

## John the Baptist

- I. **(JOH 1:6)** There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
- A. His name was by divine order, the first so named in that family line. **LUK 1:13, 59-63.**
  - B. His name in Greek was *Ioannes* (SRN G2491), which, according to Thayer, means, "Jehovah is a gracious giver."
    - 1. That Greek word, according to Brown-Driver-Biggs Hebrew Dictionary, is from the Hebrew *Yochanan* (SRN H3110), which means, "Jehovah has graced."
    - 2. God graced His people (and mankind) with a very special child at a special time to have a special ministry, a special ordinance, a special contact with Messiah.
    - 3. John had much grace but proclaimed Christ as the Fount of grace. **JOH 1:15-17.**
  - C. He was a man, not an angel or spirit. He therefore was subject to human passions and weaknesses as other men, even his type. **JAM 5:17.**
  - D. He was sent from God. c/w **MAL 3:1; 4:5-6; JOH 1:33; 3:28.**
    - 1. Christ authenticated his sending. **MAT 11:10.**
    - 2. Christ cornered the chief priests and elders on this point. **MAT 21:23-27.**
    - 3. True ministers are sent from or by God. **GAL 4:4; JOH 17:18; 20:21; ACT 13:2-4.**
    - 4. Not every professed minister is thus sent. **2CO 11:12-15.**
  - E. His name became universally associated with a title: John the Baptist. Christ affirmed this form of recognition. **MAT 11:11-12.**
    - 1. He was also "...called the prophet of the Highest" (**LUK 1:76**).
    - 2. He was the greatest prophet up to that point in time, but the least prophet of the post-resurrection era was greater than him since such had the full gospel knowledge by the Holy Ghost. **2PE 1:19-21.**
    - 3. John the Baptist at the end of his ministry was unsure of Christ but John the Apostle was very sure of Him. **MAT 11:2-3 c/w 1JO 1:1-3; 2:22; 4:1-3.**
  - F. He was called John the Baptist because he dipped/immersed in water those who came to him for baptism where there was much water. **JOH 3:23.**
    - 1. Martin Luther testified to immersion and even rendered **MAT 3:1**, "John the Dipper."
    - 2. "...let Luther, the father of Lutheranism, speak: 'Baptism is a Greek word, and may be translated immersion, as when we immerse something in water that it may be wholly covered, and although it is almost wholly abolished (for they do not dip the whole, i.e., children, but pour a little water on them), they ought to be wholly immersed...for that the etymology of the term seems to demand.'" (J. R. Graves, The Act of Christian Baptism, p. 28)
    - 3. "St. Paul alludes to the manner in which Baptism was ordinarily conferred in the primitive Church, by immersion. The descent into the water is suggestive of the body into the grave, and the ascent is suggestive of the resurrection to a new life." (footnote on **ROM 6:3** of the Douay Confraternity Version of the Holy Bible [Roman Catholic])
    - 4. John Calvin admitted, "...Although the mere term Baptize means to immerse entirely, and it is certain that the custom of entirely immersing was anciently observed in the Church." (Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book IV, p. 524)
    - 5. "Commenting on the immersion of the eunuch he (Calvin) says: 'From this verse we clearly see what was the rite of baptism among the ancients; for they were accustomed to immerse the whole body in water. At the present time (sixteenth century) the practice has gained ground for the minister only to sprinkle water on

- the body or head.' - Cal. Inst." (J. R. Graves, The Act of Christian Baptism, p. 29)
6. "In his (John Wesley's) Notes on Romans vi:4, says: 'Buried with him, etc., alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion.'"
7. "It is true that there is no express command to baptize infants in the New Testament, no express record of the baptism of infants, and no passages so stringently implying it that we must infer from them that infants were baptized." (B.B. Warfield [Presbyterian], Studies in Theology, p. 399, cited in A String of Pearls Unstrung: A Theological Journey into Believers' Baptism by Fred Malone)
8. "Respecting the form of baptism, the impartial historian is compelled by exegesis and history substantially to yield the point to the Baptists." (Philip Schaff [Reformed], History of the Apostolic Church, p. 570)

- II. John preached before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. **ACT 13:23-25.**
  - A. That "coming" of Christ was His coming into His public ministry, not His incarnation. **MAT 3:1, 11.**
  - B. John's birth preceded Christ's by about six months. **LUK 1:36.**
  - C. John knew, though, that Christ preceded him in eternity as the Word. **JOH 1:14-15, 29-30.**
- III. John's existence and influence was impressive enough to move wicked Herod to think that Christ was the resurrected John the Baptist. **MAT 14:1-2.**
  - A. John had reproved Herod for his immorality so Herod imprisoned him and had him beheaded. **MAT 14:3-11.**
  - B. "Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the *Baptist*; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away, [or the remission] of some sins [only,] but for the purification of the body: supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness." (Josephus, *Antiquities Of The Jews*, Bk. 18, Ch. 5)
- IV. John was prophesied of conspicuously in **ISA 40:1-3; MAL 3:1; 4:5-6.**
  - A. He was *indeed* (in fact, in truth) the Elijah prophesied of in **MAL 4:5-6. MAR 9:11-13.**
  - B. He ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah. **LUK 1:17.**
  - C. Unlike Elijah or Christ, John did no miracles. **JOH 10:41.**
  - D. Yet multitudes came to him for baptism (**MAR 1:5**), a pattern and ordinance that does not need miraculous signs.
- V. Consider the parentage, generation and nativity of John. **LUK 1:5-80.**
  - A. The time was the reign of Herod the Great, the monster who ordered the slaughter of all children of two years and under. **v. 5 c/w MAT 2:16.**
    1. John would be born during a time when rising to prominence was dangerous.
    2. John would, though, be raised in privacy in the deserts. **LUK 1:80.**
  - B. John's parents are of note. **v. 5.**
    1. Zacharias (from Heb. *Zecaryah*, "Jehovah remembers") was a noted name in Israel, being that of a martyred priest (**2CH 24:20**) and a later prophet who spoke of the coming Messiah as the suffering LORD and fountain for cleansing. **ZEC 12:10; 13:1.**
    2. Zacharias was a priest in the course of Abia/Abijah. **v. 5 c/w 1CH 24:10.**

- a. Abijah's course was the eighth.
  - b. Noah was the eighth person (**2PE 2:5**), a righteous man in an ark of eight people where eight souls were saved by water (**1PE 3:20**). The significance of Noah relative to John and his rite of baptism will be explored later.
  - c. The number "eight" is associated with new beginnings.
  - d. Zacharias ministered in the O.T. temple. John's ministry would be without the temple. **LUK 3:2-3**.
3. Elisabeth was of the daughters of Aaron. Both of John's parents were Levites of the priestly Aaronic line.
- a. Elisabeth is the N.T. form of *Elisheba* (SRN H472), which means "my God has sworn" or "God is an oath." God would in this chapter be true to His word to make her a mother in old age.
  - b. Elisheba was the name of the wife of the first Levitical high priest, Aaron. **EXO 6:23**.
4. John's parents were emphatically Levitical and of priestly lineage. John would one day, though, lay his hands on and baptize the One Who would "...purify the sons of Levi..." (**MAL 3:1-4**), the knowledge of Him being the Perfect Sacrificer and Sacrifice making their offering acceptable through Jesus Christ in a New Testament. Thus we read that later a "...great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (**ACT 6:7**).
5. They were both righteous and blameless in all matters moral and religious. v. 6.
- a. That they were righteous implies imputed righteousness and practical righteousness according to faith. c/w **ROM 4:19-25**.
  - b. That they were blameless means that they were not guilty of judicial censure.
  - c. These are qualities we should aspire to. **PHIL 2:15; 2PE 3:14**.
  - d. Nothing is noted about this couple being great in wealth. God is not so much concerned about golden vessels as He is about clean vessels.
6. Yet they were old and childless because Elisabeth was barren. v. 7.
- a. Once more, at a time when the impossible seemed inevitable, God would make the barren to bear.  
c/w **ROM 4:19-25; GEN 25:21; 30:1; JDG 13:2-3; 1SAM 1:2-8**.
  - b. With God, all things are possible. **LUK 1:37; JER 32:27** c/w **MAT 19:26**.
  - c. God was not unrighteous to forget their work and labor of love. **HEB 6:10**.
  - d. The best promises by the oath of God may be long in coming but they are sure. **HEB 10:36-37**.
  - e. Let such things be a comfort to those who have labored and long-awaited to see spiritual fruit finally appear. Salvation is good in youth, and not to be thought impossible when time has marched on.  
**LAM 3:22-27; JOB 42:12; PSA 71:17-18; ROM 16:7**.
- C. Zacharias was offering the appointed incense when an angel appeared unto him in the temple. **LUK 1:8-11** c/w **EXO 30:7-8**.
1. This was one of the hours of prayer. c/w **ACT 3:1**.
    - a. Note the association of incense and prayer. **PSA 141:2; REV 8:3-4**.
    - b. It is possible that godly Simeon and Anna were present. **LUK 2:25-38**.
  2. Mind that duty is not a substitute for prayer, nor prayer a substitute for duty. The people who may be most expected to receive blessing are a people who respect the service of God's house and that His house is a house of prayer. **MAT 21:13**.
  3. The angel stood on the right side of the altar of incense. ct/w **ZEC 3:1**.

- a. Zechariah the prophet was the last person in the O.T. record that was conversant with an angel. **ZEC 1:9.**
- b. Zacharias the priest is the first person in the N.T. record to be conversant with an angel.
- c. The angel was Gabriel who also appeared to Mary (**LUK 1:19, 26**) and earlier to Daniel. **DAN 9:21.**
4. Dr. John Lightfoot (early 17th C. English churchman and rabbinical scholar) calculated that the course of Abia by the Jewish calendar corresponded to early summer (June-ish) and the portions of the law and prophets that were read in synagogues at that time agreed with the corresponding focus in the temple: the law of the Nazarites and the conception of Samson (**NUM 6; JDG 13**).
  - a. This would be quite remarkable in view of what Gabriel was about to announce to Zacharias in **vs. 13-15.**
  - b. Also, if Lightfoot is correct, and if we assume that Zacharias and Elisabeth conceived John shortly after Zacharias' course was completed, this would place the conception of Jesus Christ in December-ish since there was about a six month lapse between the conceptions. **LUK 1:36.**
- D. The angel Gabriel's presence troubled Zacharias but Gabriel comforted him and assured him of glad tidings. **vs. 12-17.**
  1. NOTE: A righteous, blameless man was troubled and afraid at the presence of this angel who would announce the coming of the man whose preaching would be the beginning of the kingdom of God (**LUK 16:16**). How much more should we fear our God Who gave us the kingdom? **HEB 12:28-29.**
  2. The word spoken by this angel was, typically, *stedfast* (**HEB 2:2**), i.e., fixed, secure. It was to be received as God's word, and believed.
  3. Zacharias' prayer was heard, *come up for a memorial before God*. c/w **ACT 10:4**.
    - a. The context later implies that Zacharias had given up on praying for a child (**v. 18**), but God remembered the earlier prayers.
    - b. Sometimes our prayers seem to be futile but present silence does not necessarily mean perpetual silence. Sometimes it is a "not yet," not "No."
    - c. Pray always (**1TH 5:17**) for good things subject to God's will since we do not have a certain word from God to stop asking, as did Moses. **DEU 3:26 c/w LUK 18:1-8.**
  4. Elisabeth would bear a son that would take away her reproach among men. **v. 25.**
  5. "...and thou shalt call his name John" (**v. 13**), not merely a prophecy but an imperative. c/w **MAT 1:21.**
  6. "And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth" (**v. 14**).
    - a. Family and neighbors rejoiced (**v. 58**) and the people marvelled. **vs. 63-66.**
    - b. Years later when he ministered, people mused whether he were the Christ. **LUK 3:15.**
    - c. The Jews were "...willing for a season to rejoice in his light" (**JOH 5:35**).
    - d. Mind that when John was born, Zacharias by the Holy Ghost first blessed God for Jesus' conception (**LUK 1:67-69**)! The Holy Ghost always glorifies Jesus Christ. **JOH 16:14.**
  7. "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord..." (**v. 15**), a greatness confirmed by Jesus, Who was/is always in perfect accord with the Father. **MAT 11:11.**
  8. "...and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink..." (**v. 15**), indicative of a Nazarite.
    - a. One theory is that John was in the priestly line and this prohibition referred to the command of Moses to the priests in **LEV 10:9**. But that command

- was to priests going to minister in the tabernacle (and would have applied later to the temple, **ISA 28:7**) and John's ministry was not in the temple but in the open public forum, beginning in the wilderness. **LUK 3:2-3**.
- b. Jesus said that "...John came neither eating nor drinking..." (**MAT 11:18**) and he indeed observed a very ascetic diet (**MAT 3:4**), as would a Nazarite. **NUM 6:3-4**.
  - c. He would be "...filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (**v. 15**), filled with the spirit, not the spirits. c/w **EPH 5:18**.
  - d. One could be a voluntary Nazarite for a season but John would follow in the vein of Samson and Samuel who were Nazarites from the womb. **JDG 13:7; 1SAM 1:11**.
  - e. As a Nazarite, John would have been "different" and "separate" and under other restrictions. **NUM 6:1-8**.
    - (1) He would have been restricted from contact with dead bodies.
    - (2) He would have had long hair, the exception to the rule for men (**1CO 11:7, 14**), which, if ignored, erases the distinction of the Nazarite's hair.
    - (3) Jesus Christ, Whose Spirit authored **1CO 11:7, 14** would not have been a "long hair."
    - (4) The Nazarite's exceptional long hair is no more a license for men in general to have long hair than the exceptional nakedness of Isaiah (**ISA 20:1-4**) or the exceptional taking of a whorish woman for marriage by Hosea (**HOS 1:2; 3:1**) are licenses for all men.
    - (5) John the Baptist would have cut quite an extraordinary figure by his wilderness beginnings, appearance, diet, etc. But his most remarkable distinction was his holy life and ministry which stood out to all men, even Herod. **MAR 6:20**.
    - (6) "Note, Frequently those have most real honour done them, who least court the shadow of it. Those who live a mortified life, who are humble and self-denying, and dead to the world, command respect; and men have a secret value and reverence for them, more than they would imagine." (Matthew Henry on **MAT 3:1-6**)
  - f. "This separation was in ordinary cases temporary and voluntary: only *Samson* (**Jdg 13:7**), *Samuel* (**1Sa 1:11**), and *John Baptist* were Nazarites from the womb. It was fitting that the utmost severity of legal consecration should be seen in Christ's forerunner. HE was the REALITY and PERFECTION of the Nazarite without the symbol, which perished in that living realization of it: 'Such an High Priest became us, who was SEPARATE FROM SINNERS' (**Heb 7:26**)."  
(Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary on **LUK 1:15**)
9. "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God" (**v. 16**).
    - a. But not all. **LUK 7:29-33**.
    - b. John even turned such away from his baptism. **MAT 3:7-10**.
    - c. Of the Nazarite, Samson, it was said, "...he shall **begin** to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (**JDG 13:5**). So also with John, whose ministry paved the way for Christ Who would save God's Israel from temporal enemies and spiritual enemies and finish our faith. **LUK 1:69-75 c/w MAT 1:21; HEB 12:2; PHIL 1:6; 1TH 5:23-24**.
  10. "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of

the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (v. 17). Like the stones of Solomon’s temple made ready for that O.T. edifice, John without the temple would make ready a people prepared for the Lord and His kingdom. **1KI 6:7 c/w MAT 3:1-3.**

- a. This is exactly what the last two verses of the O.T. prophecy declared. **MAL 4:5-6.**
- b. Godly prophets, apostles, preachers and angels declare “...none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.” **(ACT 26:22). c/w GAL 1:8-9.**
- c. Jesus declared that John the Baptist was Elias/Elijah *indeed* (in actual fact, in reality, in truth; really, truly, assuredly, positively). **MAR 9:11-13.**
- d. Malachi’s prophecy implies that there was a general breakdown of the family in its duty and relationship relative to God in 1st C. Judea, an interesting parallel to **ISA 38:19. c/w DEU 4:9; PSA 78:1-8.**
- e. Elijah worked miracles but not John. **1KI 17-18 c/w JOH 10:41.**
  - (1) The Jews typically looked for miracles to confirm a prophet. **1CO 1:22.**
  - (2) Yet in the absence of observable miracles, the people held John to be a prophet and heeded him. **MAT 21:26.**
  - (3) The work of the Spirit on the inward man convicting of sin is itself a miracle of grace. **1CO 1:18.**
  - (4) Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is both conviction and release. **2CO 3:15-18.**
- f. But like Elijah, John “came out of nowhere” and preached righteousness to a generation swallowed up in carnal interests and lusts to turn them unto the Lord. **1KI 18:37-39 c/w MAR 1:1-5 c/w MAT 6:31-34; MAR 10:23-27.**
- g. Elijah reprov’d all who needed to repent and turn to God: false prophets, the people, and royalty (**1KI 18:17-21**). So also did John. **MAR 6:17-18.**
- h. Elijah’s ministry was unique, fiery, illuminating (**1KI 18:22-24**). So also was John’s, spiritually. **MAT 3:7-12; JOH 5:35.**
- i. Elijah’s ministry was highlighted by water and fire (**1KI 18:37-38**). So John baptized with water and spoke of Christ baptizing with fire. **MAT 3:7-12.**
- j. Elijah’s zeal for the Lord slew the wicked carnally (**1KI 18:40**). John slew the wicked spiritually by the words he spoke. c/w **HOS 6:5; ACT 5:32-33.**
- k. Elijah and John had similar garb and appearance. **2KI 1:8 c/w MAT 3:4.**
- l. Elijah and John turned “...the disobedient to the wisdom of the just” (v. 17). **1KI 18:39 c/w LUK 7:29.**
- m. “THERE is something grand, even awful, in the almost absolute silence which lies upon the thirty years between the Birth and the first Messianic Manifestation of Jesus. In a narrative like that of the Gospels, this must have been designed; and, if so, affords pre- sumptive evidence of the authenticity of what follows, and is intended to teach, that what had preceded concerned only the inner History of Jesus, and the preparation of the Christ. At last that solemn silence was broken by an appearance, a proclamation, a rite, and a ministry as startling as that of Elijah had been. In many respects, indeed, the two messengers and their times bore singular likeness. It was to a society secure, prosperous, and luxurious, yet in imminent danger of perishing from hidden, festering disease; and to a religious community which presented the appearance of hopeless perversion, and yet contained the germs of a possible

regeneration, that both Elijah and John the Baptist came. Both suddenly appeared to threaten terrible judgment, but also to open unthought-of possibilities of good. And, as if to deepen still more the impression of this contrast, both appeared in a manner unexpected, and even antithetic to the habits of their contemporaries. John came suddenly out of the wilderness of Judæa, as Elijah from the wilds of Gilead; John bore the same strange ascetic appearance as his predecessor; the message of John was the counterpart of that of Elijah; his baptism that of Elijah's novel rite on Mount Carmel. And, as if to make complete the parallelism, with all of memory and hope which it awakened, even the more minute details surrounding the life of Elijah found their counterpart in that of John. Yet history never repeats itself. It fulfils in its development that of which it gave indication at its commencement. Thus, the history of John the Baptist was the fulfilment of that of Elijah in 'the fulness of time.'

(Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, p. 274)

- n. So emphatic and distinguishing was Elijah's ministry in Israel, that his very appearance apparently became a uniform for false prophets. **ZEC 13:4.**
- E. Zacharias was doubtful about the promise and was struck dumb in judgment. **vs. 18-25.**
  - 1. His doubt concerned perceived human limitations.
    - a. Often, our moments of weakness of faith follow this pattern and hinder us from living freely and fully by the promises of God.
    - b. Our inadequacies and limitations are the very instruments of God bringing glory to Himself. **2CO 12:9-10.**
    - c. Believers need help with their own unbelief and this is something to pray about. **MAR 9:24.**
  - 2. In Zacharias' defense, his doubting was little different from Abraham's. **GEN 17:17.**
  - 3. "...thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed..." (v. 20).
    - a. God, Who can make a dumb ass speak (**2PE 2:16**) can also make a speaking man mute, and can stop the mouth of a gainsayer. **TIT 1:11 c/w MAT 21:27; ACT 4:14.**
    - b. If it seems strange that a good man through unbelief should lose the ability to speak, consider that it is not uncommon for a man who speaks the language of unbelief to also lose the language of praise and thanksgiving.
    - c. "...these things..." must refer to **vs. 13-15**. See **vs. 63-64**.
    - d. Zacharias would be speechless during John's conception and gestation, also unable to lead his family in devotional prayers.
  - 4. Zacharias' faith recovered enough that he acted appropriately in spite of a chastening, something we all do well to remember. **HEB 12:5-11.**
  - 5. Elisabeth conceived as promised: the unbelief of man does not thwart the faith of God. **ROM 3:3-4.**
- F. This chapter describes three people as being *filled with the Holy Ghost* relative to John the Baptist: Zacharias, Elisabeth and John himself. **vs. 15, 41, 67.**
  - 1. Under this fullness, their words and actions were definitely spiritual and not according to the flesh. **GAL 5:17.**
  - 2. We may conclude our words and actions spiritual when they accord with the Spirit's revelation and instruction. **GAL 5:22-23 c/w ROM 8:5.**
  - 3. As special as were these individuals, none of them had the fullness of the Spirit to

the same degree as Jesus Christ. **JOH 3:34.**

4. It is interesting, though, that such a concentration of sinners being filled with the Holy Ghost at this time was the preparation for Christ Whose Spirit would come to fill, feed and flow from believers of all makes.

**JOH 7:37-39 c/w ACT 2:4, 16-18; 11:15-18.**

G. The *personality* (the fact of being a person as distinct from a thing) of the conceived unborn is evident from the events of **vs. 39-45.**

1. Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John the Baptist. **LUK 1:36.**
2. Elizabeth was *filled with the Holy Ghost and spake* (**vs. 41-42**), terms descriptive of inspired prophecy. c/w **LUK 1:67.**
3. What she went on to say was by inspiration from God.
4. Like David, she in spirit called the Messiah *Lord*. c/w **MAT 22:42-45.**
5. Therefore, her description of the babe in her own womb (**v. 44**) was not mere poetry.
  - a. The babe LEAPED. This is personally initiated action.
  - b. AS SOON AS THY VOICE SOUNDED, the babe leaped. This is responsive action.
  - c. The babe leaped FOR joy. This is purposeful action.
  - d. The babe leaped for JOY. This is emotive action.
6. This unborn babe manifested the attributes of personality: intelligence, purpose and emotion.
7. The case of John the Baptist in the womb also shows that the Spirit of God is able to work His power on sinners prior to birth, instruction, faith, works, etc.

**JOH 3:8; 6:63 c/w ECC 11:5.**

H. Elisabeth gave birth to a full-term child, a very special production for a woman of old age, and he was evidently of good health and mind. That she in old age was saved in childbirth and her child hale and whole were further expressions of God's grace and mercy to that family. **vs. 57-66.**

1. Zacharias and Elisabeth continued in their righteous, blameless conduct (**LUK 1:6**) and circumcised John according to the Abrahamic order. c/w **GEN 17:12.**
2. They also at that time officially named him John. c/w **LUK 2:21.**
3. As a good and godly wife, Elisabeth insisted on honoring the design of God and her husband over the suggestion of friends and family. Zacharias had no fear of spoil with this good wife. **vs. 59-60 c/w PRO 31:11.**
4. "And they made signs to his father..." (**v. 62**). He was dumb, not deaf. Folks are funny sometimes.
5. "And he asked for a writing table..." (**v. 63**). This was a table which could be as easily immersed as a pot for washing. c/w **MAR 7:4.**
  - a. NOTE: Where there is a will to do good, obstacles need not be complete barriers to the performance. **2CO 8:1-5.**
  - b. Little Zacchaeus climbed a tree (**LUK 19:3-4**); godly friends figured out a way to get the palsied man an audience with Jesus (**MAR 2:1-5**). Paul learned to be content and committed in spite of personal challenges. **2CO 12:7-10; PHIL 4:11-13.**
  - c. Zacharias' faith had not been crushed by his chastening but fortified. He was adamant now about the angel's message: "His name is John."
  - d. The chastening of dumbness promptly ended and he praised God (**v. 64**), a curious example of "...I believed, and therefore have I spoken..." (**2CO 4:13**).



6. All this created a great fear and stir in the hill country to a people who had for centuries looked for signs to confirm prophets. **vs. 65-66 c/w PSA 74:9.**
7. Of John, "...And the hand of the Lord was with him" (v. 66).
  - a. This was similarly said of his type, Elijah. **1KI 18:46.**
  - b. He was "...filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (**LUK 1:15**) and never cast away that strength as did the other Nazarite, Samson. **JDG 16:20.**
  - c. The hand of God which had written the Law on Sinai was upon John who would baptize Christ Who fulfilled the Law for us. **ROM 10:4.**
- I. Zacharias erupted in praise to God first for Messiah, as noted earlier (**vs. 67-75**) and then prophetically addressed the child, John. **vs. 76-80.**
  1. He would be "...called the prophet of the Highest..." (v. 76), conspicuously by Christ Who identified John as such in fulfillment of the promised *messenger of the LORD* in **MAL 3:1**. See **MAT 11:9-10.**
  2. He would "...give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us..." (**vs. 77-78**). Dayspring means *daybreak, early dawn*.
    - a. Christ is the *Sun of righteousness which arose with healing in his wings*, per **MAL 4:2.**
    - b. John constantly informed the people that Christ was the true salvation of sinners. **JOH 1:7-9, 29.**
    - c. Sins would be *remitted* (forgiven, pardoned) according to *mercy*, not sinners' works, which Christ eventually did by his own blood, terminating the futile offerings for sin under the Law. **MAT 26:28 c/w ROM 3:25; HEB 9:12, 22-28; 10:18; TIT 3:5.**
    - d. "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death..." (v. 79), beginning in Galilee of the Gentiles. **MAT 4:12-16 c/w 2TI 1:9-10.**
  3. "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit..." (v. 80).
    - a. Compare this with what was said of Christ as a child. **LUK 2:40.**
    - b. The scriptures are given for spiritual strengthening, that God-loving children may find Christ in them all. **2TI 3:15 c/w ACT 10:43.**

VI. John "...waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts until the day of his shewing unto Israel" (**LUK 1:80**).

- A. That day came at a notably identified time. **LUK 3:1-2.**
  1. The sceptre had departed from Judah: they were a subjugated nation under Gentile dominion. Therefore the time of Shiloh/Messiah was at hand. **GEN 49:10.**
  2. The seventy weeks of Daniel's prophecy of Messiah's anointing could be generally known as being current by chronologies and genealogies. Could the promised kingdom of God be at hand? **DAN 9:24-27; 2:44 c/w LUK 3:15.**
  3. The priesthood in Judah was as corrupt and contemptible as Malachi had declared. **MAL 2:1-10.**
  4. The long dormant voice of prophecy was awakening, as witness the prophetic utterances of Elisabeth and Zacharias (**LUK 1:41-42, 67**) and this should have aroused the godly concerning the expected prophet, Elijah. **MAL 4:5.**
- B. John likely began his ministry at about his thirtieth year (c/w **LUK 3:23**) in keeping with the Law concerning the beginning of priestly ministration. **NUM 4:3.**
- C. By this time, under the care of godly parents who knew the scriptures and that John was slated to be a special messenger, and the fact that "...the hand of the Lord was with him"

(**LUK 1:66**), John was himself well studied in the scriptures of things of God in general, of the times, of the priority of Messiah, and of his own role. He had indeed waxed strong in spirit. With the light he had, he spoke with authority and was not "...A reed shaken with the wind..." (**MAT 11:7**).

D. Remember that there are three distinct O.T. passages that spoke of John the Baptist.

**MAL 3:1; 4:5; ISA 40:3.**

1. The gospel evangelists used both Malachi and Isaiah in describing John.  
**MAT 3:3; 11:10-11; MAR 1:2-3; LUK 3:4.**
2. But John only cited **ISA 40:3** when he was asked what he said of himself.  
**JOH 1:22-23.**
3. It seems that John gave particular attention to the prophecy of Isaiah, and with good reason.

E. The Book of Isaiah (*the book of the words of Esaiias the prophet*, **LUK 3:4**) is rich with prophecy of Christ, His work, His kingdom and His times, and penned by a man who had seen the LORD, yet lived. **ISA 6:1-10 c/w EXO 33:20.**

1. Isaiah declared the virgin conception and virgin birth of *The mighty God* Who would reign continually on David's throne. **ISA 7:14; 9:6-8.**
2. Isaiah saw the sufferings of the LORD Christ as integral with His glory.  
**ISA 6:9-10; 53:1 c/w JOH 12:37-41 c/w HEB 2:9; 1PE 1:21.**
3. The Lord Jesus Christ preached His first recorded sermon from this book.  
**LUK 4:17-21.**
4. Isaiah's chapters parallel the entire number of books of the Bible (66) and the fortieth chapter which announces comfort to God's people is the beginning of the gospel era by John. **ISA 40:1-5 c/w MAR 1:1-4.**
5. "There are not so many quotations in the gospels out of any, perhaps not out of all, the prophecies of the Old Testament, as out of this; nor such express testimonies concerning Christ, witness that of his being born of a virgin (ch. 7) and that of his sufferings, Isa 53:1-12. The beginning of this book abounds most with reproofs for sin and threatenings of judgment; the latter end of it is full of good words and comfortable words." (Matthew Henry Commentary)
6. There is so much of Christ in Isaiah that he has been called the Fifth Evangelist, and Paul refers to Isaiah's words as the gospel. **ROM 10:15-16.**
7. Isaiah speaks of:
  - a. An eschatological outpouring of the Holy Spirit associated with the wilderness and water.  
**ISA 32:15 c/w MAR 1:3, 8; ISA 35:1-10; 40:3; 41:18-19; 43:19-20.**
  - b. Israelites as the children of Abraham. **ISA 51:1-2 c/w MAT 3:9.**
  - c. Unfaithful Israel portrayed as a brood of vipers. **ISA 59:5 c/w MAT 3:7.**
  - d. Wind/breath/spirit and fire compared to a river in which one is immersed.  
**ISA 30:27-28, 33; 43:2 c/w MAT 3:11-12.**
  - e. Israel as the threshed and winnowed one. **ISA 21:10 c/w MAT 3:12.**
  - f. Israel washed clean. **ISA 1:16; 4:3-4; 52:10-11 c/w MAR 1:4.**
  - g. Works of righteousness attached to washing.  
**ISA 1:16-17 c/w MAT 3:8, 11; LUK 3:10-14.**
  - h. The Messiah as God's sin-bearing Lamb. **ISA 53:6-7 c/w JOH 1:29.**
8. "Two other qualities must be noted in Isaiah — his spirituality and his tone of deep reverence. The formal, the outward, the manifest in religion, are with him absolutely of no account; nothing is of importance but the inward, the spiritual, the 'hidden man of the heart.' Temples are worthless (Isaiah 66:1); sacrifices are

worthless (Isaiah 1:11-13; 66:3); the observance of days is worthless (Isaiah 1:14); attendance at assemblies is worthless (Isaiah 1:13); nothing has any value with God but real purity of life and heart — obedience (Isaiah 1:19), righteousness, ‘a poor and contrite spirit’ (Isaiah 66:2).” (Pulpit Commentary)

9. Isaiah showed that God's redeeming mercy is likened to the flood of Noah when sin was buried under water and the survivors exited their ark-coffin to new beginnings. **ISA 54:7-10 c/w 1PE 3:20-21.**
10. For the better part of thirty years, John was waxing strong in spirit, and evidently much so in the Book of Isaiah which spoke so much of Christ, His kingdom, cleansing and washing away of sin, spiritual religion, etc., and of himself as the Lord's messenger from the wilderness to go before Him to prepare the people for Him.

VII. The beginning of John's ministry was a watershed moment in God's program. **LUK 16:16.**

- A. The prophesied kingdom of God was preached as being “at hand” and people were actively pressing into it by faith, repentance, confession of sins, and baptism.

**MAT 3:1-6; 21:31-32 c/w LUK 7:29-30.**

1. This was a movement which was not political liberation/ascendancy or building/rebuilding/beautifying an earthly temple but spiritual reform.
2. The prophets had said that God would in time pour out His Spirit. **ISA 32:14-15; 44:3; JOEL 2:28-29.**
3. This season began with the revival of the spirit of prophecy (as noted earlier), became substantive with John's ministry, and culminated in the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. **ACT 2:16-17.**
4. Remember that John was not just a man with a message: he was sent from God (**JOH 1:6**), His messenger. **MAR 1:2.**

- B. The actual nature of John's ministry to “...make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (**LUK 1:17**) is important.

1. Some Dispensationalists affirm that John's ministry was to prepare the people to receive their long-awaited king who would restore the throne of David in Jerusalem in place of the Roman/Herodian rule and establish an earthly kingdom and empire.
2. Here are three reasons why such a theory is wrong:
  - a. Scripture consistently declares that John came to prepare a people for a Messiah-Savior, not an earthly king. **ACT 13:22-26.**
  - b. Until John rebuked Herod for personal sin, *Herod heard him gladly* (**MAR 6:20**), which he certainly would not have done if John were preaching about a new government to displace Herod's.
  - c. Christ later rebuked Israel's leaders, not because they rejected John's message of an earthly king, but because they had not believed John when he came to them “...in the way of righteousness...” (**MAT 21:32**).
3. John's emphasis, as Isaiah's, was righteousness and he demanded repentance before baptism and afterwards. **MAT 3:2, 8, 11.**

- C. John's ministry was not the first time that washing with water, even by immersion, was affirmed.

1. There were *diverse washings* under the law of Moses (**HEB 9:10**), such as the washing of priests for service, washing of garments and vessels, washing of sacrifices, washing of defiled or diseased bodies, etc. **EXO 30:17-21; LEV 1:9; 14:8; 15:5.**
2. There were priestly washings, and John was in the priestly line. But John's ministry

- addressed the washing away of sin associated with repentance, per **ISA 1:16-17**.
3. "...John burst on the scene as a virtual mutant, for his rite of baptism, though outwardly similar to Temple lustrations, was wholly without precedent in its meaning...John's rite was so unique that he was named by it ('the Baptizer'), and Jesus clearly regards it as given to John by revelation from God (Mark 11:27-33)." (Walter Wink, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 372)
- D. (**MAR 1:4-5**) John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.
1. remission: Forgiveness or pardon of sins (cf. 2) or other offences.
  2. The Law provided for a priestly atonement for sin which required a carnal sacrifice at the tabernacle/temple and even confession, but not necessarily repentance. **LEV 4:27-35; 5:5-8**.
  3. But John ministered without the temple, demanding repentance of those who believed his message both before and after their washing of baptism, and received all who willingly received his message, regardless of sex or rank. **MAT 21:31-32; LUK 3:10-14**.
  4. John did not require a carnal sacrifice of which he, as the Aaronic priests did, could benefit personally by partaking of the sacrifice. **LEV 6:25-26**.
  5. Nothing about John's ministry implied a formulaic ritual to satisfy the Law by sacrifice without a genuine reform in the life of the sinner.
  6. NOTE: There are two senses in which sins are remitted through Jesus Christ.
    - a. The *eternal penalty of sin* for God's people (death, eternal separation from God) has been taken away by the one-time blood-sacrifice of Jesus Christ when He fulfilled the will of the Father. **HEB 9:12, 22-28; 10:9-18**.
    - b. The *temporal burden and consequence of sins* of God's people (guilt, alienation, chastening) may be remitted through faith, repentance and baptism which joins one in accord and fellowship with God through Jesus Christ Who in faith forgives their future sins upon their confession. **ACT 2:37-41; 22:16 c/w 1JO 1:7-9**.
    - c. John's "...baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (**MAR 1:4**) was the opening of the door of the new kingdom order which was grounded in Jesus Christ Who remits sins for God's believing people in all nations. **LUK 24:46-47; ACT 10:43**.
- E. Noah was a link between two worlds (pre-flood, post-flood) and John was a link between two testaments/orders.
1. Noah's experience of salvation by water was a figure of our salvation by Jesus Christ, which salvation is now figured by baptism. **1PE 3:20-21**.
  2. Noah was a righteous federal head for whose sake his house was saved. **GEN 7:1 c/w ROM 5:18**.
  3. Noah was "buried" with his family in an ark/coffin from which they emerged intact to a new world. The ark was a womb which held the promise of life, even as Christ's entombment was actually the promise of life to us. c/w **COL 2:12-13**.
  4. John's baptism was the opening of the aperture of the better Light. **JOH 1:4-9**.
  5. With better light, one gets better pictures. Baptism is a better figure of our salvation by a righteous Man in Whose death, burial and resurrection/emerging we share. **ROM 4:24-25**.

VIII. John's ministry generally had broad acceptance. **MAT 3:5**.

- A. The people were for a season willing to rejoice in his light. **JOH 5:35.**
- B. But John did not use the crafty sophistry of the religious leaders. c/w **2CO 4:2.**
1. He was not a warm, fuzzy light but a burning one. **JOH 5:35.**
  2. He did not try to zealously affect men with pretended care.  
**GAL 4:17 c/w 2SAM 15:1-6 ct/w 1TH 2:5.**
  3. He was resolute, steadfast, unwavering. **MAT 11:7.**
  4. He was not a light and treacherous preacher who soft-pedaled his message to avoid offending the hearers. ct/w **ZEP 3:4.**
  5. He did not cater to men's vanities with emotion-based preaching or carnal experiences. He didn't even do miracles. **JOH 10:41.**
  6. He was very much what a modern Baptist preacher should be: frank, diligent, steadfast, fact-oriented, Scripture-oriented, practical, honest, without miracles, dunking only penitent believers and giving Christ preeminence.
- C. He knew what he was dealing with and called men out for what they were in spite of potential backlash.
1. He called the religious leaders a "...generation of vipers..." (**MAT 3:7**).
  2. He called the multitude a "...generation of vipers..." (**LUK 3:7**); it was an "...adulterous and sinful generation..." (**MAR 8:38**).
  3. He did not excuse the publicans because of their civic duty or the harlots because they were victims of circumstances or bad choices. **MAT 21:32.**
  4. He did not let Herod's veneration for him stop him from reproving Herod.  
**MAR 6:17-18.**
- D. Though he himself followed a restricted regimen of food and drink (**LUK 7:33**), he never demanded that his converts must do likewise.
1. If someone has conscience issues about using wine for communion because John never drank wine, it should be noted that he also didn't eat bread.
  2. NOTE: we should not callously violate conscience but conscience can be both misled by false assumptions and also relieved by truth. Conscience is a guide but the truth of God's words is the best guide. **PSA 119:128.**
- E. Consider how practical John was in his instruction to humbled folk in various walks.  
**LUK 3:10-14.**
1. He affirmed discretionary charity to the desperate for the needs of the body.  
**v. 11 c/w ISA 58:7; JAM 2:15-17.**
  2. He did not force the publicans to quit their work, only to purify it. **vs. 12-13.**
  3. He did not forbid soldiers their service but to do no *violence* (The exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property; action or conduct characterized by this; treatment or usage tending to cause bodily injury or forcibly interfering with personal freedom) nor resort to graft. **v. 14.**
  4. However, we do not read of where John permitted harlots to continue their walk.
    - a. harlot: 1. A vagabond, beggar, rogue, rascal, villain, low fellow, knave. In later use (16–17th c.), sometimes a man of loose life, a fornicator; also, often, a mere term of opprobrium or insult. *Obs.*
    - b. harlot: 5. Applied to a woman. **a.** As a general term of execration. (Cf. 1.) *rare.* **b.** A female juggler, dancing-girl, ballet-dancer, or actress. (Cf. 2.) *Obs.* **c. spec.** An unchaste woman; a prostitute; a strumpet.
    - c. John would have some choice words about current women's standards.  
**c/w 1TI 2:9-10.**
    - d. John's reproof of Herod was also a reproof of Herodias. **MAR 6:19.**
  5. Nothing about John's ministry implied isolation from society as necessary.

- F. Consider John's message to the multitude. **LUK 3:7-9.**
1. "...who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (v. 7).
    - a. John would have known about the 70th week of **DAN 9:26-27** which spoke of the utter destruction of Jerusalem, etc.
    - b. That wrath came to the uttermost. **LUK 21:23 c/w 1TH 2:16.**
    - c. "**wrath to come** is not meant hell fire, everlasting destruction, from which baptism could not save them; but temporal calamity and destruction, the wrath which in a little time came upon that nation to the uttermost, for rejecting the Messiah, and the Gospel dispensation; from which they might have been saved, had they given credit to Jesus as the Messiah, though only with a bare assent; and had they entered into the kingdom of heaven, or Messiah, the Gospel dispensation, by receiving its doctrines, and submitting to its ordinances, though only externally." (John Gill on MAT 3:7).
    - d. The future "...great day of his wrath..." (**REV 6:13-17**) is only escaped because Jesus Christ Himself has delivered us from it. **1TH 1:10; 5:9.**
  2. John denounced any notion of descent from Abraham as being a substitute for repentance. **v. 8.**
    - a. This was a vain conceit of the religious leaders also (**JOH 8:33-40**) and remains a stumblingblock unto this day to Jews and deluded Christians.
    - b. "The God that had called Israel out of Egypt and led it across the Jordan River was now creating a new people by passing them through the waters of baptism in that same river. The twelve stones that had been set up to mark Israel's crossing of the parted Jordan (Josh. 4) would themselves be raised up into twelve new tribes if the people of Israel would not repent."  
(Walter Wink, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, pp. 371-372)
  3. Repentance, faith and baptism to walk in newness of life were the identifiers of the kingdom of God that John was introducing. **c/w ROM 14:17-18.**
  4. Compare the chopping of **v. 9** with **LUK 13:1-9**. Israel was due to be chopped down by the end of Jesus' ministry but God gave it a little more time to bring forth the fruits of repentance.
- G. John's conversation was so holy and his message so profound that the people wondered if he might be the promised Messiah/Christ but he ever affirmed that he was only a bit-player to introduce the Christ. **LUK 3:15-18.**
- H. The Jews sent a committee of Pharisee Levites and priests to query John. **JOH 1:19-25.**
1. They had expectations of three notable characters potentially appearing: Christ, Elias, that prophet.
    - a. The Christ was prophesied of pointedly in **PSA 2** and **DAN 9**.
    - b. Moses had declared a special miracle-working prophet to come. **DEUT 18:18-19.**
    - c. Elijah did not die (**2KI 2:11**) and was expected to reappear, per **MAL 4:5.**
  2. John denied that he was any of those, which prompted the committee to ask, "...Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?" (**v. 25**). They evidently associated a watery rite like John's with major players and changes.
  3. The Jews had a number of notable "immersions" in their history and scriptures to lead them to this association.
    - a. The Flood was an obvious immersion which began a new era.
    - b. Moses "baptized" Israel through the Red Sea unto a new era. **1CO 10:1-2.**
    - c. Joshua "baptized" Israel through Jordan unto a new era. **JOS 3:14-17.**

- d. Elijah divided Jordan to pass through it in another virtual immersion and be translated. **2KI 2:7-11.**
- 4. Whatever they were reasoning about John was likely tied to the concept of immersion in water indicating a great change. And it should! **ROM 6:4.**