



# Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Year 1: John the Witness, Jesus the Baptist

Bible Reading: John 3:22-30 NET

[Watch LIVESTREAM at 10am](#)

**SUMMARY:** The 4th Gospel depicts John & Jesus baptizing simultaneously—contradicting the other Gospels. Was Jesus really a Baptist? One solution notes that it's Jesus' early ministry—his 'Year of Obscurity'—which the Synoptics omit. In this period John isn't 'the Baptist;' he's 'John the Witness.' John's singular role is 'playing second fiddle' to Jesus—a task John embraces, playing it well & gladly. Let's ask the Lord: 'What's my role at this time?' John believed & confessed Jesus, succeeding where Nicodemus failed. John produced disciples; some turned out well (e.g. Andrew), others poorly. The latter envied Jesus' baptizing success; that's an 'earthly response.' When questioned, John reiterated Jesus' superiority & his own subordinate status as Christ's 'best man,' declaring 'he must increase and I decrease.' Let's learn from John's exemplary example.

### Year 1: Jesus' 'Year of Obscurity' (Jn. 3:24; Mt. 4:12, 17; Mk. 1:14)

- A. From Jesus' baptism to John's arrest (Mt. 4:12, 17; Mk. 1:14)
- B. Year 1: the "Year of Obscurity," only in the 4th Gospel
- C. In 'Year 1' there's overlap—Jesus baptized simultaneously with John (3:22-23)
  - "We are [told]...Jesus & his disciples are carrying on a *baptizing ministry simultaneously with John*...[There's an] *early period [when John,] the Baptizer & Jesus overlapped.*" —J. Ramsey Michaels
  - "John strongly implies that Jesus was a Baptist"—Moody Smith

### He's Not 'John the Baptist,' but 'John the Witness,' in the 4th Gospel

- A. Phases in John the Baptist's Ministry
  1. Before Jesus' baptism, John's successful ministry of Baptism (Mk. 1:5; Matt. 3:5-6)

2. John the Witness—4th Gospel doesn't report John's successful baptismal ministry, nor designate him 'John the Baptist'
  3. John's final role—'speaking truth to power'—Herod & Herodias (Mark 6:17-29)
- B. John is Not 'John *the Baptist*', but 'John *the Witness*' (Jn. 1:6-8, 15)
- "To summarize the *portrayal of John the Baptist in the 4th Gospel requires only one word—witness.*"—Robert Webb
  - John is "a witness. *Everything he does & says is not focused on himself, but on Jesus...*In [his] own words '*He must increase, but I must decrease.*'" —Marco Rotman
- C. John's self-understanding
- "John *knows who he is...*He recognizes that he's '*playing second fiddle*' to Jesus, a part that he plays gladly and well." —Lamar Williamson
- D. Final Echo of John's Witness (14:40-2)
- "*To the end, John plays his role as witness to Jesus...All the expectations...have been satisfactorily met*" —Katrin Williams

## Nicodemus vs. John—What's Impossible for Nicodemus, is Possible for John

- "What's impossible for Nicodemus...is achieved through the testimony of the Baptist in both word & action"—Dorothy Lee
- A. John witnesses/testifies/confesses, Nicodemus does not
- B. The Baptist is a 'Backup Witness,' due to Nicodemus' silence
- "In light of the *lack of witness on the part of Nicodemus...*the narrator returns to...John the Baptist...[He] *reintroduces John the Baptist as a counterpoint to a failed...Nicodemus.*" —Mark Trump

## Jesus the Baptizer (3:22, 26; 4:1)

- A. Jesus had his own Baptizing Ministry
- Gospel of "John...differs from the Synoptics: *Jesus...himself conducted a baptizing ministry* for a period"—D. Moody Smith
- B. Jesus adopted John's 'baptism of repentance'
- C. Concurrent baptizing by Jesus & John causes conflict.

## Jesus & John—Rivals or Friends? Opponents or Team-mates?

- A. Are Jesus & John Rivals/Competitors?
- "Though the scene...*suggest[s] professional rivalry between the two, nothing is further from the case.*"—Dorothy Lee
- B. The issue is with John's Disciples (1:35-40; 3:25-30)
1. Two Contrasting Groups—First group, e.g., Andrew & Another, became Jesus' disciples
  2. The Second Group have a Problem (3:25-30)
    - "Their response to John's correction is not recorded, suggesting they neither 'receive [John's] testimony' nor 'obey the Son.' *They have no future in John's Gospel.*" —Gary Manning

## John's Exemplary Response (3:28-30)

- A. John reiterates his earlier witness—"I said, 'I'm not the Christ...'" (3:28)
- B. John's Metaphor—the Bride, Bridegroom, & Friend (3:29)
- C. "*He (Christ) must increase...*" It's Not an Allegory about the Church!
- "*Later in the NT, the bride is...the church...But this isn't the present text's interest & should not be allegorized.*"—Gary Burge "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (3:30)—John's final words

## John's 'Graceful Exit followed his Eloquent Farewell'

### A. John makes his own 'graceful exit'

- "Instead of having John forcibly removed...by Herod's soldiers [& imprisoned, the author] will *allow [John] to make his own exit voluntarily & say his own eloquent farewell.*" –Ramsey Michaels

### B. Nothing derogatory said about John

- "There are *no derogatory things said about John*...There's *no polemic against the Baptist here*...He [has] a very positive role in the Jesus story." –Ben Witherington

## QUESTIONS:

- A. Mark's Gospel suggests Jesus' public ministry did *not begin until after John the Baptist was imprisoned* ("Now after John was imprisoned, Jesus went into Galilee & proclaimed the gospel of God." Mark 1:14). In contrast, the 4th Gospel says *Jesus & John conducted baptismal ministries, simultaneously before John was arrested.* ("Jesus...was baptizing. <sup>23</sup> John was also baptizing...people were coming to him & being baptized. <sup>24</sup> (For John had not yet been thrown into prison.)" (Jn. 3:22-25). **Question:** How can this (apparent) contradiction be explained? Discuss.
- B. Karoline Lewis says "For the 4th Evangelist *he is not 'John the Baptist,' but 'John the Witness.'*...He is never called 'the Baptist' in the 4th Gospel." Do you agree (or disagree) with this statement? Discuss.
1. How do we see John (the Baptist) as a 'witness' in the 4th Gospel?
  2. Is John (the Baptist) the only 'witness' in the 4th Gospel? Who else is a 'witness'? How do they witness?
  3. Are you (and I) called to be 'witnesses for Jesus' today? In what ways can we fulfill this role?
- C. Concerning John's role during this period, Lamar Williamson says, "John *knows who he is*...He recognizes that he's *'playing 2nd fiddle' to Jesus, a part that he plays gladly & well.*"
1. How do you see this statement described/illustrated in the passage: Jn. 3:22-30?
  2. What was John (the Baptist's) role before Jesus appeared on the scene?
- D. John (the Baptist) was called (specifically) to be a witness for Jesus for that period; *how does this idea apply to you?*
1. Is there some specific role/function you feel the Lord asking you to fulfill presently?
  2. Have you ever felt at a specific time/situation the Lord has a specific role He wants you to fulfill? [Share]
  3. Have you ever felt that you've fulfilled a particular role & now the Lord has a different role for you? [Share]
- E. John 3:36 says: "The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but God's wrath remains on him." (3:36). Now, let's focus on the verb tenses: "The one who *'is believing'* (present tense) in the Son *'is having'* (present tense) eternal life..." (3:36a)
1. What are the implications of the verb-tenses for our view of belief (faith) & eternal life (in the present &/or future)?
  2. Is faith (belief) a 'one time' event—"I believed in Jesus; I prayed the 'sinner's prayer,' responded to an 'altar call'?"
  3. Is 'eternal life' something we possess after we die? Or is it (can it be) our present personal possession now?