

## 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**.
1. This was one of the hours of prayer. Note the association of incense and prayer. **PSA 141:2; REV 8:3-4**.
  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 this 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**.
  - 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**.