

# Vindicating Wisdom

Proverbs Matt 11:7-19  
SS Lesson for 07/05/2020

**Devotional Scripture:** 1 Cor 1:19-31

## OUTLINE

### LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

*Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*Key Verse: Matt 11:19*

*Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

#### MISGUIDED EXPECTATIONS (MATT 11:7-10)

##### *Misguided expectations of appearance (7-8)*

Misguided because of regarding from a worldly view (2 Cor 5:16)

Misguided because of not understanding a person's actions (Matt 12:33)

Misguided because only considering external appearances (Gal 2:6)

Misguided because of ethnicities (Col 3:11)

Misguided because of honoring earthly status (James 2:3-5)

##### *Misguided expectations of a prophet (9)*

Misguided because of not understanding the prophecy (Luke 1:76)

Misguided because of fear of people believing John a prophet (Matt 14:5)

Misguided because of not believing John was the fulfillment of Elijah (Matt 17:11-13)

Misguided because of not believing John was giving authority from Heaven (Matt 21:24-27)

##### *Misguided expectations of God's Word (10)*

Misguided by distorting God's word or using deception (2 Cor 4:2-5)

Misguided by not having it revealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 3:4-5)

Misguided because of not having it spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:13-16)

Misguided because of not being in unity of the faith (Eph 4:13)

#### JOHN'S PROPHECY (MATT 11:11-15)

##### *Prophecy of true greatness (11)*

Greatness is all about obedience (Matt 5:19)

Greatness is about being a servant (Matthew 23:11-12)

Greatness is not about favoritism (James 2:1-4)

Greatness is when God elevates us (Eph 1:3)

##### *Prophecy of violence (12-13)*

Violence of the wicked (Ps 7:9)

Violence that recoils (Ps 7:16)

Violence through refusing to do what is right (Prov 21:7)

Violence plotted in the heart (Prov 24:1-2)

##### *Prophecy of spiritual insight (14-15)*

Insight based on the knowledge given by God (Phil 1:9-10)

Insight to know and prove what is good and acceptable to God (Rom 12:2)

Insight to distinguish good from evil (Heb 5:14)

Insight provided by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:13-16)

#### WISDOM JUSTIFIED (MATT 11:16-19)

##### *Wisdom justified by obedience (16-17)*

Obedience to show faith (Gen 22:9-12)

Obedience to witness (Acts 8:26-31)

Obedience regardless of prejudice (Acts 10:19-23)

Obedience to follow Jesus (Matt 9:9)

##### *Wisdom justified by understanding (18)*

Understanding that opens the mind to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45)

Understanding that exposes Satan and leads to sanctification (Acts 26:18)

Understanding of the glory of God (2 Cor 4:6)

Understanding that allows knowing God better (Eph 1:17-18)

##### *Wisdom justified by works (19)*

Good works so that others will praise God (Matt 5:16)

Good works as a good example to others (Titus 2:7-8)

Good works is living a holy life (Eph 2:10)  
Good works are those that help others (Heb 6:10)

## CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

### Jesus' Commentary on John the Baptist (Matthew 11:7-15)

The Past John's Generation After John (New Covenant) All the prophets and law until John Days of John until now  
Least in kingdom is greater than John

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

## Lesson Background and Key Verse

### Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Today's text explores the seemingly vast gulf between John the Baptist and Jesus Christ—and the variety of opinions surrounding them. Many loved them; many hated them. Yet loving or hating these two is very different from loving or hating carpeting or cushions, music or movies. Choosing to hate these two, even in their differences, is choosing to hate God's wisdom. The Gospel of Matthew is one of four books in the New Testament that tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Through Jesus, God was restoring His rule over His world, setting right what human rebellion had made wrong. Matthew put special focus on the surprising way in which God fulfilled His promises to Israel in Jesus. For instance, we might expect God's true king to be warmly received. But in fact, Jesus met with hostility from His infancy (examples: Matthew 2:13; 21:45, 46; 27:20). Jesus warned His followers that they would meet with similar opposition (10:14-25, 34-36). The same hostility is seen in the arrest and death of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12), which foreshadowed Jesus' own crucifixion (26:1-5, 14-16; 27:32-44). Yet this very climax of the hostility against God's wisdom was the means by which God fulfilled His wisdom, for Jesus died not merely as an innocent victim but as the willing and worthy sacrifice for the sins of humanity (20:28; 26:28). God's victory came through rejection, death, and resurrection. Nothing could have been more contrary to expectations. In an episode preceding our text, the (to human thinking) upside-down wisdom of God proved confusing even to John the Baptist, the prophet who announced the nearness of God's reign and the coming of His true king (Matthew 3:1-3, 11, 12). John had clearly identified Jesus as that promised king and had witnessed God's affirmation of Jesus as beloved Son (Matthew 3:13-17). John had been imprisoned for his declaration that Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, was wrong to have taken his brother's wife as his own (11:2a; 14:3, 4). John became distressed and sent messengers to ask Jesus whether He was indeed the promised king, as John had previously proclaimed (11:2b, 3). John's question expressed either doubt or impatience as he languished in prison. Jesus' response affirmed that He was indeed the promised coming one (Matthew 11:4, 5). But what did that imply about John? Had his impatience or doubt demonstrated him to be a failure as God's prophet?

### Key Verse: Matt 11:19

*The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children*

### Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

**10:40-11:1.** Those who faithfully served the Lord and who faithfully received these workers were promised rewards. To receive **a prophet** and his message was tantamount to receiving Jesus Christ. (Here the apostles were called prophets for they were recipients and communicators of God's message; cf. 10:27.) Therefore even **a cup of cold water** given **to one of these little ones**, these insignificant disciples of Jesus, would be detected by the One who keeps accounts. The **reward** is in keeping with the act performed. With these words of instruction, Jesus departed **to teach and preach in... Galilee** (11:1). With the **Twelve** having received delegated authority from the Lord, it may be assumed that they departed and carried out Jesus' instructions. The words, **After Jesus had finished instructing**, indicate another turning point in the book (cf. 7:28; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

**11:2-3.** Matthew had recorded (4:12) that John the Baptist had been put **in prison**. The cause for his imprisonment was stated by Matthew later (14:3-4). **When John heard** of all Jesus **was doing, he sent** some of **his disciples to ask** Jesus, **Are You the One who was to come, or should we expect someone else?** The words "the One who was to come" are a messianic title based on Psalms 40:7 and 118:26 (cf.

Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35). John must have thought, *If I am Messiah's forerunner and Jesus is the Messiah, why am I in prison?* John needed reassurance and clarification, for he had expected the Messiah to overcome wickedness, judge sin, and bring in His kingdom.

**11:4-6.** Jesus did not answer John with a direct yes or no. Instead, He told John's disciples, **Go back and report to John what** they heard and saw taking place. Among the notable events occurring were **the blind** being given **sight... lame** people walking, lepers being **cured, the deaf** hearing, **the dead** being given life, **and the good news** being **preached to the poor**. These works would, of course, indicate that Jesus indeed is the Messiah (Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1). Those who did not miss the true character of the Lord would be truly **blessed**. Though He will ultimately bring judgment to this world by judging sin when He brings in His kingdom, the timing then was not appropriate. Israel's rejection of Him was causing a postponement in establishing the physical kingdom. But all, including John, who truly perceived the person and work of Christ would be blessed.

**11:7-15.** John's question prompted **Jesus** to give a discourse **to the crowd**. Perhaps some began to wonder **about** John's commitment to the Messiah in light of his question. So Jesus explained that **John** was not weak and vacillating. He was not a papyrus **reed** that could be shaken by every breeze that blew. Nor was he **a man dressed in fine clothes**, the kind worn **in kings' palaces**. In fact John the Baptist wore the opposite (3:4). John was a true **prophet** who proclaimed the message that God demanded repentance. In fact he was even **more than a prophet**, for he, in fulfillment of Malachi 3:1, was Jesus' own **messenger** or forerunner. Mark in his Gospel (Mark 1:2-3) combined this prophecy from Malachi 3:1 with Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 40:3) concerning the one who would **prepare** Jesus' **way**. Jesus added that of all men who had lived on earth, none was **greater than John the Baptist**. And **yet one who is least in the kingdom** will be **greater than** John. The privileges of Jesus' disciples sharing in the kingdom will be far greater than anything anyone could experience on earth.

But **the kingdom** had been subject to violence and evil men were trying to take it by force (Matt. 11:12). The religious leaders of Jesus' day (**forceful men**) were resisting the movement introduced by John, Jesus, and the apostles. **Forcefully advancing** (*biazetai*) could be rendered in the passive, "is violently treated." (The verb **lay hold of** [*harpazousin*] means "to grasp" in the sense of resisting or laying claim to it on their own). Those leaders wanted a kingdom, but not the kind Jesus was offering. So they were resisting the message and attempting to establish their own rule. But John's message was true, and **if** the nation would **accept it**, and consequently accept Jesus, John would fulfill the prophecies of Elijah. Only if they accepted the message would John the Baptist be **the Elijah who was to come** (cf. Mal. 4:5). Because the nation rejected the Messiah, Elijah's coming is still future (cf. Mal. 4:6 with Acts 3:21).

**11:16-19.** Jesus compared that **generation** to a group of little **children sitting in the marketplaces** who could not be pleased by anything. Like children rejecting the suggestions to "play" wedding (**flute... dance**) or funeral (**dirge... mourn**) music, the people rejected both **John** and Jesus. They were not satisfied with John the Baptist because he did not eat or drink, or with Jesus who did eat and drink with sinners. **They** said John had **a demon**, and they rejected Jesus as **a glutton and a drunkard and a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."** Though that generation was not happy with anything, the **wisdom** of the approach of both John and Jesus would be **proved right** by the results, namely, that many people would be brought into the kingdom.

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Misguided Expectations (Matt 11:7-10)**

7 As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning 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 clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

10 For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'

## **Misguided expectations of appearance (7-8)**

*Misguided because of regarding from a worldly view (2 Cor 5:16)*

16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

*Misguided because of not understanding a person's actions (Matt 12:33)*

33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.

*Misguided because only considering external appearances (Gal 2:6)*

6 As for those who seemed to be important — whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance — those men added nothing to my message.

*Misguided because of ethnicities (Col 3:11)*

11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

*Misguided because of honoring earthly status (James 2:3-5)*

3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"

4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

## **Misguided expectations of a prophet (9)**

*Misguided because of not understanding the prophecy (Luke 1:76)*

76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

*Misguided because of fear of people believing John a prophet (Matt 14:5)*

5 Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

*Misguided because of not believing John was the fulfillment of Elijah (Matt 17:11-13)*

11 Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. 12 But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

*Misguided because of not believing John was giving authority from Heaven (Matt 21:24-27)*

24 Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 25 John's baptism — where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" 26 But if we say, 'From men'-we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

## **Misguided expectations of God's Word (10)**

*Misguided by distorting God's word or using deception (2 Cor 4:2-5)*

2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

*Misguided by not having it revealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 3:4-5)*

4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

*Misguided because of not having it spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:13-16)*

13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. 14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

*Misguided because of not being in unity of the faith (Eph 4:13)*

13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

## **John's Prophecy (Matt 11:11-15)**

11 "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he 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 the violent take it by force.

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

14 And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

## **Prophecy of true greatness (11)**

*Greatness is all about obedience (Matt 5:19)*

19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

*Greatness is about being a servant (Matthew 23:11-12)*

11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

*Greatness is not about favoritism (James 2:1-4)*

1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

*Greatness is when God elevates us (Eph 1:3)*

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

### **Prophecy of violence (12-13)**

*Violence of the wicked (Ps 7:9)*

9 O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure.

*Violence that recoils (Ps 7:16)*

16 The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head.

*Violence through refusing to do what is right (Prov 21:7)*

7 The violence of the wicked will drag them away, for they refuse to do what is right.

*Violence plotted in the heart (Prov 24:1-2)*

1 Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company; 2 for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about making trouble.

### **Prophecy of spiritual insight (14-15)**

*Insight based on the knowledge given by God (Phil 1:9-10)*

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,

*Insight to know and prove what is good and acceptable to God (Rom 12:2)*

2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

*Insight to distinguish good from evil (Heb 5:14)*

14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

*Insight provided by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:13-16)*

13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. 14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

### **Wisdom Justified (Matt 11:16-19)**

16 But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions,

17 and saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, And you did not Lamentations'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'

19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children

## Wisdom justified by obedience (16-17)

### *Obedience to show faith (Gen 22:9-12)*

9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

### *Obedience to witness (Acts 8:26-31)*

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." 30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

### *Obedience regardless of prejudice (Acts 10:19-23)*

19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." 21 Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?" 22 The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." 23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along.

### *Obedience to follow Jesus (Matt 9:9)*

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

## Wisdom justified by understanding (18)

### *Understanding that opens the mind to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45)*

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

### *Understanding that exposes Satan and leads to sanctification (Acts 26:18)*

18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

### *Understanding of the glory of God (2 Cor 4:6)*

6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

### *Understanding that allows knowing God better (Eph 1:17-18)*

17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

## Wisdom justified by works (19)

### *Good works so that others will praise God (Matt 5:16)*

16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

*Good works as a good example to others (Titus 2:7-8)*

7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

*Good works is living a holy life (Eph 2:10)*

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

*Good works are those that help others (Heb 6:10)*

10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### **Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh**

*Jesus' Commentary on John the Baptist (Matthew 11:7-15)*

7 While they were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fancy clothes? Look, those who wear fancy clothes are in the homes of kings! 9 What did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written: 'Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' 11 "I tell you the truth, among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and forceful people lay hold of it. 13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John appeared. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, who is to come. 15 The one who has ears had better listen! (Matthew 11:7-15)

If John had some doubts about Jesus, Jesus had no doubts about John! The crowd must have overheard the question John's disciples put to Jesus and our Lord's response. As John's disciples begin their trek to report back to John, Jesus uses this occasion to address the crowd concerning John the Baptist. Jesus first presses the crowd to acknowledge what He knew they were thinking – that John was a prophet (see Matthew 21:26). In effect, Jesus says this about John,

"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A wishy-washy fellow whose views change with the political winds? I don't think so! Maybe you went all the way out into the wilderness to see what the new fashions in menswear would be? We all know it can't be that. No, you all know that the one thing which drew you out into the wilderness to hear John was the strong conviction that he is a true prophet – a man who speaks for God, a man whose words are God's words. John is a prophet, but he is not merely *a* prophet. In a very real sense, John is *the* prophet – the prophet everyone has been waiting for, the prophet whose appearance and ministry have been prophesied by other prophets. Malachi spoke of him when he wrote, 'Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' John is the forerunner of Messiah, whose unique privilege has been to proclaim His appearance and reveal His identity."

Because of John's unique role as the last of the Old Testament prophets, the prophet whose mission it was to introduce Messiah, no one born of woman (to that point in time) was greater than he. And yet, as towering a personality as John was when viewed from the landscape of the Old Testament, even the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than John (Matthew 11:11).

To me, verses 12 and 13 are some of the most puzzling in all of Matthew. In verse 12, Jesus calls attention to the "violence" which seems to characterize the days of John the Baptist. Just what is this violence? I believe we find clues in the Book of Acts and also in the Gospels:

33 Now when they heard this, they became furious and wanted to execute them. 34 But a Pharisee whose name was Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people, stood up in the council and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. 35 Then he said to the council, "Men of Israel, pay close attention to what you are about to do to these men. 36 **For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men joined him.** He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and nothing came of it. 37 **After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census, and incited people to**

**follow him in revolt.** He too was killed, and all who followed him were scattered. 38 So in this case I say to you, stay away from these men and leave them alone, because if this plan or this undertaking originates with people, it will come to nothing, 39 but if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them, or you may even be found fighting against God” (Acts 5:33-39, emphasis mine).

50 Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” Then they came and took hold of Jesus and arrested him. 51 **But one of those with Jesus grabbed his sword, drew it out, and struck the high priest’s slave, cutting off his ear.** 52 Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back in its place! For all who take hold of the sword will die by the sword. 53 Or do you think that I cannot call on my Father, and that he would send me more than twelve legions of angels right now? 54 How then would the scriptures that say it must happen this way be fulfilled?” (Matthew 26:50-54, emphasis mine)

35 Then Jesus said to them, “When I sent you out with no money bag, or traveler’s bag, or sandals, you didn’t lack anything, did you?” They replied, “Nothing.” 36 He said to them, “But now, the one who has a money bag must take it, and likewise a traveler’s bag too. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. 37 For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was counted with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me is being fulfilled.” 38 **So they said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.”** Then he told them, “It is enough” (Luke 22:35-38, emphasis mine).

14 Now when the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus performed, they began to say to one another, “This is certainly the Prophet who is to come into the world.” 15 Then Jesus, because he knew **they were going to come and seize him by force to make him king**, withdrew again up the mountainside alone (John 6:14-15, emphasis mine).

John’s generation seems to be one in which messianic expectations had reached the boiling point. The events surrounding the births of both John and Jesus may have helped to fuel some of this eschatological enthusiasm. Then, too, the political situation in Israel at that time may have played a role. I am inclined to think that John’s prophecy may have also unwittingly contributed to the messianic fervor, leading in a number of instances to violence or the use of armed force. People failed to grasp our Lord’s teaching and ministry, so why not John’s as well? Even the disciples seemed ready and willing if it came to a show of arms (Luke 22:35-38).

Jesus’ comments in verse 12 about violence seem to be closely related to verse 13 (which begins with the word “for”): “**For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John appeared**” (Matthew 11:13, emphasis mine). I see a rather clear chronological scheme laid out here:

“All the prophets and the law prophesied until John appeared” (verse 13)

“From the days of John the Baptist until now” (verse 12)

*The Past John’s Generation After John (New Covenant)*

*All the prophets and law until John Days of John until now Least in kingdom is greater than John*

Here is the way I currently understand our text. John the Baptist has some doubts about Jesus’ identity as the Messiah. This seems to be because He is not the “forceful” Messiah that John predicted, the One who would come powerfully in judgment on sinners. Jesus seems to be saying that a certain element of Israelites who tended toward violence was attracted to John, his ministry, and his message. Why would this be the case? For one thing, it would seem as though John were the only prophet in those days. Before that, there were a substantial number of Old Testament prophets who prophesied. The law, too, had its prophetic aspects. John’s ministry was the culmination and climax of all Old Testament prophecy. If we accept the concept of progressive revelation (which I do), then we must see that John’s prophecy was the fullest, most well-developed prophecy of all the Old Testament prophets. As Old Testament prophets go, it doesn’t get any better than John the Baptist.

I do not believe that Jesus is seeking to be critical of John or of his ministry. He is simply attempting to show that John’s doubts are, in part, a reflection of the spirit of the age – a time when men yearned for Messiah to come in power to cast off Roman rule, to punish the wicked, and to establish His kingdom. No wonder John had some doubts. Jesus did not seem to be playing out the script John and others had for Messiah in their minds.

I am reminded of a television commercial that ran a number of years ago. A couple of older women were in a fast food outlet and one of them looked under the bun and asked, “Where’s the beef?” I think John is looking at the ministry of Jesus and is asking, “Where’s the fire?”

John may have his doubts, but Jesus does not. In spite of John’s second thoughts, Jesus gives a full endorsement to John.

14 “And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, who is to come. 15 The one who has ears had better listen!” (Matthew 11:14-15)

In the Gospel of John, we see that John himself denied that he was Elijah:

21 So they asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not!” “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No!” (John 1:21)

How, then, can Jesus say that John *is* Elijah? First of all, notice that Jesus qualifies His statement by adding, “**And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah . . .**” Obviously, some won’t see it this way, and Jesus acknowledges the fact that only some will agree. The other statement in verse 15 underscores the qualification in verse 14:

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15, NASB).

This is a statement that will be used later on in Matthew 13 (verses 9, 43) when Jesus begins to teach by parables. This is an exhortation for the reader to think more deeply than merely on the surface. It is not a challenge to think literally, but to think beyond what is literal – that is what parables are about. They are not meant for everyone to understand. Thus, Jesus’ words here are not a contradiction to John’s denial that he is *literally* Elijah. John is Elijah in a more symbolic sense.

I’ve been giving this matter some thought, and I would like to suggest some ways in which John the Baptist *is* Elijah, if we would receive it. John was Elijah-like in his appearance. This was hardly an accident. John purposed to take on this look. Both John and Elijah spent time living in more remote places, eating food that was different from typical folks. Both John and Elijah were “inferior” to their successors. John made it clear that Jesus was far greater than he (Matthew 3:11). Elisha had a two-fold portion of Elijah’s spirit (2 Kings 2:7-14). Elijah was more a man of violence; Elisha was more a man of peace. Elijah had his doubts, when his spectacular confrontation on Mount Carmel seemed to fail. God took Elijah back to the same mountain where Moses received the law, and through a series of spectacular events, conveyed to Elijah that God was not obliged to work in spectacular ways, but sometimes through a “still, small, voice” (1 Kings 19:11-18). Elijah had the false perception that “he alone was left” (1 Kings 19:10, 14). Is this the way John also felt? Elijah hoped to bring about national revival, and it didn’t work. It was through others, whom he was to designate, that God would bring about significant changes in the nation (1 Kings 19:11-18). My point is that the similarities between John and Elijah are numerous, I believe. These two really were alike.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/jesus-john-baptist-and-jews-matthew-111-30>)

### **Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

If we think that the wisdom of God is bound to meet with universal acceptance, the New Testament tells us otherwise. The gospel has always been sharply divisive. Jesus inspired joyous faith from many but received powerful, even violent, opposition from others. God’s wisdom appeals to some people as it addresses their deepest needs. But it repels others as it challenges their self-rule. For those expecting a kingdom to come with military and political power, Jesus seemed the opposite of God’s true king. For those who expected God to bring an immediate end to injustice and suffering, Jesus’ idea of God’s kingdom seemed absurd. But for those with ears to hear and eyes to see, Jesus brings the fulfillment of every divine promise and the answer to every human need. That He was rejected comes as no surprise to us, for God’s messengers have always been rejected by many. How do you deal with the tension of God’s kingdom, which is both “now” and “yet to be”? Circumstances can prove discouraging at times, but trusting that Christ reigns now and will reign fully in the future can provide strength and encouragement to meet even the biggest challenges. Those included even the challenge of Herod’s prison for John and the challenge of the cross for Jesus. In the strength we have in Christ, we witness the vindication of God’s wisdom

## ***Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary***

**Boldness** - John the Baptist fulfilled his prophetic calling, presenting Jesus to the world. He spoke out against the adulterous marriage of King Herod and Herodias, and, sadly, his bold statements landed him in prison. During this time of suffering, John sent his disciples to make sure Jesus was the predicted Messiah and there was no need to look for another. Jesus told John's followers to tell him about the miracles being performed which conformed with the Old Testament prophecies.

**Courage** - After Jesus answered John's disciples' questions, He turned to the crowd and began to teach concerning the prophet's ministry. John had preached repentance—turning away from one's sinful behavior and turning toward God. John never backed down. He stood firm on the convictions given to him by God. He was nothing like a weak reed blowing in the wind. John courageously persisted even when the opposition pushed against him.

**Faithfulness** - Jesus spoke highly of John, the last of the prophets announcing His arrival. John had the privilege of not only saying He is coming, but that He is indeed here. God called John before his birth to fulfill this mission, and John faithfully and forcefully carried out his appointment. Those who repented were baptized, but the religious leaders turned a deaf ear to John's calls for repentance, even though, as Jesus said, John came as God's messenger in the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah.

**Like Children** - Like children, nothing seems to satisfy us. We don't like to follow the way of John the Baptist, who disciplined himself to the Lord and refrained from worldly pleasures. That's too restrictive. We don't like the way of Jesus either, who ate and drank with sinners. That's too "loose." John was accused of having a demon, and Jesus was accused of being a glutton and drunkard. Nothing pleases us. If we were wise, like John, we would seek to understand Jesus, His ministry, and the importance of the Gospel in our lives. We would not care about what society thinks about us following Jesus.