

05 July 2026 – Commending the Forerunner While Confronting Doubt

Introduction

Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations & Quotes Someone Once Said ... Believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts. —Anonymous

Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations & Quotes Someone Once Said ...

Every other crime touches God's territory, but unbelief aims a blow at his divinity, impeaches his veracity, denies his goodness, blasphemes his attributes, maligns his character; therefore, God, of all things, hates first and chiefly, unbelief, wherever it is. —Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The human heart naturally forms doubts.

Like a broken link in a chain of evidence, doubt can weaken confidence in what is true.

Our passage validates John's ministry as the forerunner, and in doing so strengthens our confidence that Jesus is the Messiah.

Historical Background

Matthew set out to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, and in Matthew 11–12 he shows how people responded to Him.

In Matthew 11:1-15, some doubted. In verses 1–6 Jesus confronted John's doubts, and in verses 7–15 He affirmed John before the crowd, who may have been unsettled by those doubts.

Read with me as we see how Jesus responded to the crowds listening to him.

Remember your doubts can influence others as well.

Read with me as we see how Jesus responded to the crowds listening to him.

Passage

Matthew 11:7–15 LSB

⁷ Now 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?

⁸ "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces!

⁹ "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet.

¹⁰ "This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.'

¹¹ "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.

¹² "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.

¹³ "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

¹⁴ "And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.

¹⁵ "He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Proposition

Five truths that commend John's greatness and confront doubting hearts.

1. Jesus declared John's greatness. vs 7-9
2. Jesus revealed the prophecies of John vs 10.
3. Jesus gave a right perspective of John. - vs 11
4. Jesus warned about the violence of the kingdom of heaven vs 12.
5. Jesus demands acceptance. vs 13-15

1. Jesus declared John's greatness. vs 7-9

Matthew 11:7–9 LSB

⁷ Now 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?

⁸ "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces!

⁹ "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet.

"7 Now as these men were going away,

These men were John's disciples, returning to report Jesus' answer to John.

Jesus had pointed John back to the predicted signs of the Messiah and gently warned him not to let limited understanding become unbelief.

Having addressed John's heart, Jesus now addressed the crowd by defending John's character and ministry.

Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John,

Jesus used three rhetorical questions, each answered by Him, to remind them what they had seen in John.

Matthew did not reveal the crowd's responses, only Christy response because that is most important to a doubting heart.

What did you go out into the wilderness to see?

Slide 1 Judean wilderness near Jericho possibly in the area John ministered

What did you go out into the wilderness to see?



Judean wilderness near Jericho

11:7

Slide 2 Judean wilderness from the south.

What did you go out into the wilderness to see?



Judean wilderness (from the south)

11:7

Why did you make the effort to leave the comforts from home to go into the wilderness—an isolated, desolate place with few distractions.

What differentiates vs 7's question from vs 8 and 9 is the addition of the geographical location.

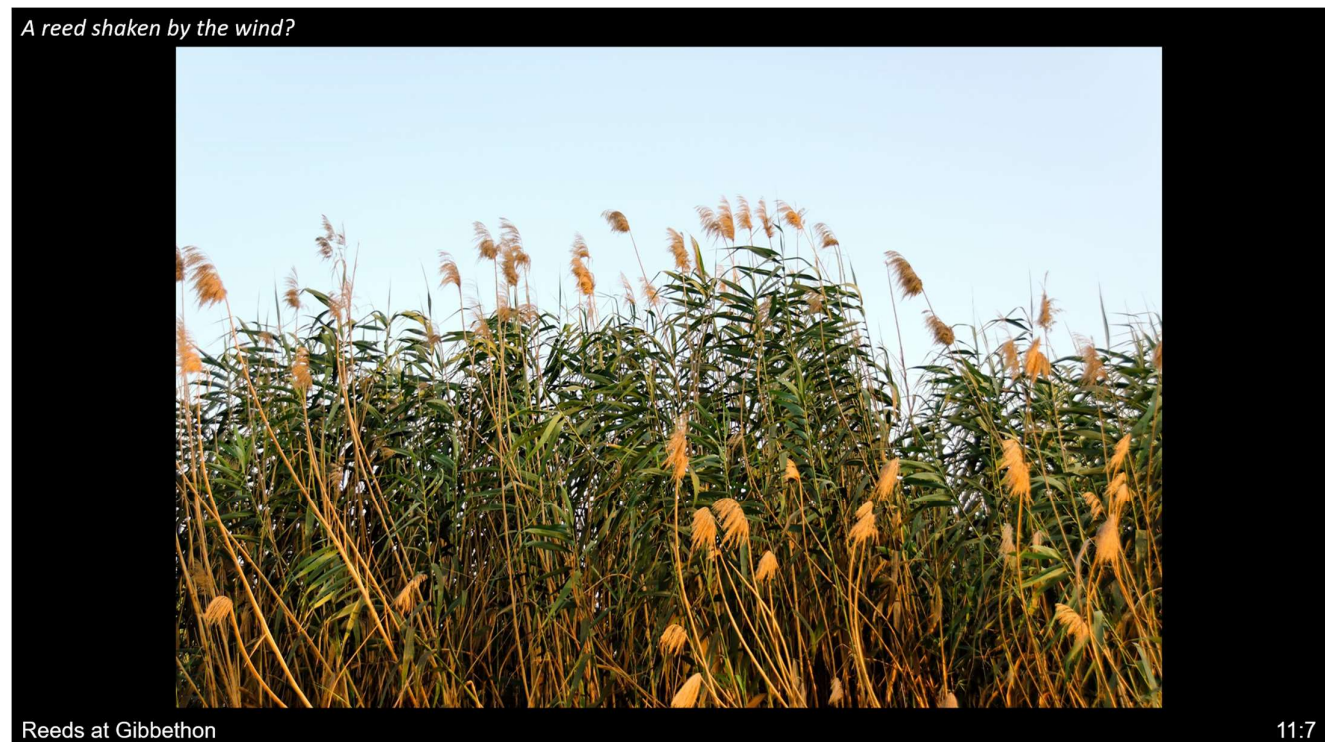
In the wilderness.

(Wilderness=eremos= wilderness, desert, isolated, desolate, desert.)

Jesus answers his question with a question:

A reed shaken by the wind?

Slide: reeds near Gibbethon not far from Tel Aviv



Reeds grew along the Jordan and bent easily in the wind.

Were they coming to look at the scenery?

No

Rabbis used the imagery of a reed shaken by the wind as a metaphor for preachers whose messages and actions were adapted to fit the prevailing mood of the people.

It served as a metaphor for a man with no conviction, no moral fiber or courage and swayed by various opinions.

King Herod is such an example.

Matthew 14:5 LSB

⁵ And although Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they were regarding John as a prophet.

Herod feared the crowd and was swayed by public opinion.

In fact, an interesting fact is that Herod printed coins that had reeds on them.

Slide: Herod's coins



John was the opposite: a man of conviction, moral courage, and truth. He did not preach to please people, even when it cost him prison.

Many today still prefer preaching that tickles the ear—messages shaped by comfort, popularity, or psychology rather than Scripture. But John was not that kind of man. He was a man of truth and love, a man with moral fiber. Are you such a man or woman?

We continue to the second question Jesus asked the crowd.

8 “But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing?
Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ palaces!

Slide Statues in Samos Museum island of Samos displaying clothing



Jesus then turned to clothing.

soft clothing is malakos= clothing that is comfortable, or pleasing to the touch, not rough.

Did they go to see someone dressed in soft, luxurious clothing?

Such people were found in kings’ palaces, pursuing comfort and favour.

Historians state that Scribes in Christ day forsook their drab garments to wear the ornate, and luxury robes in the king’s courts to try and court the king’s favor.

But when you look at John and how he dressed.

Matthew 3:4 LSB

Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

John’s camel-hair garment was rugged, scratchy, durable practical, and suited to the desert or wilderness.

He did not dress to be admired, or for comfort, or to be noticed.

He lived as an instrument in God’s hand, preparing the way for the Messiah.

9 “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet.”

With the third question, Jesus gives the climax: they came to see a prophet.

For 400 years the people of Israel had not seen or hear a prophet, they had not heard God’s voice speaking to them.

Now they flocked again to see this prophet.

But Jesus then emphasized.

Yes=Certainly, indeed I tell you, verily

—one who is more than a prophet.

One who is more= perissoteros= root = more, far more, greater, Lemma= being beyond a standard of abundance, greater, more, even more, super abundant, with special honor.

Why was John abundantly more than the prophets?

John was greater than the Old Testament prophets because:

But John (the prophet) not only announced that the Messiah was coming, He also announced the Messiah’s arrival.

John was the Messiahs personal herald.

John actually:

- talked with the Messiah,
- baptized the Messiah.
- witnessed God the HS descending upon the Messiah.
- heard God the Father personally testifying that this Messiah was indeed the son of God.

Ultimately, John is great because Jesus declared him great. The forerunner to the Messiah was not weak, confused, or false. He was solid.

Application

Jesus knew John.

John 10:27 LSB

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

Have you realised that you are a sinner in need of a Saviour?

Have you repented and trusted in Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins?

Do you know Jesus, but more importantly does Jesus know you or will he someday say:

Matthew 7:23 LSB
And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

Are you driven by God's Word or by popular opinion? Are you living by comfort or conviction? Let your life be governed by godly convictions grounded in Scripture.

The second truth that commends John's greatness and confronts doubt is this:

2. Jesus revealed the prophecies of John. - vs 10

Matthew 11:10 LSB
This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.'

“10 “This is the one about whom it is written,

The grammar reveals that that this was the result of past actions that continued.

Scripture authenticates John as the forerunner of the Messiah.

John was both a prophet and the fulfilment of prophecy: he predicted the Messiah, and he himself was predicted.

Jesus quoted from Malachi

Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.

Jesus quoted Malachi.

The context (Malachi 2:11-17), Israel:

- had dealt treacherously and profaned the sanctuary and married its daughters off to a foreign god.
- had covered the altar of God with tears, but God had stopped accepting their offerings.
- had dealt treacherously with their own wives.
- had wearied God with words that supported those who did evil.

Malachi asked: Where is the God of Justice? and God answered.

Malachi 3:1 LSB

Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.
And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says Yahweh of hosts.

Notice:

- The Yahweh sends the messenger.
- The messenger prepares the way (Grammar) intensively prepares the way.
- and the Lord suddenly comes to His temple.

When Jesus quotes Malachi, He changed the pronouns:

I send My messenger ahead of You. Who will prepare Your way before You. (not me)

In Malachi

In Malachi, Yahweh(I) sends the messenger before Yahweh to prepare the way for Yahweh.

In Matthew,

The Sender (I) is Yahweh the Father speaking to Yahweh the Messiah (Jesus) about the messenger.

I (Yahweh the Father) send the Messenger ahead of you (Yahweh, The Messiah). The Messenger will prepare the way for you (The Messiah).

Changing the pronouns reveals

1. The Messiah is Yahweh
2. The Messenger is elevated- he is sent by God the Father to prepare the way for God the Son (Messiah)

Returning to the context in Malachi we learn more truths.

Malachi 3:1–6 LSB

- ² “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a smelter’s fire and like fullers’ soap.
- ³ “And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to Yahweh offerings in righteousness.
- ⁴ “Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to Yahweh as in the ancient days and as in former years.
- ⁵ “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the sojourner and do not fear Me,” says Yahweh of hosts.
- ⁶ “For I, Yahweh, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.
-

Malachi also describes the Messiah as:

- a smelter’s fire,
- a purifier so that the sons of Levi would worship Yahweh in righteousness.
- and a judge.

In His first coming, Jesus brings purification through His death and resurrection to all who repent and trust in Him. John prepared the way for the Messiah as Saviour.

Since Israel rejected both the messenger and the Messiah by killing them the kingdom was postponed.

So, in the future there will be a future Messenger preparing the way for the 2nd coming of the Messiah.

But this Messiah will come to judge and make war and rule as king on the throne of David.

Revelation 19:11 LSB

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sits on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

Zechariah 14:9 LSB
And Yahweh will be king over all the earth; in that day Yahweh will be the only one,
and His name one.

The point John is great because:

At the most critical point in history God the Father and God the Son sent him to prepare the way for the Messianic Savior.

Application

Fulfilled Scripture should strengthen your confidence in the authority and inerrancy of God's Word.

But fulfilled prophecy also authenticates both the forerunner and the Messiah. May this lead you to trust and worship Jesus.

The third truth that commends John's greatness and confronts doubt is this:

3. Jesus gave a right perspective of John. vs 11

Matthew 11:11 LSB
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.

“11 “Truly

Jesus begins with a strong affirmation: “Truly.” (Amen, verily)

I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!

“Born of women” refers to humanity.

Job 14:1 LSB
Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil.

Jesus' point is clear: among mankind, no one greater than John had arisen. John is unrivaled in character, calling and ministry made him the greatest man. At this point one

may almost idolize John, yet Jesus gave the right perspective. John's greatness is compared now with a citizen of the Kingdom.

Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

John may be a spiritual giant, the greatest prophet, greatest human yet his greatness would not equal to the least (a true believer in Christ) a citizen in the kingdom of heaven.

Why is that?

Because the least in the kingdom of heaven must be a believer=credited with the perfect righteousness of Jesus.

Nothing compares to the greatness of Christ's righteousness.

Application

Your self-righteousness, good works, and best efforts will never meet God's perfect standard. Even John needed Christ.

If someone like John described as the greatest Man is less than an inhabitant in God's kingdom, then you need to understand, salvation is only by grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 LSB

For by grace, you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves,
it is the gift of God;
° not of works, so that no one may boast.

There is only one good work that will save you, the work of Jesus on the cross for your sins.

John prepared the way for the greatest One, yet even John needed Jesus to take away his sin.

The fourth truth that commends John's greatness and confronts doubt is this:

4.Jesus warned about the violence of the kingdom of heaven-vs 12Matthew 11:12 LSB

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.

“12 “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence,

Jesus warned that from John’s ministry onward there would be intensified spiritual conflict around the kingdom with the coming of the Messiah.

The grammar reveals that the kingdom is both the recipient of violence and the one that dishes it out.

As recipient.

In Christ’s first coming, both the messenger and the Messiah were rejected and killed. The kingdom suffered violence, and Christ’s people would also face opposition and persecution.

The Kingdom suffered

As the one that dishes it out

Let’s look at a prophesy concerning the Messiahs’s 2nd coming.

Micah 2:13 LSB

“The breaker goes up before them; They break out, pass through the gate, and go out by it. So, their king goes on before them, And Yahweh at their head.

Micah speaks of “the breaker” going before the king. Rabbinic tradition connected this with Elijah breaking through the spiritual obstacles in order that the King (the Messiah) would come and rule over His people.

A Jewish commentator writes.

“When the Holy One, blessed be He, redeems Israel. Three days before the Messiah comes, Elijah will come and stand upon the mountains of Israel.... In that hour the Holy One, blessed be He, will show his glory and his kingdom to all the inhabitants of the world: He will redeem Israel, and He will appear at the head of them, as is said, he who opens the breach (ha-poretz) will go up before them; they will break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king will pass on before them, the Lord at their head (Micah 2:13) (Peshikta Rabbati 35).”

Zechariah 12, and Revelation 19 :11-15 describes a great battle that will precede the coming Messiah, that will rule on earth. Zechariah 14:12 even describes the plague God will strike the people with that will oppose him setting up the Kingdom of heaven on earth.

Zechariah 14:12 LSB

¹² Now this will be the plague with which Yahweh will plague all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth.

The next line

and violent men take it by force.

“Violent men take it by force” likely refers to those (like the zealots) who tried to establish the kingdom through human violence and political power.

An example of that might be the Bar Kokhba revolt in 132-135 AD had a leader called Simon who led a revolt against the Romans for 3 1/2 years, ultimately succumbed to the Roman forces. He was called Simon the star based on a prophesy of Balaam in Num 24:17 as a rally cry. They were seeking to establish the political Jewish kingdom. Some Rabbinic sources hailed Simon as the Messiah

Yet despite the kingdom suffering violence and some who try to rip it away and establish it through their own means, the kingdom of heaven moves forward triumphantly, forcefully breaking through.

It will establish Christ as King.

Psalms 2:6–9 LSB

But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.

⁷ “I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.

⁸ ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth as Your possession.

⁹ ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall shatter them like a potter’s vessel.

Application

When you see opposition, persecution and suffering towards God’s kingdom, Jesus and His people, let not your heart be filled with doubt.

Jesus warned that that will happen.

Expect it but remember the words of Jesus.

Matthew 5:11–12 LSB

- ¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.
¹² “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
-

In the end, Jesus wins.

The fifth truth that commends John’s greatness and confronts doubt is this:

4. Jesus demands acceptance. vs 13-15

Matthew 11:13–15 LSB

- ¹³ “For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.
¹⁴ “And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.
¹⁵ “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”
-

“13 “For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

All the Law and the Prophets pointed forward until John. With him, fulfillment had arrived.

14“And if you are willing to accept it,

willing = GK Thelo Root is wish, Lemma = BDAG = have something in mind for oneself, of purpose, resolve, wish, wish, Bakersexp= disposed, inclined SENSE = inclined or disposed to something

To accept= dechomai=R =receive, welcome= Lemma = to indicate approval, or conviction by accepting, be receptive, be open = accepting something as true=Sense = consider or hold as true

If you as a lifestyle are inclined or willing to consider as true

What is true?

That

John himself is Elijah who was to come.

Slide 1 some Jewish synagogues have a chair for Elijah used in circumcision ceremonies.

And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come



Elijah's chair in Abuhav Synagogue in Safat

11:14

Slide 2 (At Davids tomb) The inscription on the seat cover reads: the chair of Elijah

And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come



Seat of Elijah in David's Tomb

11:14

Slide 3 the fifth cup of the Passover is known as the cup of Elijah

And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come



Elijah's cup at a Passover seder

11:14

Malachi had predicted this centuries before Christ: Elijah would come before the great and awesome day of Yahweh.

Malachi 4:1–6 LSB

¹ “For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every worker of wickedness will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them aflame,” says Yahweh of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”

² “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

³ “And you will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says Yahweh of hosts.

⁴ “Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and judgments which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

⁵ “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of Yahweh.

⁶ “And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land, devoting it to destruction.”

What we learn is that Malachi predicted:

- the wicked will be burned up.
- healing for those who fear God’s name, for whom the sun of righteousness will arise.
- the righteous will walk on the ashes of the wicked.
- and the coming of Elijah before that great and awesome day.

Now later Jesus would explain this to His disciples.

Matthew 17:10–13 LSB

¹⁰ And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”

¹¹ And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things;

¹² but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also, the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”

¹³ Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

Notice carefully what Jesus actually said.

- there is an Elijah who is coming.
- and an Elijah who had already come
- The Elijah who had already come would not be recognized and they would do to him whatever they wished.
- 2ndly the Son of Man would suffer at their hands.

We know that John was not the reincarnated Elijah.

John 1:21–23 LSB

- ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.”
“Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”
- ²² Therefore, they said to him, “Who are you, so that we may give an answer
to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?”
- ²³ He said, “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the
way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”
-

But John was a man who inwardly came with the spirit and power of Elijah.

Luke 1:17 LSB

And he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts
of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the
righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

The crowd and the reader are challenged to accept this truth.

To recognize the first Elijah as John, to accept that He came in the spirit and power of
Elijah.

Accept the Messenger and you accept the Messiah.

But reject the Messenger and you reject the Messiah.

Many Jews may have struggled just like John did with the truth.

If Jesus is the Messiah, why is His kingdom not here?

But

The Kingdom of Yahweh will only fully come when the king is welcomed by faith.

And those who accepted the messenger also accepted the Messiah and through
repentance and faith entered into His spiritual kingdom.

Colossians 1:13 LSB

Who rescued us from the authority of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of the
Son of His love,

But Matthew reveals.

The Jews killed the first Elijah (John) and the Messiah in his first coming, thus not recognizing John as the predicted Elijah.

The Kingdom was postponed.

the world now awaits the 2nd Elijah (the second forerunner) at the 2nd coming of the Messiah.

When this Elijah comes, so will the Messiah that will bring judgment upon the wicked.

15 “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Jesus closes with a command to hear. The one who has ears must listen. The one who has an ear must and is commanded as a lifestyle to hear. Here you find a challenge to discern the meaning of these utterances. Like Jesus would soon tell his disciples.

Matthew 13:11–15 LSB

¹¹ And Jesus answered and said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

¹² “For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.

¹³ “Therefore, I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

¹⁴ “And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;

¹⁵ For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes, Lest they would see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.’”

You are to confront your doubting heart.

Will you like the Jews reject the messenger and the Messiah?

To you I say, you shall meet the Messiah again as he will kindle the fires of judgment for you.

Or you can like some other Jewish (followers of Jesus) accepted the messenger and the Messiah. You do so by repenting and trusting in Christ death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. You shall meet the Messiah, and he will be your refuge.

Psalm 2:8–12 LSB

- ⁸ ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth as Your possession.
- ⁹ ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall shatter them like a potter’s vessel.’”
- ¹⁰ So now, O kings, show insight; Take warning, O judges of the earth.
- ¹¹ Serve Yahweh with fear And rejoice with trembling.
- ¹² Kiss the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!
-

Luke 12:49 LSB

I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!

What will it be accept Him or reject him.

Conclusion

Jesus’ tribute to John authenticates him as the predicted forerunner and answers the doubting hearts of the crowds then and you the reader now.

John was a man of conviction, commended by Jesus, fulfilled the Scripture, and sent to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Yet John’s greatness does not compare with Christ’s greatness.

And even John had to trust Jesus for the forgiveness of his own sins.

The Message to you and me today.

Accept the forerunner, and you accept the King. Reject the forerunner, and you reject the King and invite His wrath.

You do so when you have repented and trusted in the gospel.