

Prepare the Way of the Lord

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Brethren, as I think we are all aware, there are multiple Old Testament prophecies that foretell the role that John the Baptist would play in his ministry. The Bible directly tells us that he would come in the spirit and power of Elijah and that he would *prepare the way of the LORD*. As it says in Hebrew, *the way of Yehovah*. What we're going to do today is look at the verses that talk about this to understand exactly how John did this. What exactly does it mean that *he prepared the way of the LORD*. We're also going to look into the later part of this in his role as Elijah. There's a phrase we often use in church of God speak today, referring to it with the phrase of the "end time Elijah". That's not a term you will ever find in the Bible. That's a term we have coined in church of God speak, but it's not in the Bible. What it implies is that there would be someone who comes at the very end who would parallel the role of John the Baptist. There would be a later fulfillment of the same role that John fulfilled.

To determine that there could be an end time Elijah, we need to first understand John's role itself—what the Bible directly tells us. Exactly how he prepared *the way of the Lord* and is it possible that there would be someone who would parallel, or do the same type of thing later? Let's take a look at that particular subject.

If you would like a title for the sermon it's:

Prepare the Way of the Lord

There are multiple scriptures that directly state that this is part of the role of John the Baptist was prophesied as doing. In these prophecies there are several references in the New Testament that specifically refer to these Old Testament prophecies and directly tell us—we don't have to guess or speculate at all—that directly tie them to John the Baptist and tell us that he fulfilled them. To start off let's turn to Mark 1 and we'll see a section of this book that starts off talking about John's role. It references a couple of Old Testament prophecies and ties them directly to what John the Baptist did.

Mark 1:1 *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* (NKJV)

Pay attention to this as we go forward, because this will become more meaningful as we go through this sermon. It's telling us that the beginning of the gospel of Christ was the ministry of John the Baptist. That is a significant; we are going to look back at later.

2) *As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You."*

3) *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'* (NKJV)

We're going to see in a minute that is quoting from two different prophecies in the Old Testament. Let's continue in verse 4 so we can show this is clearly referring to the ministry of John the Baptist, we don't have to guess or speculate in any way.

- 4) *John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*
- 5) *Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.*
- 6) *Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.*
- 7) *And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.*
- 8) *I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*
(NKJV)

As we know he is referring to Jesus Christ. That Christ would be the One who would come and baptize with the Holy Spirit. He's saying that Christ is going to follow my ministry. First of all, what we want to do today is understand the Old Testament prophecies that are being referred to here. As we're going to see in verse 2 and 3, it's quoting from two different books in the Old Testament and it's attaching these prophecies specifically with the ministry of John the Baptist. No reason to speculate because we're going to see that, not only is it referenced here, but there are numerous places in the gospels where it attaches these two prophecies specifically to John. They all agree, they all say the same thing, there is no need to speculate at all.

- 1) *As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You."* (NKJV)

That is from Malachi 3:1 which we are going to look at in a moment. You'll also notice as we go forward, the way this is worded in the New Testament is a little different than what we are going to read in Malachi 3:1 and we're going to address that discrepancy later in this sermon. But just take note of that. In verse 3, this is from Isaiah 40:3 which we're going to look at in a minute.

- 3) *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'* (NKJV)

To start off, let's look at these two prophecies in their original context. What we're going to do first is properly understand some difficult phrases in these verses so we understand what they are saying. Then we're going to look at how John fulfilled these. Malachi 3:1 is where the first part of this is quoted directly from.

Malachi 3:1 *Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me.* (NKJV)

I will address this later in the sermon, but notice that it is worded a little differently to what we read in Mark.

1 continued) ... And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the LORD of hosts. (NKJV)

Also turn to Isaiah 40:3 because in the quote we saw in Mark, it combined Malachi 3:1 and the later part was actually a quote from Isaiah 40:3.

Isaiah 40:3 *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. (NKJV)*

We know that both of these prophecies are referring to John the Baptist because it's not just Mark 1. There are numerous references in the gospels that quote these and directly tell us that John the Baptist fulfilled these; there's really no question that's what it's referring to.

There are a couple of phrases that we need to unpack and understand exactly what they're saying. In English—and if we go into this with the wrong paradigm in our heads, we misunderstand what it's saying. I know I have to plead guilty that I've definitely misunderstood these in the past as well. For years in the church of God we believed in this idea that “Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament”. We also looked at the name Yehovah—LORD—and assumed that was a generic name that referred to Christ or the Father and you just slotted in whoever you wanted to. Then we saw, “Prepare the way of Yehovah, prepare the way of the LORD” and tied that to the idea that we know, John the Baptist's ministry preceded Christ's. So, the concept that we would look at that with, was kind of like someone “blazing the trail”. John comes first and he “blazes the trail” and he prepares the way and Christ follows the trail along behind him. That's the idea we had in mind of what “Prepare of the way of the LORD” was. What we were missing in that concept was, that the term, *the way of the Lord*, is referenced numerous times in the Old Testament and we have to understand what that phrase means to properly understand it.

To understand this, let me first give you the definition of the Greek word that is translated as *way* here. When it says, *the way of the Lord*, *way* is translated from the Hebrew word *derek* and it's [Strong's #1870](#) and the definition I'm going to give you comes from [The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament](#) by Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter.

“A masculine noun meaning path, journey, way; the word may refer to a physical path or road or to a journey along a road. However, this word is most often used metaphorically to refer to the pathways of one's life, suggesting the pattern of life.”

What we're going to see here is *the way of the Lord* refers to a "pattern of life". A life pursuing God's commandments and instructions. Let's notice a couple of examples where this phrase is used like that. Turn to Genesis 18. There are a ton of examples of how this phrase is used repeatedly in the Old Testament, but we'll just look at a few examples of them.

Genesis 18:16 *Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way.*

17) *And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing,*

18) *since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?*

19) *For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."* (NKJV)

In other words, He has taught him His "way" so that Abraham could pass onto his descendants the way of living a life in obedience to God; that's what he is referring to. Let's turn to 2 Kings 21:19.

2 Kings 21:19 *Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah.*

20) *And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done.*

21) *So he walked in all the ways that his father had walked; and he served the idols that his father had served, and worshiped them.*

22) *He forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD.* (NKJV)

In other words—*the way of the LORD*—he didn't walk in this way; he lived disobediently; he didn't live a life of obedience to God is what it's referring to. Turn to Proverbs 10. Again, we are just scratching the surface on all the references that verify this, but I just want to use enough to make the point.

Proverbs 10:29 *The way of the LORD is strength for the upright, But destruction will come to the workers of iniquity.* (NKJV)

You can see when it's referring to *the way of the LORD, the way of Yehovah*, it's not the idea that John goes before Christ which he obviously does, it's not about "blazing a path", it's preparing *the way of righteousness*. We'll see later in this sermon how exactly he did that, but we need to understand that phrase to understand properly what this is talking about. Let's go to Isaiah 40 because there is another phrase we need to understand.

Isaiah 40:3 *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD;"* (NKJV)

We can see that's "preparing" the path of righteousness, living a life of obedience to God.

3 continued) ... Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. (NKJV)

We're going to see that's another way of saying the same thing. We hear the word *highway* and know what that is—the paved strip I drive my car on—and that's how we tend to use that phrase. The Hebrew word translated as *highway* can carry that type of meaning but it can also have a metaphorical meaning as well. The Hebrew word is *mesilla* and is Strong's #4546 and this definition is also coming from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament by Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter and is defined as:

"A feminine noun meaning a highway, a public road. It refers to key travel routes in antiquity and the word is used in a figurative sense to describe the course of the stars, the road of life lived by the righteous or locusts' manner of marching."

Focus on the part where it says, "the road of life lived by the righteous" because that's what it's referring to here. Let me give you a couple of examples where this word is used in that manner. Turn to Proverbs 16:17.

Proverbs 16:17 *The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; He who keeps his way preserves his soul. (NKJV)*

Notice *highway* is obviously not a paved strip you drive your car on, this is *the path of life*. Another example, turn to Psalms 84:5.

Psalms 84:5 *Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, Whose heart is set on pilgrimage. (NKJV)*

It says *pilgrimage*, it doesn't use the English word *highway* but it's the same Hebrew word. They translated it as *pilgrimage* because they knew it's obviously not a paved strip you drive your car on, it's referring to "a path or a manner of living one's life." You'll also see in Isaiah 35, another example of this. This is the context of the millennium.

Isaiah 35:8 *A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray. (NKJV)*

Again, not referring to a paved strip you drive your car on, this is *a way of life*—living and following God's instructions. We are in a physical utopia with no Satan involved in the equation and he's saying that if you follow the basic instructions He's giving you, even a fool is going to have a successful life, if they just comply and live the way God is telling them. This is referring to a path of a life of obedience to God. It's not referring to a paved strip that you drive your car on. When you see "prepare the way of the LORD"

and “the highway for our God” is basically referring to the same concept. It’s *the path of righteousness*.

There’s another phrase that we need to unpack as well before we look at how John fulfilled all of this. Turn to Malachi 3:1 because there is another phrase in this verse that is often misunderstood.

Malachi 3:1 *Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me.* (NKJV)

Sometimes this gets confused—and the reason I mention that is because of the last part of the verse.

1 continued) ... Behold, He is coming,” Says the LORD of hosts. (NKJV)

LORD is the name of God the Father. I’ve had people who get confused and say, “Doesn’t this verse prove that this name can also refer to Christ, because Christ is the one whose ministry came right after, the one who followed John the Baptist.” That’s interpreting the phrase *before Me* as “prior to Me”. It’s the concept—to paint a picture—the idea of painting a picture of a man and woman and they are walking up to a building and about to go in the door and the guy decides to be a gentleman and opens the door and says, “ladies first”. He lets the lady walk in first and he walks in behind her. You could say she walked in prior to him—before him. That’s a way that we use that English phrase but that’s not what this is referring to.

The way to see this, is to understand these are two words in English and one word in Hebrew. If we understand the Hebrew word, it’s not referring to “prior to me”. Let me share with you the definition of this. The Hebrew word *paneh* is transliterated as *paneh*, Strong’s #6440 and this definition will come from Baker and Carpenter again.

“A masculine plural noun meaning a face; although the literal meaning of face is possible, most of the time this word occurs in a figurative, idiomatic sense. Face can be a substitute for the entire person or it can be a reflection of the person’s attitude. It is also used to indicate direction or purpose. With various prepositions *paneh* takes on the nature of a particle and expresses such concepts as upon, before a place, before a time, in the presence of.’

That’s the part I want you to focus on. It can mean “in the presence of”. I’m going to show you several examples where this word is used and it’s translated in English as *before me* and it doesn’t mean “prior to me”, it means “in my presence”—the meaning it’s trying to express. You’ll see from the context that’s very obvious.

You can hold your finger in Malachi 3:1, we’re going to come back and unpack this verse after we clarify this, but turn to Genesis 6 and we’ll look at a couple of examples where *paneh* is translated in English as “before me” but obviously from the context, it doesn’t mean “prior to me”, it means “in my presence”. Genesis 6:13.

Genesis 6:13 *And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me [this is paneh], for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. (NKJV)*

Notice he says, *the end of all flesh has come before Me*, He's not saying *their end came before my end*. Obviously, God is eternal, He doesn't have an end. He's not saying He'll go out of existence after they go out of existence—that's not what He's saying. He's saying that "This has happened before me, in my presence, in my sight." To see another example, skip down to chapter 7:1.

Genesis 7:1 *Then the LORD said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation. (NKJV)*

Before me is *paneh* and obviously He's not saying of Noah, "He was righteous before I was, he beat me to the punch." Obviously, that's not what He is talking about. He is saying, "Noah was righteous in My presence, in My sight." It's not, Noah got righteous first and he's getting there first; that's obviously not the intention. For one other example, turn to Exodus 10:3, this is an example of Moses and Aaron talking to Pharaoh.

Exodus 10:3 *So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. (NKJV)*

Obviously, He's not saying, "Pharaoh, you humble yourself and then I'll humble Myself and you'll do it before Me". Obviously, that is not the intended meaning. He is referring to Pharaoh humbling himself in the presence of the Creator God. If we understand that, now we can understand what Malachi 3:1 is talking about. With all of this in mind let's turn back to Malachi 3:1 and we can see exactly what this is saying. Often this verse gets used to try and prove that Christ is the God of the Old Testament and the name LORD, Yehovah, is a generic name and can refer to both God Beings and that's the argument that's made. It's based upon misunderstandings of what the verse is saying. If we go back to Malachi 3:1 we can unpack what the verse is saying because as we can see from the end of the verse it's God the Father speaking.

Malachi 3:1 *"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way ... (NKJV)*

The way of the LORD, "the way of Yehovah" which we understand now is *the path of righteousness*; "the way of life of obedience to Him", that's what John is going to prepare.

1 continued) ... before Me. (NKJV)

“In My presence” — It’s not that he went prior to, it’s that he is going to *prepare this way* and he’s going to do it *in My presence*, in the same way that Noah was righteous in God’s presence—that’s the concept.

1 continued) ... And the Lord ... (NKJV)

Notice the second *Lord* is not in all caps because this is referring to Christ. *LORD* in all caps is referring to God the Father.

1 continued) ... whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. (NKJV)

Christ is *the Messenger of the covenant* and yes, his (John’s) ministry does start prior to Christ and Christ follows behind Him. But if we understand the first part of the verse then we can understand what it is trying to say here. So now we can start to look at how exactly did John the Baptist fulfill this? We understand now what the *prepare of the way of the LORD or Yehovah* actually means—it’s preparing “the way of life, the path of righteousness”, of living a life of obedience to Him—so how exactly did John do that? Let’s go back to Mark 1 where we started off. Now we need to unpack one other little detail that can be a little confusing as well. The wording in verse 2 doesn’t exactly match Malachi 3:1 as we just read it. We’re going to understand what that’s about. Once we figure that out, we can get to our main point.

Mark 1:1 *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
2) As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.” (NKJV)*

I’m reading from the New King James, which is translated from the Greek manuscripts, and I’ll explain in a moment why that is significant. Notice instead of *the way before Me* it’s *Your way before You*. For a number of years in my life I would notice this and wonder if that was reworded on purpose? Is there a meaning or significance to this or is this maybe a translation, manuscript issue and it’s meant to be an exact quote and it just got a little muddied through all the years of manuscripts and translations of languages and things of that nature?

In recent years we’ve discovered the book of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew—that’s well documented in history. There’s good reason to believe that much, if not all of the New Testament was actually written in Hebrew and it’s just the Greek manuscripts that have predominantly survived today. There are complete manuscripts of the book of Matthew that have survived in Hebrew. The reason I mention this is, this exact quote in attributing this to John the Baptist is mentioned not only in the book of Mark but in Matthew and Luke. Let’s look at the reference in Matthew because we have a Hebrew manuscript to compare it with. Turn to Matthew 11 and I’ll start in verse 7 so we see the full context and know that there is no question that Christ is attributing this quote to John the Baptist because He explicitly states it.

Matthew 11:7 *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John [so we don't have to guess that this refers to John, Christ explicitly states it]: "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. ' (NKJV)

He's obviously referring to Malachi 3:1, this is another reference when Christ specifically says, this refers to John the Baptist—no guessing or speculation required, explicitly stated—but notice it also has *your way before You* and not “the way before me”. For years I would scratch my head and ask, “Is that on purpose? Or do we have a manuscript translation error that just muddled the wording a little.” You can compare this to George Howard's Hebrew Matthew. Let me just read to you how it's translated in English from the Hebrew manuscripts. What you're going to see is it more closely matches Malachi 3:1. This is a direct quote of verse 10 from George Howard's Hebrew Matthew.

Matthew 11:10 *This is He about whom it is written. Behold I am sending My Messenger and He will make the way clear before Me. (GHM)*

Notice it's *the way before Me* in the Hebrew which directly matches Malachi 3:1. What this indicates to me is, we just got a little muddled from Hebrew to Greek to English. It's intended to be a direct quote from Malachi 3:1.

While that is cleared up, let's turn back over to Mark and now we can look specifically at how did the work that John did prepare the way of the LORD and make straight a highway for our God? Both of those refer to the *path of righteousness*, the way of life of living in obedience to God—how did John prepare that? What did he do that fulfilled this? I'm going to start again with Mark 1:1 just to get the whole context. I'm going to read through this as it's written in the New King James.

Mark 1:1 *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

2) As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You."

3) The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight." "

4) John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

5) Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

6) *Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.*

7) *And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.*

8) *I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*
(NKJV)

Notice when it refers to him *preparing the way of the LORD*, preparing the way of Yehovah, it specifically then goes and tells you about John preaching about repentance and baptizing people. That's a very unique concept, because the whole concept of baptism we don't see in the Old Testament, that is a New Testament concept. John is known—he's called John the Baptist—for that very reason. It's a unique role for him and it's all about remission of sins and receiving the Holy Spirit, all tied to the sacrifice of Christ. This is all a New Covenant concept. Think about this, this is preparing the way of the LORD, living a life of righteousness of following God. What is required for carnal human beings to fulfill that? If we look at the example of ancient Israel, it's a long testimony of showing very clearly, you can take a nation of people, set them apart in an ideal land. You can give them wonderful circumstances to live in, give them the exact instructions to follow and they are not oppressed by any other nation. They have the government to do exactly as they want to set them up for success and they will repeatedly fail again, and again, and again. They will not stick with it for any length of time. Why is that? Because it requires conversion. If you have Satan in the equation, human beings cannot follow this for any length of time without spiritual help. They brought a knife to a gun fight and they are going to lose. It's simply how it works.

For carnal human beings to *live the way of the LORD*, the way of Yehovah, the path of righteousness, to follow Him, you have to change their hearts. To do that requires spiritual intervention, it requires the Holy Spirit. Hebrew 8 is the heart of what the whole New Covenant is about. Making that supernatural change of our hearts and turning our hearts to God requires the Holy Spirit to do that for any length of time.

Hebrews 8:7 *For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.*

8) *Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—*

9) *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.*

10) *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

11) *None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, "Know the LORD, for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.*

12) *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*

13) *In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (NKJV)*

Notice to be able to live the way of the LORD, the way of Yehovah, for any length of time requires conversion, it requires God's Spirit that will reconcile and change our hard, carnal, rebellious hearts and make us think more like Him and be willing to submit to Him. As Romans says, *the carnal mind is not capable of obeying God's law*. We just won't do it because we are fighting a spiritual battle with physical means and it's just not going to work. So, to turn that heart it requires the Holy Spirit, we have to have conversion to make that work. What do we have to do to prepare us to receive that Holy Spirit to then have that change of heart? Turn to Acts 2, this is specifically addressed in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. When it came to the day of Pentecost, we know this is when the Holy Spirit was given to the New Covenant church, but a lot of the audience who were there that day had already been baptized by John, by the apostles, prior to this day coming about. But there was an audience of people who hadn't. They hadn't been baptized yet but God was calling them and they are listening to Peter's sermon and it strikes them to their hearts and they say, "We need to take action, what do we need to do?". They ask this question to Peter and he explicitly tells them exactly what the formula is that they have to do to be reconciled to God, to have their hearts turn to God and to change and to live the way of the LORD, the way of Yehovah. If they want to do that, here is what they have to do.

Acts 2:37 *Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"*
38) *Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*
39) *For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."* (NKJV)

Notice, he specifically tells them, this is what you have to do. To have the changing of your heart, to have the ability to live this way of life, you have to have this Spirit and before you can receive that you have to repent, you have to be baptized, have hands laid upon you and then you can receive the Spirit. Who instituted the whole process of baptism and started the necessary first step you have to do in order to receive the Spirit to then be able to live this way of life? John the Baptist; he's the guy who established this. This is how he prepared the way of the LORD, prepared the path of righteousness for mankind to be able to live this way. This is what is required and this is what he did. We understand that his role is very unique. As we're going to see as we go through this, John fulfilled a very unique role. Lots of servants of God over the years have come and preached, "You need to stop sinning and stop being rebellious and start obeying God" and many others have also come and said, "Christ is going to return and the Kingdom is going to be set up". But John did something very unique that nobody else did. John instituted baptism, he prepared the way of the LORD in a way that nobody else did. It's a very, very unique role and that is something we need to understand.

I mentioned before when I started this sermon, the Bible specifically tells us that John was the one who fulfilled the prophecies in Malachi. There is one and only one verse in the Bible, at least in the Old Testament, that refers to someone coming as Elijah and turning hearts. That is in Malachi 4, and we're going to look at that in a moment. The New Testament tells us repeatedly that the individual who fulfilled that was John the Baptist. Let's look at that, turn to Matthew 17, we're going to break into the context of the transfiguration. This is where several of the apostles are there with Christ and they see a vision and see Moses and Elijah transfigured in front of them and then Christ and the other two disappear and they hear the voice of God the Father say, "This is My Son, this is who you need to hear, this is the Messiah." They are still having a hard time grasping this and we're going to see the question they raise to Christ is, "If you're the Messiah, weren't we supposed to see Elijah first?" and Christ addresses that.

Matthew 17:10 *And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" (NKJV)*

In other words, weren't we supposed to see Elijah before we could see the Messiah? Something seems out of order here.

11) Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.

12) But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands."

13) Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist. (NKJV)

They realized Elijah did come before the Messiah. You can be the Messiah if John is Elijah—now it's making a little more sense. They still don't get all of this until they receive the Holy Spirit, but now he's putting the puzzle together for them. This isn't the only time in the New Testament we are specifically told that John fulfilled the role of Elijah. Before John was born, the angel Gabriel appeared to John's father and tells him he is going to have a son and your son is going to fulfill this very important role and he explicitly tells him he is going to come in the spirit and power of Elijah. No need to speculate or guess, it's right on the page. Let's turn to Luke 1:11.

Luke 1:11 *Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.*

12) And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13) But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

14) And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15) For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

16) And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. (NKJV)

Take note of the fact that verse 16 is referring to the “hearts” that he is going to turn, he is turning hearts to God; it’s turning the people to God, that is going to become important.

17) He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah ... (NKJV)

We don’t need to speculate whatsoever as to who fulfilled Malachi 4 that we’re going to read. In fact, we can notice the next statement is a direct quote from Malachi 4:6.

17 continued) ... ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children ... (NKJV)’

Pay attention to how he rewords the second part because we’re going to read Malachi 4 in a moment and see how the wording is a bit different, but this one is on purpose; this is not a translation error or manuscript error, he’s clarifying something.

17 continued) ... and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (NKJV)

Notice he is preparing the way of the LORD and how is he doing that? By *turning hearts to God*, that is what is being referred to here. This is obviously a direct reference to Malachi 4 because there is only one verse in the Old Testament that ever speaks about an Elijah to come and that is in Malachi 4. Gabriel, when he is speaking literally quoted from that verse, so there’s no question what he’s talking about. Let’s turn to Malachi 4:4 to get the context.

Malachi 4:4 *“Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments.*

5) Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

6) And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” (NKJV)

Oftentimes we read over this because the way it’s worded kind of suggests we are talking about family relationships here. *The hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers* and that’s how this verse gets interpreted. But notice when Gabriel is talking to Zacharius he’s specifically says, “Your son is going to fulfill the Elijah prophecy”, he quotes the first part and then he rewords the second part. That gives us some more insight as to what he’s referring to here.

Let me read part of a commentary on this particular verse. This is from Jameson, Faucet and Brown’s commentary and it is specifically referring to verse 6.

“He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers, explained by some that John’s preaching would restore harmony

to families. But Luke 1:16-17 substitutes, “*for the heart of the children to the fathers, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*”, implying that the reconciliation to be affected was between the unbelieving, disobedient children and the believing ancestors Jacob, Levi, Moses and Elijah just mentioned.

Notice the context just prior to that verse refers to Moses and Elijah and if you read through the book of Malachi, you’ll see Jacob and Levi are mentioned numerous times as well. These were the forefathers who were righteous and converted, these are guys who we know in the New Testament are going to be in the Kingdom. It’s referring to a reconciliation of hearts, but it’s not specifically referring to making families stronger. Conversion can certainly do that if we all behave concertedly, we have better relationships with other people but that’s not what he is primarily referring to. He’s referring to turning hearts to God.

To provide a little more support for this, let’s ask the question, why call this *the Elijah to come*. Why refer to just John as coming in the spirit and power of Elijah or he is the Elijah to come, why not just pick any Old Testament name? Why not the Moses to come, the Daniel to come, the Joshua or the Ezekiel to come? Just pick any Old Testament name. There obviously has to be a correlation between what he would do and what the original Elijah who we have recorded in the book of Kings did—there has to be some direct correlation between what they accomplished in their lives or what meaning would the comparison have? Why tie it to that?

If we look specifically at the life of the prophet of Elijah recorded in the book of Kings and look for any reference during his whole time as a prophet that refers to turning hearts, we’ll find one and only one reference that refers to it. It’s about turning hearts to God, not about family relationships. Turn to 1 Kings 18, we’re going to break into a very famous story. This is basically Elijah’s show down with the prophets of Baal and they set up both sacrifices and he’s taunting them and says, “You call upon Baal and we’ll see who is the real God; you have Baal bring down fire from heaven and consume these and we’ll believe Baal is real”. Of course, this plays out for a while and Elijah taunts them for a while and then he has a very short prayer to the true God and of course, fire comes down and makes it very clear who the true God is. Let’s notice the short prayer and the reference to *turning hearts*. This is the only reference in the whole Elijah story where he refers at all to turning hearts.

1 Kings 18:36 *And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, “LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.*

37) Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.” (NKJV)

Notice the whole reference to the original Elijah, because there has to be some connection between what Elijah did and what John did or the comparison makes no sense. The only reference to “turning hearts”—what is it about? It’s about turning hearts

back to God. Once we understand that, the person who fulfilled Malachi 4—the turning of hearts—is John the Baptist and John did this through establishing baptism to being the beginning of the gospel of Christ, to preaching the Kingdom and establishing all of this. As we’re going to see in a minute, he is the transition between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant and the Bible explicitly states that.

Let’s also look at this reference and why it refers to the Day of the Lord in Malachi 4? As I mentioned in the introduction of the sermon, regarding a phrase in the church of God I’ve heard all of my life—the phrase, “end time Elijah”. Who is this end time Elijah? Quite frankly, that phrase is similar to the phrase “second resurrection” and “third resurrection”. What I mean by that is, these are phrases that don’t appear in the Bible. In our logic, as I’ve covered in a previous sermon, we coin the terms “second” resurrection and “third” resurrection because the term first resurrection is in the Bible and based upon how we interpreted the term first resurrection we thought it was logical to put second and third into it. The logic follows if you assume first meant first in time order, which I covered in a previous sermon is not what that’s referring to. There is a reference to the Day of the Lord and this is where we got the whole concept of end time Elijah. Let’s look at what that’s about. Turn to Malachi 4 again, verse 4 again to get the whole context.

Malachi 4:4 *Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments.*

5) *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.*

6) *And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” (NKJV)*

Notice here, nowhere in this does it say “just prior to and living into the Day of the Lord”, that’s an assumption that we have often made because it says, before the Day of the Lord and we think, that’s got to be someone who lives at the very end time in their physical life, who lives to see the Day of the Lord—it doesn’t actually say that, that’s an assumption. Let’s understand the curse reference. It says he is supposed to *turn the hearts, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse*. Why does it mention that? We’ve already seen, the “turning of the hearts” is not really about family relationships. Yes, people behaving in a converted manner and yielding to God’s Spirit will certainly make family relationships better but that’s not the primary reference. The turning of hearts is the turning of hearts to God. So why does He refer, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse, what is that about? Let me read verse 6 from the Complete Jewish Bible because I think it makes it a little clearer.

6) *He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers, otherwise I will come and strike the land with complete destruction. (CJB)*

In other words, if this didn’t happen, I would just wipe everybody out and be done with it. In the Olivet prophecy there is a specific reference to this. Let’s notice what it is that

God says had to exist, or otherwise in the Day of the Lord He would just wipe everybody out. Turn to Matthew 24:21.

Matthew 24:21 *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.* (NKJV)

A time that is worse than any other time, it has to be talking about the Day of the Lord. Nothing compares to the destruction of the Day of the Lord.

22) And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. (NKJV)

It's the existence of the elect. Who is the elect? The elect is those who have God's Holy Spirit, they are the Ecclesia—the New Covenant church. Those who have received God's Holy Spirit and faithfully obey Him. It's because this group exists, He is not going to wipe out all flesh and have nothing left. If you think about that, it directly matches what we just read in Malachi 4. If you understand what John's role was, he's the beginning of the gospel of Christ, he establishes baptism, the necessary step for receiving conversion, receiving the Holy Spirit which *turns hearts* to God. But this is also the definition of the elect, isn't it? Those who have repented, been baptized, receive the Holy Spirit, live a life of obedience to God—they are the elect. This had to happen or He would come and destroy all flesh. He would wipe everybody out. It directly matches what John did, with what Malachi is referring to.

As I mentioned, we coined this phrase “the end time Elijah” and the whole idea was, yes Elijah fulfilled this, but there is going to be a duality and there will be another guy who will come right at the end and he'll parallel and be a dual fulfillment of what John did. He will be the end time Elijah. We base that entire logic on that Day of the Lord reference. We have to keep in mind what that would mean is, not only would this person be dual but typically when there is duality in prophecy and a prior fulfillment and a later fulfillment, the later fulfillment is typically grander. It's bigger and more significant.

Let's also look at another issue that the Bible specifically tells us about John's role. We have to understand John's role to answer the question:

“Can there be a parallel person who will be a duality and come and be a dual fulfillment of what John's role was?”

We have to fully understand John's role to answer that question. In Luke 16, we're going to see that the Bible tells us part of John's role was being the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. We've already read in Mark 1, he's the beginning of the gospel of Christ, we're going to see twice that Christ refers to him being literally the turning point when we transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. We'll get this directly from Christ Himself.

Luke 16:14 *Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.*

15) *And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

16) *"The law and the prophets were until John [Notice that, we're going to flush this out in a minute; notice what happens once John comes]. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.*

17) *And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.*

18) *"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery. (NKJV)*

He refers to the law and the prophets being until John. John comes and he's preaching the Kingdom of God and now we're talking New Covenant. So now we have this transition point. Why does he turn around and talk about divorce and remarriage? Why is that relevant, why is that a meaningful point to throw in at this point? Because He is referencing a subject where the rules specifically change in the New Covenant, different from what is described in the law. Turn to Deuteronomy 24 and we'll see this. We'll see why this is relevant and fits into the context of what He just said. This is Moses speaking about how marriage and divorce was handled in the Old Covenant in ancient Israel.

Deuteronomy 24:1 *When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house,*

2) *when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife,*

3) *if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife,*

4) *then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. (NKJV)*

Notice what he has described is not near as restrictive as what Christ says. Here it's, if it's not working out and they aren't happy with each other, husband writes a certificate of divorce, hands it to her, she leaves and they are both free to marry other people. It's just the restriction if she marries somebody else, she can't come back and marry the first husband again—that's forbidden. It doesn't give any other restrictions. It's basically, if this isn't working, he just gives her the certificate and that's the end of the subject. That's very different than what we just read from Christ in the New Covenant. Christ says, "No if they remarry that's going to be adultery." There's a little more detail, I'm not going to unpack all the details around *porneia* (any sexual sin) and 1 Corinthians 7 and

those other issues. What I want you to see is that the rules are significantly different in the New Covenant than they were in the Old Covenant. That's why this subject is relevant, that's why when He's talking about John's role and uses this transition, He throws that in. Christ addresses that a number of times throughout the gospels and is even challenged with, what you're saying isn't what Moses said. Christ says, the Father didn't want marriage to be handled like that, but He understood and was merciful. He knew He was dealing with an unconverted, hardhearted bunch of people. He made those rules because He was being kind to a bunch of unconverted people who He knew were going to have a hard time with this. But in the New Covenant for converted Christians, that's now how this works.

The point I wanted you to see is why this is relevant to the role of John the Baptist and how things change because it's a pivot point with his role. Let's also note another time where Christ makes a similar comment. Turn to Matthew 11; we read in Luke where Christ says *the law and the prophets were until John*—He's obviously not saying the law and the prophets don't apply anymore. He's not saying we can throw the law away. He's referring to a transition. Now it's not just about physical promises for physical obedience and national prosperity, now it's about the Kingdom of God and conversion.

Matthew 11:11 *“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. (NKJV)

We see this transition point with 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! (NKJV)

Once again, we have Christ directly saying, “You want to know who fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah? John—there's your answer”. Now let's look at the uniqueness of John's role. As I started off this sermon, we coined this phrase in our time of the end time Elijah. There's no question whatsoever from the New Testament—we know John the Baptist fulfilled the Elijah prophecy in Malachi 4. The angel Gabriel comes and tells Zacharius, *“You're going to have a son and he is going to fulfill this prophecy”*; there's just no debating it. We know Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, they refer to John explicitly stated numerous times in the New Testament—there's just no way to debate any of it. We know for sure John fulfilled that.

However, let's ask is it possible for there to be a dualistic fulfillment? To use the phrase we've coined, the end time Elijah. In other words, someone to come at the end and parallel that role. I'm going to stray into personal opinion here because the Bible doesn't specifically mention this here. Just keep in mind that to do that, whoever would come, they're going to have to parallel John's role. Even if not upstage it in the later fulfillment.

Exactly how would they do that? Let's notice that John did something very unique. He didn't just come preaching that we need to repent and obey God—pretty much every major servant of God in the Bible did that to some level. They came preaching, "You guys need to stop sinning and listen to God and obey Him, then your life is going to go better." Particularly in the New Testament, it's "You all need, to repent and be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit." That's been a common theme ever since. John did something very unique. He prepared the way of the LORD. He prepared the way of Yehovah. What does it require to live that way? It requires conversion, it requires the Holy Spirit. What's necessary to do that? You have to repent and be baptized. John didn't just baptize people; he instituted the concept. He's the guy who introduces this whole idea and started it off. Today lots of us are baptized—I baptized people myself—and John is the one who started it. We all just follow the example of what's laid out in the Bible. This is what turns *hearts to God*. John uniquely did this but he's also, as the Bible specifically tells us, as Christ specifically tells us, he is the transition between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. He's the beginning of the gospel of Christ. Personally, I don't see how it would be possible for some end time individual to come along and be a dual version of this. What would this guy do? What would he institute, what role could he play that would somehow be an exact duality of that?

I'll just state that as my personal view of that. I've thought about this for years and I have no idea how one would do that. So, to wrap up this sermon, I'll just quote from Jesus Christ Himself.

Matthew 11:13 *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! (NKJV)*