

WINTER 2025–2026

John the Baptist

LESSON 10

FEBRUARY 08, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 3:1–12

FOCUS VERSES

Malachi 4:5–6

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the **LORD:**

“And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

.....

Matthew 3:8

Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God sent John to call people to repent in preparation for the Messiah.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

I will prepare my heart through repentance.

COVENANT CONTEXT

As the Old Testament closed, the New Testament opened with a feeling of anticipation. Breaking four hundred years of silence from God, John the Baptist announced the kingdom of heaven was at hand and called for repentance. His role was to point to the Messiah who was about to extend a New Covenant to take away the sin of the world.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What is the longest you have had to wait for something or someone, such as a goal, a friend, or something else? Was the wait worth it?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group’s answers to the hundreds of years God’s people waited for their Messiah to come.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. **MALACHI’S FINAL WARNING**

A. The Day of the Lord and the Coming of “Elijah”

DISCUSS: *How does God’s final warning and call to repentance paint our view of Him?*

B. The Long Silence

C. In difficult trials, I will remain faithful to what I believe about God and His purpose.

DISCUSS: *How do Paul's words in Romans 8:28 equip us to remain faithful in times of difficulty?*

II. JOHN'S ARRIVAL

- A. The Spirit of Elijah on John to Announce the Kingdom's Arrival
- B. John's Message
- C. I will prepare my heart through repentance and follow Jesus.

DISCUSS: *What does repentance look like for someone first coming to God?*

III. JOHN'S DEPARTURE

- A. Jesus' Increase, John's Decrease

DISCUSS: *What makes John's humility so impressive? In what ways is this type of humility difficult?*

- B. Jesus Declared John to Be the Greatest Prophet
- C. Following John's example, I will live my life to point to Jesus.

DISCUSS: *How can we make our lives about pointing to Jesus: where we decrease so Jesus Christ may increase?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to grant wisdom to those who turn to Him in repentance, that they would know what repentance means for them practically
- For God to remove any unwarranted condemnation, that all would feel the call of God's love

LESSON CONNECTION

Of all the features he remembered of the old house, the great bay window stood out. From childhood on, Andrew recalled first looking up to it and thinking it more appropriate for a castle than for a home in a run-down suburb. The center window with its magnificent view onto the street below gifted him with a special place from which to watch passersby. From neighborhood kids to chance travelers, from the mail carrier to Jehovah's Witnesses, Andrew examined them all as they traveled up and down his childhood street.

Much of the time Andrew was watching for his mom. His patient and intense waiting could have been due to his unfettered love for the woman who gave him life, but there was another reason the rest of the family assigned Andrew to be the "lookout." Andrew's mom gave strict instructions when she would leave for work. Chores needed to be done, and Andrew's mother was a master delegator. "No play until the chores are done," she would say.

Andrew waited at the bay window for the blue SUV to appear on the horizon at the end of his street. As soon as he spotted his mom's vehicle, he was given strict instructions—which, ironically, he obeyed—to sound the alarm and raise the ramparts, signaling to the rest of the family to stop playing, grab a few dish towels, turn on the vacuum, and clean as if they had been hard at work for hours. There is no telling whether their hardworking mother actually bought their act, but she always smiled as if she was pleased—whether with a clean house or a stellar performance

remains uncertain.

The reason for such antics was a promise attached to good behavior and a clean house: pizza at the arcade. Nothing said fun like cheese-topped cardboard and games that would leave your eyes and ears sore for days. Their well-executed, curated plan was worth waiting at the window. Andrew felt his recon mission was one of honor. He ensured the family enjoyed pizza, and his mother was none the wiser and happy with her hygienic house.

Now with a wily child of his own, Andrew thinks back on those days fondly. Watching as his son quickly shifts from devious to delightful when Dad walks in the room makes him smile inside (smiling outwardly would reinforce bad behavior). He often considers what his son would get away with if he had his own heralding prophet to warn of Dad's arrival. The walls and carpets would never be the same and the dog would need counseling. Thankfully, Andrew's son does not have the grace afforded by a watchman on the wall or a voice in the wilderness. For now his antics are contained by the silence of being an only child. Perhaps that silence will be broken if the face of the Lord shines favorably on him and his parents one day.

BIBLE LESSON

I. MALACHI'S FINAL WARNING

A. The Day of the Lord and the Coming of “Elijah”

The Day of the Lord was a favorite topic of the prophets, especially Isaiah. If all its variations of use throughout the Old Testament were numbered (both prophesying prosperity and judgment), the total references to the Day of the Lord would pass two hundred. With such frequency, we can know this day was of upmost importance. Even though the exact phrase “Day of the Lord” does not appear until midway through the biblical story (Amos 5:18–20), the theme of God’s hopeful rescue associated with that day rings throughout the entire Old Testament.

Interestingly, Amos’s first use of the phrase was in direct response to Israel’s sins, which included the usual list of idolatry, God-denying self-importance, and a lack of care for the poor and helpless. The Day of the Lord will ultimately lead to salvation even if it is through purifying judgment. God Himself will redeem, restore, and heal His people with His personal presence (Amos 9:14–15). What a promise!

After this destruction, there will be a time of complete, global renewal. Even the “foreigner” (one outside the ethnic people of Israel) will enjoy God’s great salvation and express their devotion toward Him (Isaiah 19:18–19; Micah 4:1–4; Zephaniah 2:11; 3:9; Zechariah 14:16–17). All the earth will participate in the restorative goodness of God’s action.

God promised a sign that would mark the impending arrival of the Day of the Lord. The last of the prophetic books in our Old Testament, the Book of Malachi, declares what that sign would be: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:5–6). In other words, a prophet’s call to repentance would signal to the world that God was on His way.

DISCUSS: How does God's final warning and call to repentance paint our view of Him?

B. The Long Silence

In between the last syllable of the final prophet until the time of Jesus lay an approximate four hundred years of what has been called "silence." This is an interesting label for those years because they were anything but silent. Israel experienced and produced much noise during this time, taking the form of war, revolt, Jewish victory, and establishment of a dynasty. Jewish writing also flourished. Though not Scripture to us, many of these texts served the Jewish people faithfully in times of extreme difficulty, and they also help us understand the time of Jesus and the apostles.

The four hundred years were not silent in the strictest of terms. Nor do these "silent" years suggest God was not working in the world. God was indeed providing, protecting, and leading His covenant people as He had promised. Moreover, God was setting the stage for the arrival of the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ and the apostolic church. The term *silent* is captured by the Book of Amos when it records: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11). In other words, these years were silent because they fulfilled the prophecy of Amos and lacked the authoritative voice of God. During those years, there appeared to be no fresh word from God for His people. God was present, but He was silent.

C. In difficult trials, I will remain faithful to what I believe about God and His purpose.

Israel was successful because their covenant-making-and-keeping God spoke to them. He gave them wisdom and guidance at every turn. He called them back to faithfulness. He gave them promises. We can easily see that an absence of the direct voice of the Lord would spark fear and uncertainty for Israel. But God's final word left Israel with a promise to hold onto during the silence. To paraphrase: "Things are bad now—mostly due to your own poor choices—but there is coming a day when all of this will be turned around for good and My purposes will be forever established. Trust Me. Prepare yourself. I am on My way."

We too have been called to live in the "in between" of God's promises and their fulfillment. Just as Israel had to trust God through great difficulty, we are called to do the same. The good news is if we share the same call, we will also share the same outcome—God will indeed make good on His promises. Trust Him and remain faithful in hope. The apostle Paul's words captured well the confidence of a trusting people when he said: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

DISCUSS: How do Paul's words in Romans 8:28 equip us to remain faithful in times of difficulty?

II. JOHN'S ARRIVAL

A. The Spirit of Elijah on John to Announce the Kingdom's Arrival

The New Testament picks up where the prophet Malachi said it would—introducing Elijah, kind of. The Gospel of Matthew records the appearance of John the Baptist and describes Him in unusual terms: a desert wanderer wearing

camel's hair clothing, eating bugs, living the good life (Matthew 3:1–4). This was Elijah-type behavior. Plus, John was prophetically announced in this way: "And he shall go before [the Lord] in the spirit and power of Elias [Elijah], to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). Sound familiar?

The prelude to the Day of the Lord is here; Elijah has come. Jesus Himself, speaking of John, proclaimed that in John, Elijah had "come already" (Matthew 17:12). Since that was the case, the Day of the Lord had also arrived, the kingdom of God was breaking in, and the promises of God were manifesting. Late in John's short life, he was thrown into prison for speaking the truth to a sinful Herod, and John sent people to Jesus to ask the all-important question: Was Jesus really the arrival of the embodied Day of the Lord or did the long wait continue? Jesus responded by highlighting the fulfillment of Isaiah 35 that detailed the "signs" of God's reign. (See Isaiah 35; Matthew 11:4–5.) In other words, the fruits of Jesus' own ministry confirmed the ministry of John. Elijah had come and the Lord had followed.

B. John's Message

John preached what God had called him to preach: repentance and preparedness to follow the Christ, the Lamb of God. This is what Luke meant when he wrote that John would turn the hearts of the people (Luke 1:17). John was specific too; he taught the greedy tax collectors and oppressive Roman soldiers who sought his guidance to turn from their evil ways. He commanded the religious leaders to produce the "fruit" of repentance. John was after a repentance that affected the heart and the hands—belief and practice. This type of holistic repentance was the only appropriate way to be "prepared for the Lord." The truth of repentance rings in our lives today. We too must prepare our hearts to wholeheartedly follow Jesus Christ.

C. I will prepare my heart through repentance and follow Jesus.

No wonder a large portion of the apostle Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost mirrored John's own words. Peter first called the people to repentance; the other aspects of salvation always follow. In fact, the other parts of new-birth salvation remain closed to the unrepentant. In other words, the fertile ground in which the seeds of salvation can be sown is a repentant and prepared life. Let us not move past this moment in our walk with God too quickly. We must prepare our lives through repentance if we are to be good ground for God's Word and Spirit, and this repentance must be in our heart and come out of our hands—our lives must change to be aligned with God.

DISCUSS: *What does repentance look like for someone first coming to God?*

III. JOHN'S DEPARTURE

A. Jesus' Increase, John's Decrease

As John continued his ministry, Jesus entered stage left. After John received so much attention, it would seem giving up his newfound fame would be difficult. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even at the beginning of John's ministry, he proclaimed that someone was coming after him who was greater, whose shoes were too holy for John to touch (worn shoes were extremely gross in the ancient world). The Messiah would do more than John had done:

John baptized with water unto repentance, but Jesus would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. When Jesus' rise in popularity was brought to John's attention, John the Baptist responded with the now famous line: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). John willingly decreased because Jesus' arrival meant John's prophetic role was complete. God performed what He had promised: The Lord had arrived.

DISCUSS: *What makes John's humility so impressive? In what ways is this type of humility difficult?*

B. Jesus Declared John to Be the Greatest Prophet

John was willing to step aside humbly, but Jesus gave him due praise. Of John, Jesus announced: "For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist" (Luke 7:28). Why was John so great? John was great because he held the great privilege of announcing the greatest of the Old Testament prophecies: the Messiah is here.

Jesus' words did not stop with a simple praise of John. Jesus continued, "But he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he [John]" (Luke 7:28). What did Jesus mean by this statement? Jesus was highlighting the superiority of the New Covenant. The great fulfillment of what the prophets, including John, had pointed toward warranted Jesus' praise. John was privileged to announce the kingdom of God's arrival, but those after John—including us—get to live in the kingdom of God. What a privilege!

C. Following John's example, I will live my life to point to Jesus.

John served a temporal, transitional role, but his example still serves us well today. John's entire life revolved around pointing to the one who would ultimately save and make the difference the world so desperately needed. We are called to live out a similar role. The apostle Peter declared we are brought to Jesus Christ so we can proclaim His praises to others (I Peter 2:9–11). The apostle Paul called us "ambassadors" for Christ (II Corinthians 5:20). In Acts 1 Jesus Himself called those who would receive His Spirit *witnesses*. All this adds up to a special purpose for the life of every Christian. We are to be signposts that lead others to Jesus. Like John, we must decrease so Jesus Christ may increase. We must point to the one who is greater than we are.

DISCUSS: *How can we make our lives about pointing to Jesus: where we decrease so Jesus Christ may increase?*

Teacher Option: *Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how repentance and obedience are always right for a child of God. The following story may be a continuation of the Lesson Connection or a stand-alone story.*

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Andrew and company did not always execute their plans perfectly. Sometimes their mom returned home early. Other times Andrew missed his watch, and the remaining brigade was caught off guard when their mother unexpectedly walked in the front door. Those days were the worst. Getting caught playing while the house was a mess was never good. The matriarch's march into the room in deliberative, authoritative fashion to pronounce judgment on the unrepentant, unwatchful sinners struck fear: You're grounded for a week, no going to see friends

after church, and no games. After receiving their sentence, with heads hung low, the children trooped about the house fulfilling their delayed duties—the house would be clean one way or another.

After one of those unexpected entrances, and perhaps in a true act of repentance, the maturing miscreants decided they would simply do their chores on time from then on. If they were going to have to bow their knees to cleaning regardless, it made the most sense to complete their chores so at least they would have a reward for their labors. A real change had occurred, a change that brought about the blessings of their mother in the form of pizza and praise.

Paul tutored the church of Thessalonica with these words:

For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness....For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. (I Thessalonians 5:2–5, 9–11)

God's desire—just like Andrew's mother's desire—is to protect and reward His children. Just like Andrew and his siblings' awareness of their mother's return, we are aware of Christ's return; I Thessalonians 5:5 teaches that we are "children of the day." Knowing that God's goodness and patience leads us to repentance, let us come before God wholly prepared for His arrival in our lives and His return to the world. Through repentance let us prepare our hearts for our King to come back.