



Chapter 11: Jesus and John the Baptist

John the Baptist's Messengers (11:1-6)

King Herod arrested and imprisoned John the Baptist whom we met in chapter 3. John then sent his followers to ask Jesus if he really was the promised Messiah. Jesus told them to tell John what they had seen and heard. No-one could perform such miracles or preach like this unless they really were the Messiah.

To answer the question *"Are you the one who is to come?"* Jesus showed them that his work fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah and the coming Kingdom of God that we find in Isaiah. Compare the reply of Jesus to the disciples of John with these words from Isaiah 35 and 61.

Jesus' reply includes these words:	Jesus' words are taken from these passages	
Matthew 11:5-6 "The <u>blind receive their sight</u> and the <u>lame walk</u> , lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the <u>poor have good news preached to them</u> . And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."	Isaiah 35:5-6 "Then the <u>eyes of the blind shall be opened</u> , and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the <u>lame man leap like a deer</u> , and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;"	Isaiah 61:1 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me <u>to bring good news to the poor</u> ; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;"

John was executed (read Matt. 14:3-12). When Jesus returns John will be resurrected and given immortal life, a hope that all disciples share. Isaiah 35 and 61 tell us of both the release from sin that Jesus brought and the even greater blessings he will bring with him at his return.

In his reply Jesus also included *"the poor have the good news preached to them"*. Look at Luke 4:16-21 to see how Jesus had previously applied this prophecy to himself.

John the Baptist's Role (11:7-15)

John had completed the work foretold by the prophet (read Isaiah 40:3). He had been *"the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord"* (Matt. 3:3). John knew that his work was at an end and he wanted his disciples now to follow Jesus. *"He must increase, but I must decrease"* (read John 3:30).

So Jesus paid tribute to the work of John, the last and greatest of a line of prophets.

In the last chapter of the Old Testament (Malachi 4:5) there is a prophecy that Elijah (one of the early Old Testament prophets), will reappear before God's day of judgement to be a messenger like that of John the Baptist. John had prepared the way for the coming of Jesus, just as Elijah had prepared the way for Elisha (a prophet who came after Elijah and completed his work).

Sadly, the people of Israel did not accept either the message of John or the ministry of Jesus but put Jesus to death. God's judgements were poured out on them when the Romans attacked Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and later in A.D. 135 when it was *"ploughed as a field"*, fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 3:12.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: MESSIAH

MESSIAH is a Hebrew word meaning 'anointed' or 'king'. In Greek the same word is translated 'Christ'. Matthew 1.21 tells us 'Jesus' means 'Saviour' so Jesus Christ means 'The Saviour, the (future) King'.





John and Jesus – Both Righteous but Outwardly Different (11:16-19)

The Jews had rejected John, claiming that *“he has a demon”*, or he was mad. They rejected Jesus as well, despite his very different way of life. Notice that people said that John had a demon because his behaviour and appearance were very unusual; he did not spend his time socialising and he did not drink alcohol (see Luke 1:15). John lived a life apart from other people in order to focus on the work God had called him to do.

The same people also rejected Jesus and said that he too had a demon (John 7:20; 8:48-52). But Jesus came to save the lost sheep of Israel (see Matt. 10:6) and so he mixed with the people and socialised with them in order to preach to them. Yet his accusers used this openness as an opportunity to accuse him of gluttony, drunkenness and mixing with those who were most despised by society (see Matt. 9:10).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: WISDOM

Godly wisdom is pictured in the Old Testament as a righteous woman who invites people to her house (Proverbs 9:1-12). Folly is represented by a foolish woman who encourages people to do wrong things (Proverbs 9:13-18). These are examples of personification, where something without life is described as if it were a person.

John and Jesus are ‘children of wisdom’ - children of the righteous woman; both of them invited people to come and listen to the message they preached. God, in His wisdom, planned that John would be like the prophet Elijah in appearance and way of life, but He planned that His Son would be different.

Jews who knew the Old Testament would recognise that Elijah gave way to a greater prophet, Elisha, who performed many miracles, some of them pointing forward to the work of Jesus. For example, Elisha healed a leper and raised the dead (2 Kings 4, 5). This would help them to recognise that Jesus was the Son of God.

People who Ignored God's Power (11:20-24)

It must have been wonderful to see the amazing miracles Jesus performed, and witness the joy of those that he healed! Only by God's Holy Spirit could such miracles be performed yet some who saw the marvellous power of God at work refused to accept Jesus. The people from Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, rejected the witness of the power of the miracles performed and dismissed the call to repentance and the prospect of entrance to the Kingdom of God at Jesus' return.

Verse 21 tells us that the people of Tyre and Sidon, who were Gentiles (non-Jews), did not have the same opportunity to see the miraculous works of Jesus and to hear his teaching. The Jews were privileged to be God's chosen people. By turning their backs on God's offer of salvation they will not go unpunished in the day of God's Judgements.

God is calling us through His Word, the Bible. While we have the opportunity, we must not neglect the call to repentance and the offer of deliverance from sin and death.

People who Accepted Jesus (11:25-30)

In contrast to the wickedness of those who rejected his teaching, the Lord thanked his Father for his close disciples and other people who were not blind to his message.

"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;"
(Matthew 11:25)

Jesus here describes his disciples as little children meaning those who have a child like trust in him.

God calls people to salvation, and here Jesus calls us by asking us to take his yoke. A yoke enabled a pair of oxen to bear the load and work together. To work in harmony with Jesus we must develop characters that are meek (gentle) and lowly (humble). Jesus promises that, if we will work with him, he will share our burdens, give us rest now from our sins and complete rest in the kingdom to come at his return to the earth.

