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Isaiah 35:1-10 Page 1

Psalms146 Page 2

James 5:7-11 Page 2

Matthew 11:2-15 Page 7

Isaiah chapter 35

New International Version

1 The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus,

2 it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God. **3** Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;

4 say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.' **5**

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. **6** Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

7 The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. **8** And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. **9** No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, **10** and those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Psalm chapter 146

New International Version

1 Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, my soul. **2** I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. **3** Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. **4** When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.

5 Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God. **6** He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them-- he remains faithful forever. **7** He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, **8** the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.

9 The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

10 The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.

James chapter 5

7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. **8** You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. **9** Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

10 Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. **11** As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Context Summary

James 5:7–12 shifts focus from the condemnation of the rich oppressors, back to encouragement of the Christians these abusers were hurting. James urges

believers to remain patient and strong in their faith. The day of the Lord is coming. They must not turn on each other, but they should be challenged and encouraged by the examples of the Old Testament prophets and Job who remained faithful to God through great suffering.

James 5:7, NIV: Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.

What does James 5:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In the prior passage, James condemned rich unbelievers who were oppressing James's often poverty-stricken Christian readers. Here, he turns to encourage these suffering believers. He urges them to be patient as they wait for the coming of the Lord. According to worldly perspectives, their wealthy oppressors appeared to be winning. The rich were comfortable. According to the standards of the world, they had succeeded in every way that mattered.

But, according to James, the day of the Lord—or the "day of slaughter" (James 5:5)—was coming. James had written that these rich people should start crying now in anticipation of the misery headed their way. But to those trusting in Christ, however little money and status they had in this life, James offers that same fact as comfort: The day of the Lord is coming. Be patient while you wait for Him to keep His promise.

Waiting is hard when you're suffering. James uses the analogy of a farmer for encouragement. He asks his readers to think of how hardworking farm hands have to *wait* for the payoff of their efforts. All of the struggle and strain, through all the stages of the growing season, eventually lead to the glorious harvest. Be patient like that, James says. The harvest will come.

James 5:8, NIV: You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

What does James 5:8 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In this passage, James is urging his oppressed Christian readers to be patient as they wait for the coming of the Lord. In the previous verse, he pointed to the example of farmers. These hardworking people wait through the long, arduous growing seasons for the crop to finally become ready to harvest.

Be like those farmers, James writes. The harvest is close. The coming of the Lord is near. James tells his readers to strengthen or establish their hearts. His instruction for them is not to waver, when they're so close to receiving God's promise.

We cannot control the timing of the day of the Lord. However, James's instruction here makes it clear that we can control how we respond to the waiting. The reality of God's promise—His pledge to rescue us and make things right—gives us the ability to stand strong, even when our circumstances have not yet changed.

James 5:9, *NIV*: Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

What does James 5:9 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In the previous verses, James urged his oppressed Christian readers to remain patient while waiting for the coming of the Lord. James understands the difficulty in this request. There are times when it appears the oppressors are winning, and injustice will be left unpunished. It seems sometimes as if the suffering would never end. And yet, believers have the promise that the day of the Lord is coming soon! On that day, everything will be judged and made right.

So, James writes, these suffering believers must strengthen their hearts. Don't waver now, James says. Remain patient.

In the meantime, conflict between them was evidence that they were not being strong in their waiting. James warns his Christian readers not to grumble against each other, which shows a lack of trust in God. The fact that the day of the Lord

will come soon means that the Judge is standing at the door. Don't risk His judgment by giving in to the pressure of your suffering and turning on each other.

This echoes what James wrote to these same believers about their fighting and quarreling in chapter 4. The temptation to go back and live according to the world's wisdom grows stronger with our suffering, and the result is always greater conflict between us

James 5:10, NIV: Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

What does James 5:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

James is urging his oppressed Christian readers to remain patient in their suffering. They must refuse to give in to the pressure to turn on each other. Instead, they should continue to believe God's promise that the day of the Lord is coming and all will be made right.

Previously, James offered the example of the farmer's patience as he waits for the harvest. Here, James offers the example of the Old Testament prophets. These men delivered God's messages, which often included warnings of God's coming judgment. Many years could go by without those warnings coming to pass, and the prophets often suffered great persecution while they waited for God to keep His word.

These men remained patient in their suffering, James insisted, trusting God to sustain them through it until the promise was kept, or the suffering was over. We should do the same.

Hidden in this encouragement is a truth that James's readers surely would not have missed: Many of the Jewish prophets died while waiting for the Lord's promise. Predictions of the Messiah, for example, were not fulfilled until centuries later. This is a key perspective, because James is not promising that God will necessarily deliver his readers and make all things right before they die. He is urging them to remain faithful, as the prophets did, all the way through this life and into the reward of eternity.

That doesn't mean that the day of the Lord *cannot* come before our earthly lives run out. Rather, it means this promise from God is not earthly, but eternal. This life is short by definition; God calls us to wait in patience and strength, trusting Him all of the way through it, no matter our circumstances.

James 5:11, NIV: As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

What does James 5:11 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

James continues to urge his oppressed Christian readers to remain faithful to God. He calls on persecuted believers to trust Him in their suffering as they wait for the day of the Lord. In the previous verse, he encouraged them to follow the example of the Old Testament prophets who remained faithful to deliver God's message through the difficult circumstances of their own lives.

The goal of worldliness is to avoid suffering. It's the quest to get everything you want in life, no matter what it costs, no matter who it hurts. James makes it clear that the goal for Christians is different. We consider faithfulness to God despite suffering a mark of success. James uses the Greek word *makarizomen*, which literally means "to count as blessed, or happy, or successful." This praise is given to those who continue to demonstrate their trust in God by obedience and service to others.

Now James points to another example of this kind of faithfulness-despite-suffering. Some would say this is, in fact, the *ultimate* example. This story is told in the book of Job. Job was a man who endured enormous suffering while refusing to renounce his faith in God. In the end, God rewarded him by restoring all he had lost and giving him much, much more. Suffering Christians in every era should follow Job's example of faithfulness to God in their physical and emotional suffering, and every believer in Jesus should also expect, ultimately, to receive from God far more than we have ever lost.

The verse ends with a declaration about God's character: He is full of compassion, and He is merciful. God's character doesn't change. God's goodness is not greater when our circumstances are better, and lesser when we

are suffering. He *always* has compassion for His people in our suffering, and He is *always* merciful to those in Christ, now and forever.

We must remind ourselves of that truth when the suffering becomes long and difficult to bear.

Matthew chapter 11

New International Version

1 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

2 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples **3** to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'

4 Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: **5** The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. **6** Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.'

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? **8** If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. **9** Then 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: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. **12** From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it.

13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. **14** And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. **15** Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Context Summary

Matthew 11:1–19 deals with John the Baptist, who is in prison at this point (Matthew 4:12). John sends his own disciples to ask if Jesus is really the

Messiah. Jesus gives them an answer and then upholds John to the crowds. He reminds them of John's strength and affirms that John was the prophet who fulfilled the prophecy about the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

This generation, though, rejected John's message of repentance, saying that John had a demon and that Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard. Jesus insists He and John will be proved right in the end.

Matthew 11:2, NIV: When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples

What does Matthew 11:2 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

John the Baptist is a central figure in Matthew's telling of the story of Jesus. Before Jesus' public ministry began, John lived in the wild and preached that the people of Israel should repent because the kingdom of heaven was near. He baptized many Israelites in the Jordan River as a sign of their repentance before God (Matthew 3:1–6).

John's mission was to prepare the way for the Messiah, and He recognized Jesus as the One: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel" (John 1:29–31). John's understanding was that the Messiah was coming to bring judgment on those in Israel who did not repent (Matthew 3:7–12).

Jesus insisted that John baptize Him, as well. That's the moment when Jesus saw the Holy Spirit descend onto Him like a dove, and God the Father's voice was heard saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Not long after that, John the Baptist was arrested and imprisoned by Herod Antipas, also known as Herod the tetrarch: ruler over parts of Israel under the authority of the Romans. Matthew 14 explains why John was arrested: He had spoken out against Herod's sin in marrying his brother's wife (Matthew 14:3–4).

Now Jesus receives a message from John, still in prison, through John's disciples. Scholars tell us John was imprisoned at Herod's fortress east of the

Dead Sea, a place called Machaerus. He has been there for as long as a year at this point, but he has heard reports about what Jesus has been doing.

Many teachers had disciples. John's disciples were still loyal to him and serving him despite his imprisonment. They delivered John's question to Jesus.

Matthew 11:3, NIV: to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'

What does Matthew 11:3 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

John the Baptist has been in prison for as long as a year. Chapter 14 will reveal additional details as to why he was imprisoned. He had declared that Herod's choice to divorce his own wife and marry his brother's wife was not lawful. In retaliation, Herod had him arrested and imprisoned at a fortress called Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea.

The gospels make it clear that John was more than just a teacher. He was the fulfilment of God's prophecy in Isaiah 40:3 about a man who would come to "prepare the way of the Lord." John did this by calling Israel to repent because the kingdom of heaven was near. He introduced Israel to Jesus as the Messiah.

The question being posed here suggests John was grappling with doubt. He has heard about what Jesus has been doing, and he has sent his disciples to Jesus with a question: Are you the one who was to come, or should we look for someone else? In short, John the Baptist was asking if Jesus was really the Messiah. It's also possible that John is asking this question rhetorically—that his deeper meaning is something like saying, "Jesus, what are you waiting for?"

John preached that those who failed to "produce good fruit" would be "cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10). He said the Messiah was coming to gather the wheat into His barn and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Scholars suggest John's expectations for the Messiah didn't match up with Jesus' early ministry. This was a common response of people who had been raised to expect a David-like figure who would immediately conquer. Scripture shows that almost nobody understood that Jesus had come to *demonstrate* power before

dying for the sins of the world, and then to be resurrected from the dead. Judgment would come for all who rejected the Messiah, but it would come later.

John had heard about Jesus' preaching and His miracles of healing and casting out demons. He had not heard anything about Jesus bringing judgment on Israel so far. Perhaps John was waiting even for Herod to be judged by the Messiah so they he could be released from prison.

Matthew 11:4, NIV: Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see

What does Matthew 11:4 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

John the Baptist's disciples have come to Jesus with a question. John has heard about everything Jesus has been doing, and he wants to know if Jesus is the "one who is to come" or if they should be looking for someone else?

At first glance, this seems like a strange question from John the Baptist. He was the one who declared Jesus to be "the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29–31). He was the one who said he was not worthy even to tie Jesus' sandals (John 1:27). He also was present when God's voice spoke from heaven and declared that Jesus was His beloved Son.

It's even stranger, in a way, because John is responding to what he has heard about Jesus' ministry. Christ was going about Galilee, miraculously healing every kind of disease and affliction. He effortlessly cast out demons. He powerfully preached about the coming kingdom. Looking back, with the advantage of hindsight, we might think of these as obvious signs.

It's likely John was expecting Jesus to bring *immediate* judgment on those in Israel who had not repented of their sins. Perhaps John expected that judgment to reach his own captor, Herod Antipas, the Jewish ruler over parts of Israel under the rule of the Romans. From John's perspective, it might have seemed strange that Jesus had not yet brought earthly judgment. For many people of that era, who had lived under constant oppression, this was a common misunderstanding (John 6:15; Matthew 16:21–23). It would not be until after

Christ's death and resurrection that the details prophesied in the Old Testament would become clear (John 2:22).

Another possibility is that John's question is not so much an expression of doubt as impatience—the equivalent of asking, "Jesus, are you going to do these things, or not?"

Jesus now instructs the messengers to go and tell John what they have witnessed. Jesus spells that out in the following verses, and John would have understood Him to be referencing passages in Isaiah about the coming Messiah. This is Jesus' evidence to John that He truly is the One who was to come.

Matthew 11:5, NIV: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

What does Matthew 11:5 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Disciples of John the Baptist have been sent back to their master, currently in prison (Matthew 4:12) with an eyewitness report about what they have seen Jesus do. This is the answer to John's question about whether Jesus is the Messiah or if they should expect someone else (Matthew 11:1–4). This might have been an expression of John's impatience or confusion. Or, John's faith in Jesus may have been wavering because he expected the Messiah to bring immediate judgment on the unrepentant in Israel. This was a common misunderstanding prior to Christ's death and resurrection (John 2:22; Matthew 16:21–23).

What has Jesus done? He tells John's disciples to report the miracles and preaching message He has been proclaiming. All of these describe powerful works Jesus has done—but Christ is doing more than suggesting John should believe because of His power to heal. Jesus is referencing several prophecies made by Isaiah, and applying them to Himself:

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy" (Isaiah 35:5–6).

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61:1–2).

John the Baptist would recognize those comments as Scripture quotations. He would realize Jesus is claiming to be the fulfillment to Isaiah's prophecies. The verses around those passages also speak of God's judgment and vengeance. Jesus may be assuring John that the time of God's judgment will come, even if it has not yet happened. For now, John should trust that Jesus is the one who was to come.

Matthew 11:6, NIV: Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.'

What does Matthew 11:6 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Jesus has answered John the Baptist's tough question very specifically. John had sent a message to Jesus from prison (Matthew 4:12) through his disciples. He seems to wonder if Jesus is truly the Messiah (Matthew 11:1–3). Jesus responded by connecting His healing miracles and preaching to prophecies from Isaiah (Matthew 11:4–5).

John probably expected the Messiah to quickly bring God's judgment on those in Israel who had not repented of their sin, as well as Israel's oppressors. His question might have been an expression of doubt. Or, it might have been a way to express confusion—as if saying, "Jesus, are you going to do these things, or not?"

This was a common misunderstanding of Jesus' followers prior to His crucifixion and resurrection (Matthew 16:21–23; John 2:22). Jesus has shown that the Messiah will come with healing and hope, as well as the promise of God's judgment.

Jesus concludes His answer to John's disciples by declaring "blessed" the one who "does not fall away." This phrase in Greek is *hos ean mē skandalisthē en emoi*. This can also be translated as "the one who does not take offense at Me," as in the NASB. There is a connection here to the English term "scandalize:"

Jesus is subtly warning not to give up belief because He doesn't immediately meet a person's expectations. Assumptions are part of our fallible nature, and can be wrong.

Jesus is the only way to God the Father (John 14:6), but He is also the stumbling block that people will trip over in their attempts to reach God because they do not believe that He is the Christ (Isaiah 8:14; Romans 9:33). Many people, both in Jesus' era and today, reject God *specifically because* He does not fit their preferences or their demands.

Matthew 11:7, NIV: As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind?

What does Matthew 11:7 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus with a question from their master in prison: Are you the Messiah or should we look for someone else (Matthew 11:1–3)? Jesus apparently was not doing the things John expected the Messiah to do *right away*. Jesus told John's disciples to go back to him as eyewitnesses of Jesus' activities and with a specific answer. That included quotations from Isaiah showing that Christ's work was exactly what God had predicted (Matthew 11:4–6).

As John's disciples are leaving, Jesus turns to the crowds to talk about John. Instead of dismissing John for his question, Jesus defends John the Baptist for his strength and for fulfilling his mission. Many, many Israelites had gone to see John the Baptist in the wilderness during his preaching and baptizing ministry (Matthew 3:5–6). That number undoubtedly included many who now followed Jesus, since John pointed to Him as the Messiah.

Jesus asks those gathered if they went into the wilderness to see "a reed shaken by the wind." This would bring to mind images of the cane grass that grows along the Jordan River, where John baptized so many Israelites. Those plant stems are thin and weak—but they are also extremely common. Watching reeds blow in the wind would be akin to asking, in modern English, about watching paint dry.

The assumed answer to Jesus' question is "no." The people didn't go into the wilderness to see something weak, or common, or mundane. John the Baptist was known for his strength and even ferocity.

Matthew 11:8, NIV: If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces.

What does Matthew 11:8 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Jesus is defending and praising John the Baptist. Some in the crowd may have questioned John's faith in Jesus as the Messiah. John's disciples brought a message asking if Jesus really was the Messiah, or if they should expect someone else (Matthew 11:1–3). After answering John's disciples and sending them away (Matthew 11:4–6), Jesus began to tell the crowd about John the Baptist (Matthew 11:7). This began by pointing out that people were not attracted to John's message because he was ordinary or weak (Matthew 11:7).

Now Jesus continues this theme by referring John the Baptist's clothing. John was famous for—among other things—his rough clothes made of camel hair secured with a leather belt. This was a reason he was so closely associated with the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). Jesus adds that those who live in kings' houses wear soft clothes, not prophets in the wilderness. The reference to kings' houses might be a dig at Herod, the ruler who had imprisoned John the Baptist for calling out his unlawful marriage to his brother's wife.

Through His questions, Jesus is reminding the people that John the Baptist was strong and wild in the way prophets can be. Despite John's question for Jesus, John's faith was not soft or weak. Like so many others, he simply had the wrong expectations for God's timing in connection to the events surrounding the arrival of the Messiah (Matthew 16:21–23; John 2:22).

Matthew 11:9, NIV: Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

What does Matthew 11:9 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Jesus has been asking the crowds around Him a series of questions about John the Baptist. Some of John's disciples had asked, on behalf of John, if Jesus was really the Messiah. Jesus gave them an answer and sent them back to John. Then He turned to the crowd to defend John from any thought that the Baptizer's faith was weak (Matthew 11:1–8).

The questions Jesus has asked are rhetorical—they are really statements. The man so many of these people went to see in the wilderness was strong, not soft. He was unique, not common. Now Jesus asks if they went out to see a prophet, and immediately gives the answer. Not only was John a prophet; he was "more than a prophet."

Prophets were people called by God to deliver specific messages. Every Israelite would have grown up learning about Israel's most famous prophets: Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Isaiah, etc. They would have also grown up knowing that Israel had not received a true prophet from God in hundreds of years. That's why so many of them went out to see the prophet John the Baptist preach and to be baptized by him as a sign of their repentance (Matthew 3:5–6).

The fact that John was a prophet in the same way as those famous men is remarkable enough. Jesus, though, insists that John was even more than that. He quotes Scripture to show why that is true (Matthew 11:10).

Matthew 11:10, NIV: This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

What does Matthew 11:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The crowds following Jesus are now hearing about John the Baptist. Christ is reminding them that when the people went to see John in the wilderness, preaching about the kingdom and baptizing, he was strong and wore rough clothes (Matthew 11:7–9). Jesus has described John the Baptist as a prophet and more than a prophet. Now He quotes from Malachi 3:1 to show what He means.

John the Baptist was the fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me" (Malachi 3:1) These words are spoken by the Lord of the one who will come before Him when He comes. This is a prophecy about the Messiah.

It's extremely important to note that Jesus confirms His own identity as the Messiah by making this reference. His insistence that John is the one Scriptures predicted to herald the Messiah means *Jesus Himself* is the Messiah. Jesus is upholding both John as God's messenger and Himself as the "one who is to come" (Matthew 11:3).

Matthew 11:11, NIV: Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

What does Matthew 11:11 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

"A prophet...and more than a prophet" is how Jesus has just described John the Baptist (Matthew 11:9). He has referred to Malachi's prophecy as a way of affirming John's status (Matthew 11:10). That comment also serves as Jesus' claim to being the "one who is to come" (Matthew 11:3).

Christ now adds that not only is John the greatest of the prophets, he is the greatest of every person ever born on earth. This statement, as with all Scripture, should be considered carefully in context. John served as the one man chosen by God to prepare the way for the Messiah. There is no more privileged position on earth than to point others to Jesus as the Messiah, and God gave John that mission first and above all. Also, John had a better understanding of who Messiah was than any of the prophets who came before.

Jesus is quick to add, however, that even the least person in the kingdom of heaven is "greater" than John the Baptist. Heaven's kingdom will be filled with those declared righteous before God by His grace and because of their faith in Jesus. In Christ, their sins will be forgiven and God will give them credit for the righteous life that Jesus lived. Anyone forgiven for all sin and is declared righteous before God through faith in Christ will be better—"greater"—than John the Baptist standing only in his own righteousness.

John was the last of the prophets to point forward to the kingdom of heaven. This gave him greater status and knowledge than any who came before. Yet he is not greater in either status or knowledge, than those who will stand in the kingdom itself.

Matthew 11:12, NIV: From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it.

What does Matthew 11:12 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Not all phrases are easy to translate into other languages. This verse represents a difficult concept to understand, and commentators offer several possible explanations of what Jesus meant. He has just said that John is the greatest person ever born, but that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is (Matthew 11:11).

The key phrase here, in the original Greek, is *hē basileia tōn ouranōn biazetai, kai biastai harpazousin autēn*. Most English translations follow the pattern of the ESV: "the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force." Other translations, such as the NLT, render this as "the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it." The NASB adds some subtlety by noting, in footnotes, that these phrases can also be translated "is forcibly entered," and "seize it for themselves," respectively.

Jesus' reference to the days of John the Baptist likely means the time of John's ministry before he was imprisoned (Matthew 4:12). "Now," in this context, would then mean that moment in Jesus' ministry of introducing the kingdom of heaven.

The most direct meaning of these words seems to be that when Jesus began His public ministry, the kingdom of heaven was beginning on earth in the form of Jesus and His followers. But great opposition has risen up against heaven's kingdom in the form of men like Herod—who imprisoned John the Baptist—and the Jewish religious leaders.

Another possible meaning is that Jesus is speaking about the perversion of truth committed by His critics and opponents. In other words, a *right understanding* of

the kingdom had been attacked. People had the wrong idea about what the kingdom of heaven really was. That's why John the Baptist asked if Jesus was really the Messiah. In that sense, then, Jesus would be saying that violent men are insisting the kingdom *must be* a political kingdom that begins by overthrowing the Romans. Jesus did not come to earth to do that.

Matthew 11:13, NIV: For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

What does Matthew 11:13 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

"The Prophets and the Law" are what we now call the Old Testament Scriptures. The law is God's specific instructions for the nation of Israel; these are mostly found in the Law of Moses: the first five books of the Bible. "The Prophets" includes the writings of all of God's hand-picked messengers: men like Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel, who delivered His words to His people and others.

Jesus states now that all those writings pointed forward to the last prophet of that era: John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Messiah (Malachi 3:1). Once John introduced Jesus to the world as the "one who is to come" (Matthew 11:3), those prophecies were fulfilled. Predictions about the coming of the Messiah were active "until John;" he ushered in the age of the Messiah and the nearness of the kingdom

Matthew 11:14, NIV: And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.

What does Matthew 11:14 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Malachi is the final book of what we now call the Old Testament. Malachi, like all the prophets, delivered the message God gave him to say. These included statements about what would happen in the distant future. Malachi lived hundreds of years before the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, but he wrote what God said about them both:

"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" (Malachi 3:1).

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes" (Malachi 4:5).

Luke's gospel quotes the angel of the Lord describing the work John the Baptist will do to his father. This uses the same phrasing found in Malachi: "And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:16–17).

John the Baptist himself denied that he was literally Elijah (John 1:21); he refuted any suggestion that he was that prophet reborn or returned to earth in some way. Jesus, though, insists that John was the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy that Elijah would be sent to prepare the way for Christ. John certainly came "in the spirit and power of Elijah," as the angel said.

Jesus adds "if you are willing to accept it," implying that He knew not everyone would grasp that this was true or what it meant. If John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the promise of the return of Elijah to usher in the day of the Lord, it means Jesus was claiming to be the Lord.

Matthew 11:15, NIV: Whoever has ears, let them hear.

What does Matthew 11:15 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This statement sounds like a platitude or a figure of speech that would be tacked on to a wise saying: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." When Jesus says it, though, it is a clue to go back and look at what He has just said. Those with ears should review Jesus' words, because He has just given them a clue that His prior statements are important.

Those listening only on a surface level may have only heard Jesus praise John the Baptist and hold him up as the fulfillment of the prophecy that Elijah would

return (Malachi 4:5). Yet, in saying this, Jesus has really claimed to be the Messiah Himself. He's saying that John the Baptist prepared the way for Him. After all, Malachi's prophecy was God saying that "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes." That means that Jesus is claiming the title of Lord and announcing that He has arrived to bring about the day of the Lord.