

The Gospel Of John

ICEBREAKER

How do you introduce yourself when you meet someone for the first time? What information do you share about yourself?

CONTEXT

Earlier in this chapter, John the Baptist is described as a “witness.” In this passage, we see his testimony as a group of Priests and Levites interrogate him to determine his identity. John’s answer is not what they were expecting.

PASSAGE

John 1:19-28

DISCUSS

Who were the Priests and Levites? How would you illustrate this group to help understand in today’s context?

The Priests and Levites have to ask John four separate times about his identity before John tells them who he is. Why didn’t he just tell them who he was? What does this tell us about John’s character?

DISCUSS CONTINUED

How does understanding who we are not help us know who we are? How does understanding John’s identity help us understand our own identity?

Why was it an issue for the Priests and Levites that John the Baptist was baptizing people (see additional resource on page 2)? What is the purpose of John’s baptism? What is the purpose of baptism today?

The Priests and Levites question John about baptism in verse 25. What does this question reveal about their priorities? How does John’s response reveal his priorities? What does this tell us about our priorities?

NEXT STEPS

As we wrap up the prologue in John 1, what are your main takeaways from this section? Have these truths affected the way you interact with the people around you? How?

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

D.A. Carson, The Gospel According to John

The question put to John the Baptist by the Pharisees in the deputation reflects one of their concerns: Why then do you baptise if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet? Their interest is in what authorizes John's baptismal practices. It is not that baptism was unknown. Some Jewish groups practised 'proselyte baptism', i.e. proselytes were baptized in the process of converting to Judaism. In the monastic community at Qumran, members invoked passages such as Ezekiel 36:25 to justify their daily baptism, a sign that they were the righteous community of the end-time. But in both instances baptism was self-administered. Candidates baptized themselves. One of the things that characterized the baptism of John the Baptist is that he himself administered it. It may even be that the authority implicit in such an innovative step triggered the assumption in the minds of at least some Pharisees that John's baptism was an end-time rite administered by an end-time figure with great authority.

Nevertheless, their question should not be interpreted to mean that they have all unambiguously identified John's baptism as an eschatological rite: there is no good evidence to support such a view (contra Bultmann, p. 88). Rather, they want to discover by what authority John is baptizing Jewish people as part of their preparation for the kingdom he is announcing. Looking around for an adequate authority to sanction so extraordinary a practice, they wonder if he is an eschatological figure. And if he is not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet (principal eschatological figures), then what could possibly justify his baptism?

The Synoptic Gospels preserve more details about the scope of John the Baptist's preaching and the significance of his baptism. Unlike those who held themselves to be adequately related to God by virtue of their descent from Abraham (Mt. 3:9; Lk. 3:8), John insisted that personal and individual repentance and faith were necessary (Mt. 3:1-10; Mk. 1:2-5; Lk. 3:3-14). In this he resembled the Old Testament prophets who sought to call out a holy remnant from the descendants of Abraham, and anticipated Jesus' insistence that his messianic community would transcend the barriers of race and depend on personal faith and new birth (e.g. Mt. 8:5-12; Jn. 3:1-16).