

It was customary in Jerusalem to send people out to investigate miracles or other happenings in the countryside.

Gospel writers want to ensure the original readers know that Jesus is the Messiah and not John the Baptist.<sup>1</sup>

[Malachi 4:5-6](#)

[Deuteronomy 18:15-19](#)

[Isaiah 40:3](#)

Were they expecting that either the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet would be baptizing?

A prominent theme is John is the comparison of baptism with water (living water) and spirit (living water) - see [John 7:37-39](#)

**19** And this is John's testimony, when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

**20** And he confessed, and did not deny, but he confessed, "I am not the Christ."

**21** And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

**22** They said therefore to him, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

**23** He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

**24** (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.)

**25** And they asked him, "Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

**26** John answered them, saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands one whom you do not know.

**27** He is the one who comes after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to loosen."

**28** These things were done in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Testimony/Witness - a major theme in John as the entire Gospel is a testimony to who Jesus is for those who had never seen him alive. ([Jn. 20:29](#))

See also Josephus on Jesus<sup>2</sup>

[Isaiah 40](#) was an important chapter for both the Essenes (Dead Sea Scrolls) and the early Christian sect - called "the Way." (see Paul's comment in [Acts 24:14](#))

This is a Rabbinic method of making an interpretation of the Hebrew Bible by changing the punctuation.

Compare the punctuation in Isaiah 40:3 with the same verse as it is quoted in the NT.

"Bethany across the Jordan" is most likely northeast of the Sea of Galilee - the region of Batanaea (OT - Bashan)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Josephus on John the Baptist - <https://josephus.org/JohnTBaptist.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Josephus on Jesus - <https://josephus.org/testimonium.htm>

<sup>3</sup> The Lexham Bible Dictionary: "The most likely solution is that the phrase is meant to represent Batanaea (Old Testament Bashan), the region of the Transjordan, not a specific city."