

GOD FULFILLS HIS PROMISES

Think of a time when someone made a promise and they didn't deliver – it may be in a family setting, the workplace, or even a faith community.

Describe what disappointment felt like.



Imagine being part of the Jewish community in the first century. As far as we are aware, heaven had been silent for 400 years since Malachi wrote: ¹ “Behold, I 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 the Lord of hosts.

Jesus explicitly identified this person as none other than John the Baptist, introduced to the reader in Luke 1:57–60 (NLT)

⁵⁷ When it was time for Elizabeth’s baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ And when her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father.

⁶⁰ But Elizabeth said, “No! His name is John!”

Matthew 11:7–10 (NLT)

⁷ As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. “What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind? ⁸ Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes? No, people with expensive clothes live in palaces. ⁹ Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet. ¹⁰ John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say, ‘Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you.’

Back in Malachi’s day they were saying “where is the God of justice?” (2:17). In your read of Luke 1 and 2, how would you respond to that question? Discuss.

Consider how Isaiah 40:3 harmonizes with John 1:23 re how the messenger will prepare His way.

Reading the text again, describe some of the uniqueness around the birth of John the Baptist.

Ok, there's more in Malachi. Remember Elijah? He's coming back, well maybe not literally but 'in the spirit of Elijah' (Elijah was 'taken up'). Before John the Baptist was born an angel of the Lord predicted that he would minister "in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). Compare this with Malachi 4:5-6 (cf. John 1:21-23)

Jesus went on to say, "Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him" (Matt. 17:12), and the disciples understood He was talking about John the Baptist (Matt. 17:13). The last words of the Old Testament are the prophet Malachi's menacing anticipation of the *great and dreadful day of the Lord*.

Yet what we witness in the coming of Jesus is a day of grace seen in the reading by Jesus from 'the prophet Isaiah' (Luke 4:17) quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2a, stopping short of vs 2b "... and the day of vengeance of our God;"

God's visit to Zechariah to announce the miraculous birth of John marks for Luke the breaking in of the messianic age, i.e., the beginning of the things that God has fulfilled among his people. Read Luke 3:1-6 as John the Baptist steps into the gap (cf Mark 1:1-8; Matthew 3:1-6) and make some observations about John the man and the message.
Discuss

How was John's message one of challenge and of hope?

So how would you read Luke 3:9 (ESV) ⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."?

Whatever might be said of John the Baptist, he lived a life of seclusion (Luke 1:80) till his dramatic rise in public prominence and his sudden decapitation by the edict of Herod. Whilst he would say he was not worthy to do up the shoes of the Messiah, Jesus would give this commendation of His friend: Matthew 11:11 (ESV) ¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

PRAYER

Thank you, Father, for your fulfilled promises in Your messenger John the Baptist. May we have even a smidgen of his boldness, faithfulness to righteousness, and passion for Jesus.