

# John 1 vs 19-28

Heralding the hero

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# Heralding the hero

## John 1 vs 19-28

Let's start by reading JOHN 1 vs 19-23, but before we do, here is some background info on some of the background characters we are about to meet.

### Background Info:

- Pharisees (v 24) – mostly local dignitaries. Laymen but theologically very keen!
- A Levite (v 19) – is a priest (the vast majority of priests came from the tribe of Levi).
- Elijah (v 21) – it is promised in the Old Testament book of Malachi that God would send someone like Elijah, who was a famous Israelite prophet (c. 860BC).
- **“The Prophet”** (v 21) – The greatest Old Testament prophet, Moses, was known as ‘the Prophet’. At the end of his life God promised to send another prophet like Moses to lead his people.

*JOHN 1 vs 19-23: And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" <sup>20</sup> He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." <sup>21</sup> And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." <sup>22</sup> So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" <sup>23</sup> He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."*

### Question time

John the Baptist is THE witness to Christ – he is the “link man” who prepares the way.

- John – the hottest item on the news! CNN and the BBC would have been out in the desert. What he said would have made the front page of your paper!
- The Jewish nation have been watching for signs of the coming Messiah – and will be wondering if John is THE figure they have been taught to expect.
- The Government and the Church have sent representatives.

- Hence the question – v 19 **“Who are you?”** ... and the subsequent questions in vs 21 and 22:
  - **“Are you Elijah?” ... “Are you the Prophet?”... “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us.”**

Clearly John had very high “street cred” in the way that officialdom was treating both him and his message. But he doesn’t want the attention for himself...

...Interesting that his first utterance is entirely linked to Jesus...:

v 20 **“I am not the Christ”**

### **Get ready...**

v 23: *He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."*

It will not have been lost on any Jew, brought up awaiting the Messiah and aware that there will be signs of His coming, that John the Baptist dives straight into the book of Isaiah!

Isaiah – who, in the clearest possible way, prophesied 700+ years before Jesus Christ all about the life of the coming Christ. (John often refers to Isaiah because Christ continuously fulfilled his prophecies).

v23 ***Make straight the way of the Lord.***

...For Christ the Creator God: Make way - it is GOD who is coming!

- Such powerful imagery was not new or surprising to the people of these times....

In the days of such powers as the Greeks and the Romans, it was normal practice to create wide highways and entrances to major cities, so that a victorious leader could parade in front of his people the spoils of war, captured slaves and possessions that he was bringing back to the glory of his country.

- So how much more grandiose should be the entrance of God as described in Isaiah 40 vs 3:

***“the way of the LORD”... “a highway for our God”?!***

- Hence John 1 vs 23:

***'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.***

Here is what Isaiah foretold:

Isaiah 40 vs 1-3:

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*

*<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,*

*that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*

*<sup>3</sup> A voice cries:*

*"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a  
highway for our God.*

Jerusalem, a city in occupation, is about to see the arrival of **the Lord**.

### ***It's not me you're looking for...***

JOHN 1 vs 24-28: (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) <sup>25</sup>They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" <sup>26</sup>John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, <sup>27</sup>even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." <sup>28</sup>These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The WORST, most humble task was to wash the feet of a guest – this is a time of open sandals in a hot, dusty, land of many animals!! Get the picture – feet were bad news!!

So... to truly humble yourself in the eyes of your guest, you offered to untie the sandals and bathe the feet of your guest ...or more usually you gave the job to your lowest servant.

But John says – he is not worthy to even untie the sandals of the coming Christ... let alone wash his feet!

v 27      ***"...the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."***

It's worth noticing that...

It is a characteristic of John the Gospel writer that we get lots of detail – like this location reference:

v 28      ***These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.***

John is writing at a time when people who attended the original events that John is recording would still be alive.

...So John regularly gives lots of historically accurate details as if to say, "Go check and see if what I am saying is correct!"

## ***Summary:***

- To reference Isaiah 40 (which starts with “***Comfort, comfort my people, says your God***”) was a very telling passage to choose when the Jews in John the Baptist’s day were an occupied people!

...The Messiah has come to rescue God’s people...

...Who are under God’s judgement!

...He has come to make them right with God.

- So ... as John the Baptist says – God is coming – and it’s no wonder therefore that John doesn’t view himself as even being worthy to untie the sandal of his Saviour! (v 27)

I wonder if we are the same as in the days of Isaiah 40 – a people who need God’s rescue!?

## ***What comes next?***

Jesus arrives “centre stage”... and John can’t help himself...

Flashing like a neon arrow sign – he points out Jesus!

Here is the whole passage we have just studied:

### *John 1 vs 19-28*

<sup>19</sup>And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" <sup>20</sup>He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." <sup>21</sup>And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." <sup>22</sup>So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" <sup>23</sup>He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

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