

Leader's Guide
Sports in Focus Guide Two

Below are some additional insights for
John 1:19-2:25
Source for answers: MacArthur New Testament Commentary

1. Why were the Jews confused by the appearance of John the Baptist?

The ancient world had seen many great men. It had known feared war leaders, like Alexander the Great; judicious lawgivers, like Hammurabi; profound thinkers, like Socrates; powerful rulers, like Augustus Caesar; wise men, like Solomon; and noble religious leaders, like Abraham, Moses, David, and the judges and prophets of Israel. But the greatest of them all was a most improbable candidate by human standards for that supreme honor. He lived his life in obscurity in the desert, far from society and the seats of power and influence. Nor was he wealthy; by the way he dressed and ate he identified with the poor (Matt. 3:4). Yet he had the most important and elevated task in history: to announce the arrival of the Messiah.

The first question posed to John, "Who are you?" reflects the Jewish leaders' confusion regarding him (cf. their questions in vv. 21–22), since he did not fit into any of their messianic expectations. The question implied that John might consider himself the Messiah, as his emphatic (cf. his use of the emphatic pronoun *egō*) reply, "I am not the Christ" (the Greek word for Messiah) indicates. Messiah had come, John insisted, but he disavowed any thought that he might be Him. In fact, the apostle John's threefold declaration, he confessed and did not deny, but confessed emphasizes the vehemence of the Baptist's denial. Unlike some of his followers, he clearly understood his subordinate role as the forerunner of Christ (cf. 3:25–30).

If John were not the Messiah, was there a possibility that he might be another significant figure associated with the end times? Hence the delegation next asked him, "Are you Elijah?" Based on the prophecy of Malachi (3:1 and 4:5), the Jews expected Elijah himself to return in bodily form just before Messiah returned to establish His earthly kingdom. Even today many Jewish people leave an empty seat at the table for Elijah when they celebrate their Passover Seder. John's appearance was strikingly similar to Elijah's; according to Mark 1:6, "John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist," while 2 Kings 1:8 describes Elijah as "a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins." John's call for repentance (Matt. 3:2) and warning of coming judgment (Matt. 3:10–12) would have further reminded his hearers of Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 18:18, 21; 21:17–24).

John was not actually Elijah as the Jews expected; instead he was Elijah-like, coming "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). As noted above, John preached with the same boldness and power as Elijah did. Had the Jewish people believed his message and accepted Jesus as the Messiah, John would have been the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. "If you are willing to accept it," declared Jesus, "John himself is Elijah who was to come" (Matt. 11:14). With those words, Jesus interpreted Malachi's prophecy as referring to one similar to Elijah and not to the prophet himself.

The next query, Are you the Prophet? came from the prophecy of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15–18 about a prophet like him who would come and speak the word of God. There was no consensus in first-century Judaism about the precise identity of that Prophet (cf. John 6:14; 7:40). Some believed that he, like Elijah, would be a forerunner of the Messiah (possibly Jeremiah or one of the other prophets resurrected; cf. Matt. 16:14); others saw him as the Messiah Himself. The latter view is the correct one, since both Peter (Acts 3:22–23) and Stephen (Acts 7:37) applied Deuteronomy 18:15–18

to Jesus. Thus John denied being that prophet, answering simply, “No.”

2. What do we learn about the character of John the Baptist from this passage?

This man, John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, was introduced in verse 15 where it is recorded that he confessed that Christ was greater than he. Yet Jesus pronounced him greater than any other person who had ever lived before him (Matt. 11:11). He also said that everyone after John in the kingdom was greater than John because they lived in the fullness of all the new covenant work of the Messiah. John died on the other side of the cross and resurrection, though its merits were applied to him as to all Old Testament saints.

John repeated the words attributed to him by the apostle John in the prologue. He identified the Messiah whom they did not recognize as He who comes after me because he was born and began his ministry before Jesus. Then, in a stunning expression of humility, the Baptist reaffirmed the truth that Jesus had a higher rank than he did (1:15). Untying the thong of his master’s sandal was the task of the lowliest slave. John did not even consider himself worthy to perform that most menial and degrading task—one that Jewish teachers were forbidden to demand of their students.

3. How does Jesus Christ fit the role of “lamb of God”? How does His sacrifice parallel the Old Testament?

The concept of a sacrificial Lamb was a familiar one to the Jewish people. All through Israel’s history God had revealed clearly that sin and separation from Him could be removed only by blood sacrifices (cf. Lev. 17:11). No forgiveness of sin could be granted by God apart from an acceptable substitute dying as a sacrifice. They knew of Abraham’s confidence that God would provide a lamb to offer in place of Isaac (Gen. 22:7–8). A lamb was sacrificed at Passover (Ex. 12:1–36; Mark 14:12), in the daily sacrifices in the tabernacle and later in the temple (Ex. 29:38–42), and as a sin offering by individuals (Lev. 5:5–7). God also made it clear that none of those sacrifices were sufficient to take away sin (cf. Isa. 1:11). They were also aware that Isaiah’s prophecy likened Messiah to “a lamb that is led to slaughter” (Isa. 53:7; cf. Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 1:19). Though Israel sought a Messiah who would be a prophet, king, and conqueror, God had to send them a Lamb. And He did.

4. What did Jesus reveal about Himself at the wedding in Cana?

The miracles Jesus performed constitute one of the most powerful and convincing proofs of His deity (3:2; cf. Matt. 11:1–5; Acts 2:22). In keeping with his theme of presenting Jesus as the incarnate God-man, John catalogs eight miraculous signs that He performed. That list is, of course, by no means exhaustive; there were certainly many occasions when He did more than eight miracles in one day. Out of the countless miracles that Christ performed (cf. 20:30; 21:25), John selected these eight as examples that prove His deity. It is not the quantity of miracles that matters, or God would have given that number. It is the quality of every miracle, as a supernatural act, that proves who Jesus is. This passage describes the first of those eight miracles, which was also the first miracle Jesus did at the outset of His public ministry (which John records in chapters 2–12). It may be divided into four points: the scene, the situation, the supply, and the significance.

5. Why did Jesus become so angry when he cleared the temple? What was the purpose?

As He surveyed the sacred temple grounds now turned into a bazaar, Jesus was appalled and outraged. The worshipful atmosphere that befitted the temple, as the symbol of God’s presence, was completely absent. What should have been a place of sacred reverence and adoration had become a

place of abusive commerce and excessive overpricing. The sound of heartfelt praise and fervent prayers had been drowned out by the bawling of oxen, the bleating of sheep, the cooing of doves, and the loud haggling of vendors and their customers.

Christ would not tolerate any mockery of the spirit of true worship. His indignant words to those who were selling the doves, “Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a place of business,” applied to all who were polluting the temple and corrupting its intended purpose. Jesus’ reference to God as His Father was a reminder both of His deity and His messiahship; He was the loyal Son purging His Father’s house of its impure worship (an action that prefigures what He will again do at His second coming [Mal. 3:1–3; cf. Zech. 14:20–21]).

6. Based upon how Jesus has acted in John 1-2, what would you say was His main agenda?

The result of this beginning (or first) of Jesus’ signs was twofold. First, He manifested His glory (cf. 1:14); that is, He put His deity on display. Jesus’ signs were not simply powerful displays of compassion, but were designed to reveal who He really was, since they unmistakably manifest God at work.

John’s purpose in writing not only his account of this miracle, but also his entire gospel: “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (20:30–31).

7. What qualities from the life of John the Baptist would you like to emulate? Why?

- A man of faith whose faith was being tried.
- He did not “flip-flop”; was not a vacillating man; Not swayed by public opinion.
- Courage – John boldly preached repentance.

8. This passage includes both true followers of Christ and others who seemed to have only superficial enthusiasm for Christ. What are you more like on most days? Why? What do you need to change?