

Lesson 2 . . . From Disciples of John the Baptist
to Disciples of the Messiah

Gospel of John

.....



Suggested responses to questions about John 1:19-51

Note: Be sure to respond to all the questions yourself before reading the suggested responses in order to make the most of this study.

1. The Jewish religious authorities from Jerusalem were familiar with writings of the prophet Malachi that foretold how God would send Elijah before the “great and terrible day of the LORD.” Some people were under the impression that Elijah himself would return from heaven. Because of the attention that John the Baptist is receiving as a spiritual leader, the religious authorities wonder if he’s Elijah returned to earth. Although John the Baptist denies being Elijah, in Matthew 11:13-14 Jesus identifies the Baptist as the Elijah who was to come. In Deuteronomy 18:15-18 Moses tells the Israelites: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed—just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the LORD said to me, ‘They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.’” The religious authorities ask the Baptist if he’s “the prophet” because they believe that Moses prophesied the coming of a final and ultimate prophet who would appear at the end of the age. Jesus, not John the Baptist, is the ultimate and long-awaited prophet. Paragraph 523 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that John the Baptist goes before Jesus “in the spirit and power of Elijah.”
2. In the fortieth chapter of the book of Isaiah, the prophet writes about the comfort God extended to the exiles returning to Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity. This suggests that John the Baptist sees his mission as being the herald of the final fulfillment of the comfort and liberation that God intends to give his chosen people through the coming of the Messiah.
3. In Ezekiel 36:25-28, the prophet writes: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” The sacrament of Baptism is one of the signs of the New Covenant. Paragraph 1262 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. Thus the two principal effects are purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit.”

John Lesson 2 Suggested Responses

4. The baptisms performed by John the Baptist aren't sacramental but are baptisms "of repentance." The Baptist sees himself as an inferior herald to the one who is to come after him. Baptisms performed by John the Baptist were only preparatory and indicated a spirit of repentance. According to paragraph 537 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sacramental Baptism instituted by Jesus confers on Christians "newness of life"—the divine life of the Holy Spirit: "Everything that happened to Christ lets us know that, after the bath of water, the Holy Spirit swoops down upon us from high heaven and that, adopted by the Father's voice, we become sons o God."
5. The lamb of sacrifice in the Old Testament Passover sheds its blood to seal the covenant between God and the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel, and to remove ritual impurity from the nation. The Passover lamb's blood caused the death to "pass over" the Israelites and not to strike their first-born. Paragraph 608 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that Jesus' "whole life expresses his mission: 'to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.'"
6. John the Baptist sees his own purpose in life to reveal Jesus as the Messiah to the people of Israel. In John 1:31 the Baptist says: "I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."
7. The two disciples referred to in John 1:35-37 are Andrew and John. The Evangelist (John) reiterates the Baptist's acclamation of Jesus as the Lamb of God in order to emphasize that John the Baptist's role is to prepare the way for Jesus and to show that Jesus is superior to the John the Baptist.
8. A name change indicates a change in identity, as when Jacob's name was changed to Israel. In John 1:42, Jesus' first words to Peter are: "'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter)." "Cephas" and "Peter" both are names that mean "rock."
9. In John 1:45, Philip implies that he, Andrew, and Peter probably all have been talking about the promised Messiah before ever meeting Jesus. By writing that "Moses in the law and also the prophets" wrote about Jesus, the Evangelist is pointing out that the New Covenant of the Messiah is rooted in the covenant God made with the people of Israel. There's continuity with what God already has revealed.
10. Nathanael initially dismisses Jesus as being from an insignificant town. "Nazareth" sounds like the Hebrew word for "branch," one of the titles of the long-awaited Messiah prophesied by Isaiah and Zechariah. In Isaiah 11:1-3a, the prophet writes: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD." In Zechariah 3:8-10, the prophet writes: "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men of good omen; behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. For behold, upon the stone which I have set before Joshua, upon a

single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription, says the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. In that day, says the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree.” The exchange between Jesus and Nathanael assumes readers also will be familiar with Jacob, whose name is associated with guile and guilt. John’s Gospel also assumes readers will be familiar with Zechariah’s description of a high priest named Joshua (another name for Jesus), who will remove all of the Israelites’ guilt in a single day.

Responses to the Questions for Reflection will vary.

John Notes