

## Hebrews 1:2

- "in these last days has spoken to us in His Son"- "In" His Son, meaning not only what Jesus said, but what He did, and what and who He was. God spoke through Jesus when Jesus spoke, because Jesus is God, and as He said, He and the Father are one. Jesus spoke through His prophetic office, priesthood, royal kingship, His sterling character, miracles, sermons, parables, and quotations of Scripture. John 10:30
- "whom He appointed heir of all things"-Jesus is the Son of God, and He is the second person of the trinity. He is the heir of all things in both the physical and spiritual worlds. He will inherit the nations, the throne of David ("Root of Jesse" = heir to David's throne), Satan himself, the Name above all Names, the new heaven and earth. Psalms 2:8, Isaiah 11:10, John 19:21, Mark 15:2, Genesis 3:15, Hebrews 1:4, Revelation 21
- We are co-heirs with Christ, will inherit eternal life, and will co-reign with him forever. John 1:12-13, Galatians 4:7, Romans 8:17, Hebrews 9:15, 1 Peter 1:3-4, 2 Timothy 2:12
- "through whom also He made the world"-Jesus is the Agent of creation. God the Father spoke the command, "Let there be light." Jesus performed the command. The Holy Spirit supplied the power. This is attested by Moses, John, Paul, etc. Gen 1:3, 26, John 1:1-3, 10, 1 Corinthians 8:6
- We also reviewed the following blog post from [www.ApologiaVeritas.org/2020/06/09/did-john-the-baptist-doubt-that-jesus-was-the-messiah/](http://www.ApologiaVeritas.org/2020/06/09/did-john-the-baptist-doubt-that-jesus-was-the-messiah/)

In last week's [Monday Night Live!](#) Q&A, I commented that John the Baptist was never in doubt that Jesus was the Christ. When John, who was in prison at the time, sent his disciples to question Jesus about whether or not He was the Christ, it was for their own benefit, not John's. Since the subject was too involved to address in the limited format of the Q&A, I decided to lay out the arguments in this forum. – Noel R. Vincent

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## The Traditional View

Most scholars take at face value the biblical accounts of John the Baptist directing his disciples to question Jesus about His messiahship ([Matthew 11:2-3](#), Luke 7:19-20). The Hebrew word *messiah* is translated *christ* in Greek (John 1:41), which is the language of the New Testament. Both words mean *anointed*. The "Anointed One" [messiah] was to come after Moses and redeem Israel (Deuteronomy 18:18-19, 2 Samuel 7:16). Most scholars conclude from the accounts in Matthew 11 and the parallel passage, Luke 9, that John simply held doubts about Jesus and wanted reassurance. He may even have sent his disciples to Jesus to remind Jesus of his imprisonment. After all, John was in prison, and Jesus, his miracle-working cousin, had not done anything about it. If Jesus was the Messiah, surely He would have got John out of prison. Jesus was also becoming very popular. He had been feasting with the wealthy (Luke 5:9-30), for example, including tax collectors, who were considered traitors among the Jews. All the while, John had been abandoned and forgotten in a lonely jail cell. This article will challenge the traditional view.

### Checkmate in Two Moves

John the Baptist is unique among the prophets. He was Jesus' first cousin, being the son of Mary's sister, Elizabeth (Luke 1:36). The Baptist was a few months older than Jesus and began his ministry just prior to Jesus beginning His own ministry. Jesus said, "The prophets were until John." – Luke 16:16 The Old Testament prophets, in one fashion or another, preached the coming Messiah. John the Baptist was the last of the messianic prophets. Indeed, his prophetic mission itself was prophesied in the Old Testament:

*"A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God." Isaiah 40:3*

*"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me." Malachi 3:1*

*"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." – Malachi 4:5-6*

The New Testament Gospel of Mark, in summary of John the Baptist's advent, opens with these words:

*"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way; The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.'" – Mark 1:1-3*

Now, consider these facts about John the Baptist as recorded in the Gospel of Luke:

- He was great in the sight of the Lord – 1:15
- He was filled with the Holy Spirit – 1:15
- He was the forerunner of the Messiah – 1:17
- He made ready a people for Jesus – 1:17
- He was called the prophet of the Most High – 1:76
- He went before Jesus to prepare His way – 1:76
- He grew strong in the Spirit – 1:80

The Gospel of Matthew records these further facts about John:

- He recognized Jesus as the Messiah – 3:14
- He saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus – 3:16
- He heard God declare that Jesus was His Son – 3:17

- He was the Elijah who was to come – 11:14

Still more facts about John in the Gospel of John (not the Gospel of John the Baptist, but the Gospel of John who was the brother of James bar-Zebedee):

- God confirmed to him that Jesus was the Messiah – 1:33
- He testified that Jesus was the Messiah 1:34
- He called Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” – 1:36
- He called Jesus “the Bridegroom” – 3:29

In summary, John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit, grew up with Jesus, preached repentance and faith in the coming Messiah, saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus, was told by God that Jesus was both the Messiah of the Jews and the Son of God. John was the Elijah who was to come, he baptized Jesus, he called Jesus both the Bridegroom and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and he verbally and outright declared Jesus to be the Messiah. John could not possibly have harbored uncertainty about who Jesus was. This is point number one, “Check”.

The disciples of John the Baptist complained to him that Jesus was proselytizing his followers and assuming his ministry:

*“Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John’s disciples with a Jew about purification. And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan [Jesus], to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.””* – John 3:25-26

The disciples of John the Baptist were motivated by their own carnality, pride, and jealousy. They were not followers of Jesus. They were followers of John. They did not like Jesus taking over their leader’s ministry of baptism nor could they accept that the people were leaving John and following Jesus. John gently rebuked them:

*“John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease.”* – John 3:27-30

John explained that Jesus, not he, was the anointed one (Christ). John fully understood his role to be that of forerunner. Jesus was the Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church. As the disciples of John the Baptist, his followers should have already understood these things. It was the entire basis of John's ministry. If he was not about serving as the forerunner to the Messiah, then he had no ministry at all. Yet, his disciples persisted in their ignorance. Later, the disciples of John

the Baptist questioned Jesus about His disciples neglecting the law, insinuating that Jesus was to blame:

*“Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”” Matthew 9:14-17*

Given their previous complaints about Jesus in John 3, it appears that John’s disciples then sought to discredit Jesus by association. The Baptist’s disciples believed that Jesus allowed His disciples to rebel against the law. There are several issues here. First, Jesus commanded in the Sermon on the Mount that His disciples should fast in such a way that no one would know about it (Matthew 6:16-18). If they fasted publicly, then their approval was from men. But, if they fasted privately, then their approval was from God. If Jesus's disciples were fasting according to His instructions, the Pharisees and John's disciples would never have known. But, the Pharisees and John's disciples fasted publicly and assumed that, if Jesus's disciples fasted, it would naturally be publicly, too. Second, if the disciples of Jesus were rebelling against the law, what did it say about the moral character of Jesus? But, Jesus was keenly aware of the law and took serious His responsibility to fulfill it. ([Matthew 5:17, 4:1-11, 17:24-27](#)) A similar false claim was brought against Jesus at his crucifixion trials (Mark 14:58). Jesus rebuked John’s disciples for not recognizing Him as the Bridegroom and for being puffed up like the Pharisees, who fasted so that all would see their great piety, false as it was. John the Baptist’s disciples doubted Jesus was the Messiah. This is point number two, “Checkmate”.

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### **A New Perspective on Matthew 11**

In the John 3 passage, John the Baptist had difficulty convincing his disciples that Jesus was the Christ. In the Matthew 9 passage, Jesus has difficulty convincing John's disciples that He is the Christ. By the time John sent his disciples to question Jesus about His messiahship in Matthew 11, Jesus had already performed the miracles the Old Testament prophesied would validate the Messiah ([Isaiah 29:18-19, 35:5-6, 61:1-2](#)). This left no doubt as to whether or not Jesus was the promised Messiah. Once John learned that Jesus had performed the miracles prophesied in the Old Testament of the Messiah, John's role as forerunner was also validated. Thus, John sent his disciples to see Jesus's validating miracles for themselves. John was frustrated by his disciples' lack of faith and unwillingness to accept Jesus as the Christ. He hoped that his disciples would finally be convinced of Jesus's messiahship and abandon their inflated sentiments toward himself to become true followers of Jesus.

*“Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.” – Matthew 11:2-6*

Note that John sent his disciples to ask Jesus for themselves (“we”), not on behalf of John (“I”). Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah by performing many irrefutable miracles. Thus, He ended the question of His messiahship by giving John’s disciples a glimpse into His validating miracle ministry. Jesus told them to “report to John” as their instructor, who had sent them on an expeditionary mission for their own learning. The last verse of the above passage, “And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me”, is directed at John’s disciples and telling. They have taken offense at Jesus. Their guru was no longer “the big noise at the party” (C.S. Lewis). Jesus was getting all the glory, as He should. But, they were still looking for someone else. In reality, they missed the boat. Like all of us, they needed to repent and place their trust in Christ. Jesus further explains that John was not weak in his faith, but was committed to his prophetic ministry and the object thereof, the messiahship Jesus.

*“As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ palaces! But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.’ Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” – Matthew 11:7-15*

The entire tone of Jesus’ response here reflects no personal conflict between Himself and His cousin, John. John the Baptist was not “a reed shaken by the wind”. He was Elijah who was to come (Malachi 4:5, Luke 1:17). He was strong in his faith in God, filled with the Holy Spirit, and confident that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus pointed out to His own followers that John the Baptist was not the one in doubt, but rather it was John’s disciples who doubted that Jesus was the Christ.