

1. John 1:19-23

- Religious leaders from Jerusalem - it was customary for the Temple authorities in Jerusalem to send out Priests (Tribe of Levi *and* descendants of Aaron) or Levites (only the Tribe of Levi) to investigate events in the countryside.
- John's ministry is having an impact, and the religious leaders want to know who John thinks he is.
- There had been many before Jesus who arrived on the scene claiming to be Messiah (see [Acts 5:34-39](#)).
- Since the Messiah is the coming King of Israel, the religious authorities are concerned that it will disrupt their power in Jerusalem.

2. Who are you? -

- Christ (Messiah)? - see [Isaiah 11](#) and [Isaiah 42](#).
- Elijah? - see [Malachi 4:5-6](#)
- Prophet? - see [Deuteronomy 18:15](#)

3. The Voice of one crying:

- John the Baptist gives the religious leaders a cryptic answer as he quotes [Isaiah 40:3](#).
- Notice the quotation marks. John the Baptist says he is the "voice of one crying," and he places himself in the "wilderness."
- The voice in the wilderness then cries out with the message, "Make straight the way for the Lord."

4. Isaiah 40:3 –

- Poetic Parallelism - a common technique in Hebrew Poetry where two sentences are contrasted against one another.
- The structure of Isaiah 40:3 demonstrates:
 - 'wilderness' 'the way' 'for the Lord'
 - 'desert' 'highway' 'for our God'
- The appropriate structure of Isaiah 40:3 places the "voice crying out" in Jerusalem with the instructions that "in the wilderness" prepare the way for the Lord.

5. Wilderness –

- In Hebrew, wilderness is synonymous with desert.
- The "wilderness of Judea" was located in the desert area east of the mountains where Jerusalem is located.
- See our lesson on the uniqueness of the Hebrew word for Wilderness - <https://youtu.be/uBM2thUKwJE>

6. Rabbinic Hermeneutics:

- Hermeneutics: a method for deriving meaning from scripture.
- One Rabbinic method could be called "variant reading."
- Variant readings of scripture can occur due to ancient Hebrew lacking punctuation.

7. Isaiah 40 -

- Isaiah 40 begins the "Book of Consolation"
- The overall message of Isaiah 40 is that Israel's God will return to Jerusalem and "reign" as king.
- [Isaiah 40:9](#) - we find the "good news" or "Gospel" coming to Jerusalem.

8. The Essenes at Qumran:

- [The Essene sect of Judaism](#) was a group of priests who rejected the corrupt Temple authority from the 2nd century BC through the 1st century AD.
- Isaiah 40:3 was central to their mission as they went out from Jerusalem into the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord.
- John the Baptist is from the priestly line of Aaron and grew up in the "wilderness." There are many similarities between John the Baptist and the Essene sect, although most scholars do not think John was an Essene.
- Dead Sea Scroll Community Rule -

"When these become the Community in Israel, they shall separate themselves from the session of the men of deceit in order to depart into the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord; as it is written: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make level in the desert a highway for our God." This the study of the Torah, which He commanded through Moses to do... and according to that which the Prophets have revealed by His Holy Spirit."

Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 8:12b-16a
Rule of the Community