A voice in the wilderness

The chief priest from the Temple in Jerusalem had sent three of his most trusted elders to investigate. But John the Baptist was quick to see, day by day, that the river’s banks were always brimming with people.

“We’re lucky if we even get a chance to speak to him,” Benjamin, one of the elders, said when they arrived. “He certainly does have a wild appearance.”

The man called Simon chuckled. “What would you look like if you had spent most of your life living alone in the desert among the wild beasts?” They say that this John the Baptist eats only locusts and honey.

Why would he choose such a life for himself?” Eli asked. “His parents died years ago and left him well off. As the story goes, he was born to a priest and his elderly wife when they should have been grandparents. One day while Zechariah, his father, was serving at the temple an angel appeared to him and foretold the birth of John.

“Let’s better be careful with our investigation,” Simon advised. “I know we’ve had plenty of false prophets before. And a few dead years since we’ve seen a true prophet. But John the Baptist has a considerable following.”

Some are claiming that John is the prophet, Elijah, come back to earth, the river’s banks were always brimming with people. “It does not matter who I am,” John replied. “I am merely a voice in the wilderness making the way for he who comes after me.”

“We have been sent here by the chief priest from Jerusalem,” Simon asked him abruptly. “Who are you?”

“Who is coming after you?” Eli queried.

“John the Baptist was a faithful witness in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to the chief priest,” Simon continued. “I am just his witness.”

As the three elders looked on, people lined up and waded into the river where John baptized them. He seemed to be tireless. It was several hours before the crowds thinned down and he stepped out of the Jordan River. "We have been sent here by the chief priest from Jerusalem," Simon explained, "Who are you?"

"He is a madman! The Baptizer's senses have been scorched by the desert sun," Eli said, laughing heartily. "By the way, Simon, what did you mean about even more serious talk concerning him?"

"There are many who insist that John the Baptist is the long-awaited Messiah," Simon replied. "Impossible!" Benjamin said. "If the Messiah were here, we would certainly know."

Simon was not able to hide his annoyance. "Speak plainly! What shall we tell the chief priest?"

"The one coming soon is the prophet, Elijah, come back to earth, the river’s banks were always brimming with people. "If you were, you would be willing to do what is necessary to change your lives!" John said. "I am merely a voice in the wilderness making the way for he who comes after me."

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The Jordan River has long been a place of historic significance for the Hebrew nation. In ancient times, Joshua led the Hebrews across the river to take possession of the Promised Land. It was also the site of the miraculous healing of Naaman, a Syrian war general. The prophet, Elisha, instructed him to go and wash in the river to be cured of leprosy.

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