the centurion’s servant, must also have preceded what is here narrated. What the Baptist needed was, not the knowledge of fresh facts, but a different way of looking at those he already knew. Where these works were done, there were tokens that the coming One had indeed come.

“But above all signs and wonders, there was another spiritual note of the kingdom, which our Lord reserves as the last and greatest: *Poor men have the good news proclaimed to them.* They are invited to the kingdom, and told of peace and pardon. It is as though our Lord knew that the Baptist, whose heart was with the poor, would feel that One who thus united power and tenderness could be none other than the expected King” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“The poor have the gospel preached to them - It was predicted of the Messiah that he would preach good tidings to the meek [Isaiah 61:1](#); or, as it is rendered in the New Testament, "He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor," [Luke 4:18](#). By this, therefore, also, John might infer that he was truly the Messiah. It adds to the force of this testimony that the "poor" have always been overlooked by Pharisees and philosophers. No sect of philosophers had condescended to notice them before Christ, and no system of religion had attempted to instruct

them before the Christian religion. In all other schemes the poor have been passed by as unworthy of notice” (Barnes’ Notes).

**24 And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?**

In this passage, Jesus contrasts John’s strength and role as a prophet with reeds along the river bank. One source remarks, “It was no vacillating, swaying character men went out to see like a swaying reed, but a man immovable as a mighty tree.”

“*A reed*] John was not like the reeds which they had seen waving in the wind on the banks of Jordan, but rather, as Lange says, ‘a cedar half uprooted by the storm.’ (Cambridge)

**25 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?**

“*A man clothed in soft raiment?*] A contrast to the camel’s hair mantle and leathern girdle of the Baptist; [Matthew 3:4](#).

“*they which are gorgeously apparelled and live delicately*] Rather, **they who are in glorious apparel and luxury**. The Herods were specially given both to ostentation in dress ([Acts 13:21](#)) and to luxury” (Cambridge Bible).

**26 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.**

“But what went ye out for to see?... What led your curiosity to go into the wilderness after him, since it could not be any of the above things? was it to see a prophet? which was the case; for John was a prophet, and

was known to be one; and the fame of him, as such, drew vast numbers to see and hear him, there not having been a prophet among the Jews, for some hundreds of years:" (Gill's Exposition).

28For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

*"there is not a greater than John the Baptist]* "He was the lamp, kindled and burning," [John 5:35](#)." (Cambridge Bible)

The forerunner of the Messiah the one to get the people ready for Jesus.