



## What Made John the Baptist So Special?

**John 1:23: (NASB) *He said, I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as Isaiah the prophet said.***



Every so often someone comes along who stands out from the crowd, someone who distinguishes themselves from their peers by their manner, their motivation and their mission. They do not seem to fit into any comfortable category, for theirs is a mission that has world-changing implications and such missions are not common, and least of all comfortable. With such a description, we would typically and rightfully envision Jesus as its object, but today we will focus on another. Today we focus on John the Baptist, the man who prepared the people for Jesus, the man who stood alone as a powerful voice who pointed to the Redeemer of

all men. John the Baptist uniquely epitomized greatness. Where did he come from, what did he do and how did he do it?

Everything about John the Baptist was unique, beginning with the conditions of his birth.

**Many people in Scripture can be better understood by examining where they came from:**

**Luke 1:5-7: (NASB) *<sup>5</sup>In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.***

**John's heritage:**

**Zacharias:** Strong's #2197 Zacariav Zacharias of Hebrew origin;  
Zacharias = "remembered of Jehovah"

**Elizabeth:** Strong's # 1665 elisabet Elisabet el-ee-sab'-et of Hebrew origin;  
Elisabeth = "oath of God"

(Source: Biblical commentary by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown) *course of Abijah* - the eighth of the 24 orders of courses into which David divided the priests (see 1 Chronicles 24:1,4,10). Of these courses only four returned after the captivity (Ezra 2:34-39), which were again subdivided into 24 - retaining the ancient name and order of each. They took the whole temple service for a week each.

**Zacharias was on one of the 24 "teams" of worship.**

(Source: Biblical commentary by John Lightfoot) *his wife was of the daughters of Aaron* - the priests might marry into any tribe, but it was most commendable of all to marry one of the priests' line.

**John's parents were faithfully devoted to serving God.**

*<sup>6</sup>They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.*

(Source: Biblical commentary by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown) *Commandments and ordinances* - the one expressing their moral - the other their ceremonial - obedience [CALVIN and BENGEL], (Compare Hebrews 9:1.)

*<sup>7</sup>But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.*

Not having children in those days was looked at as a sign of disfavor or unfaithfulness. Elizabeth being barren shows the will of God in the birth, not the will of men. God was about to introduce one of the greatest prophets in the world.



The man chosen to pave the way for Jesus needed strong parental influence to raise him and teach him godly reverence and godly knowledge.

If you are a parent, consider it a calling to bring your children up with a strong guidance of godliness in their lives.

**Appearances do not always reflect reality - barrenness was considered a sign of a lack of faith:**

Luke 1:13,15-16: (NASB) <sup>13</sup>*But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John...* <sup>15</sup>*For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.* <sup>16</sup>*And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.*



The man chosen to pave the way for Jesus needed clear and focused access to God's influence to achieve the greatness of his calling.

God put the preparation in place before he was even born.

**John the Baptist was set to be a prophet of God even before birth.  
Did this override his free choice?**

The whole idea of our free will is easily misunderstood. Every child born is taught and told things from infancy by not only parents, but a whole host of other influencers as well, and we never complain about those things. To teach John that he would be a chosen vessel of God was simply raising him up in the way that he should go.

***Just do what must be done. This may not be happiness, but it is greatness.***

— *George Bernard Shaw*



## Be first in moral excellence, *Martin Luther King Jr.'s Speech on Serving*

- I want you to be first in moral excellence. I want you to be first in generosity. That is what I want you to do. He transformed the situation by giving a new definition of greatness. And you know how he said it? He said, "Now brethren, I can't give you greatness. And really, I can't make you first." This is what Jesus said to James and John. "You must earn it. True greatness comes not by favoritism, but by fitness. And the right hand and the left are not mine to give, they belong to those who are prepared." (Amen)*

What was the source of the command to Zacharias for his son to be "separated"? It was the Nazarite Vow, a vow of sanctification, being set apart.

**There were three outward elements to this vow. The first was what a person did and did not eat and drink:**

**Numbers 6:1-8:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup>Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the LORD, <sup>3</sup>he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes. <sup>4</sup>All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from the seeds even to the skin.

His life would be sober, reflected in what he would eat and drink (and not eat and drink!).

<sup>5</sup>All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long.

Second, his appearance stressed that all of his attention would be on what he was doing; everything else was not material.

<sup>6</sup>All the days of his separation to the LORD he shall not go near to a dead person. <sup>7</sup>He shall not make himself unclean for his father or for his mother, for his brother or for his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head. <sup>8</sup>All the days of his separation he is holy to the LORD.

Third was what you did and did not do. Staying clean was important.

This was a serious way to bring up a child, with dedication and focus. This is why his parents had to be the right people, steeped in understanding and following the Law.

(Source: John Gill's Exposition of the Bible) There were various sorts of Nazarites; some were appointed by God, as Samson; some were devoted by their parents, as Samuel; and some by themselves, concerning whom is this law more especially; some were perpetual Nazarites, a Nazarite for life, as the two persons just mentioned; though the Jews distinguish between a Samsonian Nazarite, and a perpetual one; and some were only for a certain time, according as they vowed.

Interesting side note: Samson and Samuel were also born to mothers who had previously been barren and were both dedicated to God's service as John was.



Greatness is a result of being groomed by your learning and experiences to fulfill the difficulties of your task at hand.

What kind of greatness do YOU have the opportunity to fulfill in the service of God? What can you do to bring others to see the greatness of God?

**Back to the description of John to Zacharias by the angel:**

Luke 1:17: (NASB) *<sup>17</sup>It is he who will go as a forerunner before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

**John grew up to look, act and fulfill the role that was prophesied about him:**

Matthew 3:4: (NASB) *Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.*



2 Kings 1:7-8: (NASB) *<sup>7</sup>He said to them, What kind of man was he who came up to meet you and spoke these words to you? <sup>8</sup>They answered him, he was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.*

Elijah was known just by how he looked, and so was John.



Greatness requires not only preparation, it also requires complete follow-through. John was disciplined enough to LIVE his role with zeal and completeness.





**So far, we have seen John being prepared for his work.  
What was his work? What did he actually do?**

The work of John the Baptist would prove to be powerful, dangerous, transformational and short-lived. According to prophecy, he had but one mission - to prepare the Jewish world for the coming of their Messiah. To speak of this task is easy, but to accomplish this task would require the full bending of all his will and energy to this one goal.

He was to be so different on every level for every moment of his life. It required incredible greatness and the power of God to be able to do such things.

*It is a rough road that leads to the heights of greatness. — Lucius Annaeus Seneca*

**Everybody can be great, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Speech on Serving**

- *And so, Jesus gave us a new norm of greatness. If you want to be important - wonderful. If you want to be recognized - wonderful. If you want to be great - wonderful! But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. (Amen) That's a new definition of greatness. By giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great because everybody can serve.*

Luke 3:1-6: (NASB) (Selected verses) <sup>1</sup>Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar... <sup>2</sup>...the word of God came to John...in the wilderness.

John knew he had work to do but did nothing proactive until he was clearly instructed. He sprang into action once the word came to do so.

<sup>3</sup>And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; <sup>4</sup>as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight... <sup>6</sup>...and all flesh will see the salvation of God.

John KNEW he was that voice and he KNEW what that voice was to proclaim! (See John 1:23) He was there to serve a specific purpose.



The most telling  
measurement of greatness  
is the clarity and  
importance of its purpose.

John takes this clarity and boldly speaks as no one had spoken in 400 years as a direct mouthpiece of God. The last words of the Old Testament in Malachi introduced John followed by 400 years of prophetic silence. Greek influence began to corrupt Judaism and a lot of the Jewish thinking went down the wrong pathway. The silence was discouraging and damaging. John had a difficult task in front of him.

**His general message was one of brutal honesty with no allowance for excuses:**



**Luke 3:7-16: (NASB)** <sup>7</sup>So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham for our father, for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>9</sup>Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so, every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

**His boldness, uniqueness, honesty and message garnered sincere interest:** <sup>10</sup>And the crowds were questioning him, saying, then what shall we do? <sup>11</sup>And he would answer and say to them, the man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise. <sup>12</sup>And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, Teacher, what shall we do?



<sup>13</sup>And he said to them, Collect no more than what you have been ordered to. <sup>14</sup>Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, and what about us, what shall we do? And he said to them, Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.



<sup>15</sup>Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, <sup>16</sup>John answered and said to them all, As for me, I baptize you with water; but one is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of his sandals; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.



The most telling application of greatness is in the value of what it opens its recipients to. In this case, they were opened to receive their Messiah!



John was preparing the people not only for the one who would save them, but he who would also save every man, woman and child who ever lived.

**John was absolutely mighty in the hand of God!  
How did Jesus react to John's might and position?**

The interactions between Jesus and John the Baptist were unique as they were happening at the most major crossroad in world history. John was the last of the prophets of the Law and Jesus was the first of the heavenly call. The respect and honor between them was powerful and productive.

***Human greatness does not lie in wealth or power, but in character and goodness. People are just people, and all people have faults and shortcomings, but all of us are born with a basic goodness. — Anne Frank***

 **Thinking about my funeral, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Speech on Serving**

- *Every now and then I guess we all think realistically about that day when we will be victimized with what is life's final common denominator - that something that we call death. We all think about it. And every now and then I think about my own death and I think about my own funeral. And I don't think of it in a morbid sense. And every now and then I ask myself, "What is it that I would want said?" And I leave the word to you this morning. If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long.*

John was masterfully teaching, challenging and baptizing the crowds. He was the lone voice of God's direction in the midst of the clamor and noise of a society that had lost its way.

**Then Jesus came:**

**Matthew 3:13-17: (NRSV)** <sup>13</sup>Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup>John would have prevented him, saying, I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?

We see the power of John. He recognized Jesus. Here was the man his entire life was focused on announcing. It had all come to this moment. To John's surprise, Jesus walks up to him to be baptized.

<sup>15</sup>But Jesus answered him, Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness. Then he consented.

It did not take an explanation other than, "This is the way it must be; trust me."

<sup>16</sup>And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

<sup>17</sup>And a voice from heaven said, This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.

The power of this experience must have been dramatic! John fulfilled what he was supposed to do and in a moment understood this was the beloved son of God. People needed to stop looking to John and start looking to Jesus.

John never questioned his role or his respect for his master Jesus. Jesus' arrival signaled John's end.



### John clearly saw his role in relation to Jesus:

John 3:25-30: (NASB) <sup>25</sup>Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. <sup>26</sup>And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, he is baptizing and all are coming to him.

### This shows us what greatness really is:

<sup>27</sup>John answered and said, A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup>You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, I am not the Christ, but, I have been sent ahead of him. <sup>29</sup>He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So, this joy of mine has been made full. <sup>30</sup>He must increase, but I must decrease.

John's role was like a shooting star - a dazzling light that lives for but an instant - but in his case, it lit the way to find man's eternal light.



The most telling  
accomplishment of greatness  
is the humility and selflessness  
with which it is administered.

John clearly loved  
his Lord more than  
his own role!



John would later lose his life as a result of his influence and his unrelenting stand for righteousness. After he was gone, Jesus, Peter, James and John experienced the transfiguration vision.

### It was right after this vision that Jesus vividly established John's position as part of the company of Moses and Elijah:

Matthew 17:9-13: (NASB) <sup>9</sup>As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup>And his disciples asked him, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? <sup>11</sup>And he answered and said, Elijah is coming and will restore all things; <sup>12</sup>but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also, the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands. <sup>13</sup>Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

They saw an amazing vision but they were not allowed to tell anyone about it until after Jesus rose from the dead. What was the explanation? They understood that *Elijah already came* meant John the Baptist. There is an incredible prophetic connection between Elijah and the relationship to John the Baptist.





The most telling characteristic of greatness is the relentless toughness and grit it requires to be successful. John stood strong and often alone!

**John's greatness in fulfilling God's will is utterly inspirational. What else could there be left to say?**

There is one more ingredient to John's greatness that completes it as a perfect example for us. To illustrate this last ingredient, we need to go back into John's life shortly before he was executed. He found himself in prison, an incarceration from which he would never see the light of day. But first:

***Keep me away from the wisdom which does not cry, the philosophy which does not laugh and the greatness which does not bow before children. — Khalil Gibran***



**Tell them what not to say, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Speech on Serving**

- *And every now and then I wonder what I want them to say. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize - that isn't important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards - that's not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school. I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. And I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say on that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.*

In telling us this, he was telling us to do the same. What a great example in putting things in perspective.

**Matthew 11:2-3: (NASB)** <sup>2</sup>Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to him, Are you the expected one, or shall we look for someone else?

Why was John questioning if Jesus was the Messiah? What happened to him? He was in prison! Sometimes our expectations do not dovetail with reality and the result can be genuine doubt. Perhaps John thought that once Jesus was on the scene that he would become Jesus' greatest follower and advocate, continuing to bring people to Jesus. Sitting in prison was not what he might have expected.

The expectation of the Jews was that Messiah would come right then as a great leader, freeing them from Roman bondage. Expectation did not equal reality, which creates doubt.

Jesus' answer was not a mere "yes, no worries," - his answer was laden with hope, prophetic fulfillment and personal blessing.

### Jesus knew John's heart even though he was far away:

**Matthew 11:4-11:** (NASB) <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered and said to them, Go and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. <sup>6</sup>And blessed is he who does not take offense at me.

The answer reiterated prophecy John would recognize. He was reminded of the power of God. *And blessed is he who does not take offense at me* - John did not take offense and was blessed.

After sending an answer back to John, Jesus testified to the crowd of the faith, strength and greatness of John.

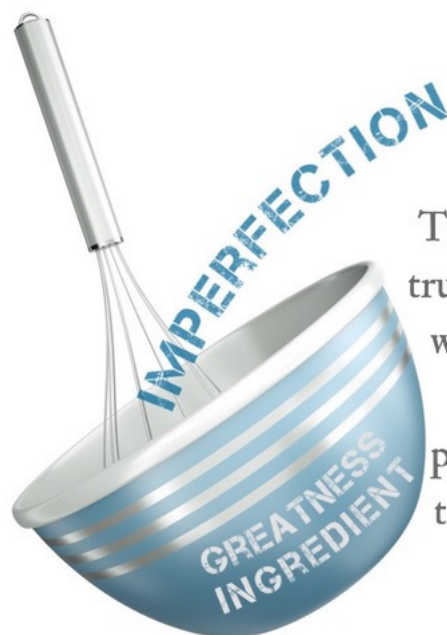
### Jesus was plain...John was a prophet, appointed specifically by God to send them salvation:

<sup>7</sup>As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup>But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! <sup>9</sup>But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written, behold, I send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.

### Jesus then captures the glory of John the Baptist and the privilege of his work:

<sup>11</sup>Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

What an amazing statement showing the great work of John the Baptist.



The most telling victory of true greatness in our broken world comes as a result of battling through one's personal doubts and fears to accomplish that which one is called to do!



This final greatness ingredient is not being perfect or exactly on target. It is unexpected but true! It was okay that John doubted. This should bring us hope as we try to bring praise, honor and glory to God but we fall short. We can start fresh and move forward again.

Do not make this ingredient an excuse, make it a reason to work harder and use the other ingredients so you can stand straighter in your work for God. Together they are a recipe for greatness for the average person.

### **Back to John describing his calling and the utter joy of being in humble service of God's plan:**

**John 3:29-33:** (NASB) <sup>29</sup>*He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So, this joy of mine has been made full.* <sup>30</sup>*He must increase, but I must decrease.* <sup>31</sup>*He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.* <sup>32</sup>*What he has seen and heard, of that he testifies; and no one receives his testimony.* <sup>33</sup>*He who has received his testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true.*

John saw God's will in his life. The next time you are thinking about greatness, think about the exceptional character, devotion, passion and work of John the Baptist. Think about his focus. Think about his discipline. Think about his humility. And remember, he was imperfect just like you and me and yet, God saw fit to adorn him with a mantle of blessing and privilege.

We want to be great in God's sight doing God's work. Keep God first. That is the lesson of the greatness of John the Baptist.

*So, what made John the Baptist so special?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*

*And now even more to think about...  
only in the **Full Edition** of CQ Rewind!*



Here are several additional biblical examples of those who could not have children until God allowed.

### **Abraham and Sarah and the birth of Isaac:**

**Genesis 17:15-19:** (NRSV) <sup>15</sup>*God said to Abraham, As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.* <sup>16</sup>*I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.* <sup>17</sup>*Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?* <sup>18</sup>*And Abraham said to God, O that Ishmael might live in your sight!* <sup>19</sup>*God said, No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.*



### **Isaac and Rebekah and the birth of (Esau) and Jacob:**

**Genesis 25:21:** (NRSV) *Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived.*

**Genesis 25:24-26:** (NRSV) *<sup>24</sup>When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. <sup>25</sup>The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so, they named him Esau. <sup>26</sup>Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so, he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.*

### **Manoah, and his wife and the birth of Sampson:**

**Judges 13:1-5:** (NRSV) *<sup>1</sup>The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines forty years <sup>2</sup>There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren, having borne no children. <sup>3</sup>And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, although you are barren, having borne no children, you shall conceive and bear a son. <sup>4</sup>Now be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, or to eat anything unclean, <sup>5</sup>for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines.*

### **Elkanah and Hannah and the birth of Samuel:**

**1 Samuel 1:1-11:** (NRSV) *<sup>1</sup>There was a certain man of Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. <sup>2</sup>He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. <sup>3</sup>Now this man used to go up year by year from his town to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD. <sup>4</sup>On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; <sup>5</sup>but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. <sup>6</sup>Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. <sup>7</sup>So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore, Hannah wept and would not eat. <sup>8</sup>Her husband Elkanah said to her, Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons? <sup>9</sup>After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. <sup>10</sup>She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. <sup>11</sup>She made this vow: O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a Nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.*

**1 Samuel 1:20-22:** (NRSV) *<sup>20</sup>In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, I have asked him of the LORD. <sup>21</sup>The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. <sup>22</sup>But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the LORD, and remain there forever; I will offer him as a Nazirite for all time.*





What are the similarities and differences in the four accounts above with the account of John?

**Observations:**

**Similarities:**

- All were unable to have children.
- All either prayed or had an angelic visit to reveal God's will.
- All of the "promised" children were specially used of God, born of grace.

**Differences:**

- Two (Isaac and Jacob) were the genealogy of the promised seed Jesus.
- Two (Samson and Samuel) were to be Nazarites and prophets of God.
- John also was to be a Nazarite and a prophet.

**A bit of prophetic background on John's mission:**

Luke 1:14: (NASB) *You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.*

Haggai 2:7: (NRSV) *and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts.*

John was to introduce the one through whom this treasure and glory would eventually come.

Malachi 3:1: (NRSV) *See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight--indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.*

Luke 1:17: (NASB) *It is he who will go as a forerunner before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

The Jews knew that Elijah would come - this was proof.

(Source: Biblical commentary by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown) A religious and moral reformer, Elijah-like, he should be (Malachi 4:6, where the "turning of the people's heart to the Lord" is borrowed from 1 Kings 18:37.) In both cases their success, though great, was partial - the nation was not gained.

Isaiah 40:3-5: (NRSV) <sup>3</sup>*A voice cries out: In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup>Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

Finally, a few more quotes on greatness:

***By constant self-discipline and self-control, you can develop greatness of character.***  
— Grenville Kleiser

***The final proof of greatness lies in being able to endure criticism without resentment.***  
— Elbert Hubbard



***Your ego can become an obstacle to your work. If you start believing in your greatness, it is the death of your creativity. — Marina Abramovic***

***At a certain point, you have to kind of realize that greatness is a messy thing. — James Gray***