

John the Baptist

***Key Verse: “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”
—Matthew 11:11***

***Selected Scripture:
Matthew 11:7-15***

prepared for the Lord.”—Luke 1:5-17

When Jesus reached thirty years of age he came to John, who had been “preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” When John saw Jesus he proclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Then Jesus asked John to baptize him. When Jesus came up out of the water, “John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.”—Luke 3:2-23; John 1:19-34

Later, when John was put in prison, Jesus proclaimed to the multitudes the words of our Key Verse: “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the

BOTH MALACHI AND ISAIAH prophesied that God would select an individual who would “prepare” in advance the way of the Lord. (Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3-5; Matt. 11:10) This special ambassador was John the Baptist. The angel of the Lord informed John’s father that his wife, advanced in age as he was, would bear a son and they should name him John. The angel announced concerning John, that “many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord ... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”—Luke 1:5-17

kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”—Matt. 11:11

The expression “kingdom of heaven” refers to the spiritual phase of the Messianic kingdom, which began to be developed at the time of Christ’s earthly ministry and death. This continued at Pentecost, with the pouring out of God’s Holy Spirit upon individuals who would dedicate their lives to serve our Heavenly Father. (Acts 2:1-41; Rom. 12:1; Heb. 3:1) This heavenly calling has continued throughout the Gospel Age up to and including the present time.

One of the titles the Scriptures assign to Jesus is “Bridegroom.” As a group his faithful followers will become his “bride.” (Rev. 19:7; 22:17) John the Baptist explained, “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice.” (John 3:29) John’s ministry belonged to the prior Jewish Age, which was about to end. Yet, because he died before Jesus’ opened the invitation to be part of the “kingdom of heaven,” John would not be considered part of the “bride” class, though he rejoiced to be a “friend of the bridegroom.”

John the Baptist, along with “Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets,” will be rewarded for their faithfulness by being resurrected on earth as perfect human beings. They will be “princes in all the earth,” serving as instructors and examples for all mankind in the earthly phase of the kingdom.—Luke 13:28; Ps. 45:16; Heb. 11:4-40

When Jesus stated that “he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he,” we are not to infer that John the Baptist and all those righteous characters mentioned in the Scriptures who lived before Christ’s earthly ministry were less faithful than the Gospel church. Rather, it means merely that God will resurrect them as perfect human beings on earth, while he has promised to resurrect the Bride of Christ as perfect spirit beings, giving them immortality and the divine nature.—II Pet. 1:4; Rom. 2:7; 6:3-5; II Tim. 2:11,12 ■