

Matthew 11:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

Analysis

Jesus escalates His praise: 'But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.' The crowds rightly recognized John as a prophet—the first authentic prophet in Israel after 400 years of silence since Malachi. But Jesus declares John is 'more than a prophet' (περισσότερον προφήτου/ perissoteron prophētou). How? Verse 10 explains: John himself was prophesied in Scripture, and he directly prepared the way for Messiah. While other prophets foretold Christ's coming, John announced His presence. He stood at the culmination of Old Testament prophecy, the hinge between old and new covenants. John didn't merely predict the Messiah; he baptized Him, identified Him to Israel, and decreased so Christ could increase (John 3:30). Reformed theology sees John as the last and greatest representative of the old covenant era, the final voice pointing beyond itself to Christ. His greatness lay not in himself but in his proximity to and proclamation of Jesus.

Historical Context

From approximately 400 BC (Malachi) until John the Baptist's appearance around 27-29 AD, Israel had no recognized prophets—a period called the 'intertestamental period' or '400 silent years.' During this time, Jewish hope for prophetic renewal intensified (1 Maccabees 4:46, 14:41). When John appeared, wearing prophetic garb, calling for repentance, and speaking with authority independent of the priestly establishment, the people's response was electric. Josephus records that multitudes flocked to hear him. John's message combined prophetic call to

repentance with apocalyptic urgency: 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matthew 3:2). His baptism of repentance prepared Israel for Messiah's appearance. Jesus's validation of John countered any who dismissed John's inquiry (v.3) as disqualifying. Even from prison, facing death, John remained God's chosen forerunner.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 – God is love

John 15:13 – Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does John's role as 'more than a prophet' highlight the significance of the shift from Old to New Covenant?
2. What does Jesus's generous defense of John teach about how God views His servants who struggle with doubt while maintaining faithfulness?
3. In what ways should John's self-effacing ministry ('He must increase, I must decrease') shape Christian leadership and ambition?

Interlinear Text

ἀλλὰ	τί	έξήλθετε	ἰδεῖν	προφήτου	ναί	λέγω	ὑμῖν
But	what	went ye out	for to see	A prophet	yea	I say	unto you
G235	G5101	G1831	G1492	G4396	G3483	G3004	G5213

καὶ περισσότερον προφήτου
and G4053 A prophet
G2532 G4396

Additional Cross-References

Luke 1:76 (Prophecy): And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

Matthew 14:5 (Prophecy): And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

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