

## JOHN THE BAPTIST - HIS PERSON AND HIS WORK

### INTRODUCTION

1. Malachi Closes The Old Testament With The Promise Of the Return of Elijah.
    - A. Malachi 3:1: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.
    - B. Malachi 4:5: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."
  2. These Scriptures Are Fulfilled In The Person of John The Baptist. (Matt. 11:14): "And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come."
    - A. Luke 1:17: "He (John) will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, '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."
    - B. Matthew 17:10-13: "And His disciples asked Him saying, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must first come? Then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Elijah truly is coming first, and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.
- I. THE PERIOD FROM MALACHI TO JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS TRULY A GREAT ONE.
- A. POLITICALLY: THE WHOLE BALANCE OF POWER SWUNG FROM THE EAST TO THE WEST.
    1. Persian Empire From 550 to 331 B.C.
      - a. Jews Return to Palestine, Rebuilt Walls, Temple Worship Restored.

2. Alexander The Great

- a. Crossed Hellespont 334 B.C.
- b. Conquered What is Now Called Turkey 333 B.C.
- c. Conquered Palestine and Egypt by 331 B.C.
- d. Persia Fell to His Generals in That Same Year
- e. He Died of a Fever in Babylon After a Night of Revelry at the Age of 33.
  - (1) His Conquests Spread Greek Customs and Language.
  - (2) 

These Ideas Formed the Basis of That Eastern, Mediterranean Culture When Rome Took Over From the Second Century B.C. Onwards.
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3. Alexander's Empire Was Eventually Divided Three Ways After Much Fighting. (276 B.C.)

- a. House of Seleucus - Got Babylonia, Syria, Asia Minor.
- b. House of Antigonus - Got Macedonia and Greece.
- c. House of Ptolemy - Got Egypt and Palestine.
- d. Palestine Was Constantly Fought Over by the House of Seleucus and House of Ptolemy. (From 276 to 199)
  - (1) In 199 B.C., Antiochus III Finally won Palestine from the Ptolemies.

Note: The Jews had fared well under the Ptolemies. A translation of the Old Testament had been made in the Greek language for the Jews living in Egypt,

- (a) But under the Seleucids, oppression was to be the lot of the Jews.

4. The Jewish Revolt Under The Maccabees (Gained Independence from 164 to 63 B.C.)

5. Rome Takes Palestine and Jerusalem in 63 B.C. - Under the Roman General Pompey.

a. Antipater The Idumaean Became The Rule of Judea.

b. Herod The Great - His Son Succeeded Him in B.C. 37 and He Died B.C. 4.

(1) Herod The Great Divided Palestine Among His Three Sons:

(a) Archelaus - Became Ethnarch of Judea, Samaria, Idumaea.

(b) Antipas - Became Tetrach of Galilee, Peraea and The Jewish Territory East of the Jordan.

(c) Philip - Became Tetrarch of the East and North of Sea of Galilee.

c. Tiberius Became Caesar at the Death of Augustus.

(1) He Installed Pontius Pilate as Governor of Judea from A.D. 26.

(a) Archalaus had been exiled to Gaul by the Romans.

(b) They appointed a Roman Governor Over Judea.

(i) Coponius became the First Governor 6 - 9 A.D.

(2) It Is in This Politican Climate That John Came Preaching.

(a) Luke 3:1-3: "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea and Herod (Antipas) being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrach of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness, and he

went into all the region around Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

B. RELIGIOUSLY: THE EIGHTH TO THE FIFTH CENTURY GAVE RISE TO THE GREAT RELIGIONS.

1. This Period Was to Give Rise To:

- a. Zoroastrianism in Persia.
- b. Taoism in China.
- c. The upanishads of India.
- d. Buddhism and of the precursors of Hinduism in India.
- e. The Orphic-Pythagorean Movement in Greece.
- f. The Hebrew Prophets.

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Whitley says of this period that "Changes of a political and intellectual nature were hence passing over the ancient world. From the Nile to the Tigris, armies were on the march, and from the Pacific Ocean to the shores of Asia Minor, the mind of man was astir. An old age was passing away; new forces and new ideas were coming into being and were imparting freshness and vitality to an outworn and stagnant world. It was the beginning of the age of philosophy, science, and theology, and marked the first step in man's advance from tradition and credulity to argument and reason."

The Exilic Age, p. 3.

C. PHILOSOPHY: THIS IS THE GOLDEN AGE OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY WHICH HAS INFLUENCED THE WORLD.

1. Plato. (427-347)
2. Aristotle. (364-322)
3. Eolyhius. (204-122)
4. Cicero. (106-43)

## II. IT WAS INTO THIS WORLD THAT THE FORERUNNER OF THE MESSIAH WAS BORN.

A. Luke 1:5-17: "There was in the days of Herod (The Great) the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they both were well advanced in years. So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid; Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb."

### B. Zacharias Tells Us of John's Mission.

1. Luke 1:76-80: "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest: for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation, to His people by the remission of their sins... To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. So the child grew, and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel."

2. Dwight L. Moody has well said on this passage:

9 "Notwithstanding the wonders attending John's birth, for thirty years he dropped out of sight. Many events had taken place during that period. The Roman Emperor had died; Herod, who had sought the lives of the young children when he heard that Jesus was born King of the Jews, was dead; the shepherds were gone: Simeon and Anna, the prophet and prophetess, were gone; the father of John the Baptist was gone; and all the rumors that were afloat at the time of John's birth had died out and were forgotten, when all at once he burst upon the scene like the flashing of a meteor. There was a voice heard in the wilderness, and the cry

came, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" There had been a long line of prophets. He was the last prophet of the Law; he was to close up that dispensation; he stood upon the threshold of the new age, with one foot upon the old and the other upon the new dispensation. He told them what had taken place in the past, and what would take place in the future."

Bible Characters, pp. 107-108.

C. John Began To Preach In The Wilderness of The Jordan Valley.

*Describe  
The Desert  
From Jerusalem  
EASTWARD*

1. He Announced the Coming of the Kingdom.

- a. Luke 3:3-6: "And he went into all the region around Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill brought low; and the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."
- b. Matthew 3:1-2: "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

2. He Condemned The Hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

- a. Luke 3:7-9: "Then He said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."
- B. Matt. 3:7: "But when he saw many of the Parisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

3. John Denied That He Was The Christ But Pointed To Jesus As The Lamb of God.

- a. John 1:19-28: "Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you? He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ. And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' Are you the prophet? And he answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, "Who are you? that we may give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said. Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them saying, "I baptize with water: but there stands One among you whom you do not know: It is He who, coming after me is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."
- b. John 1:28-34: "These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is He of whom I said, "After me comes a Man who is preferred before me: for He was before me. I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water. And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him: but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.'"

4. All Judea Came Out to Hear This Desert Preacher Who Reminded Them of Elijah.

a. Matthew 3:3-6: "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.' And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins."

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b. Mark 1:4-6: "John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey."

c. "The Bank of the Jordan Was His Pulpit, the desert his home; when his message was delivered, he retired again into the wilderness. His food was locusts and wild honey; there was not a beggar who did not fare better than he. He did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. He kept back nothing ... Day after day, as he came out of the desert and stood on the banks of that famous river, you could hear his voice rolling out, "Repent. For the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Like Elijah, he was intrepid and uncompromising. He did not preach to please the people for he denounces their sins."

Moody, Bible Characters, pp. 110-111

5. John Continued To Baptize Even After Jesus Started His Personal Ministry.

a. John 3:22-24, 4:1-2: "After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and they came and were baptized. For John had not yet been thrown into prison. ... Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus

Himself did not baptize, but His disciples). He left Judea and departed again to Galilee."

6. John Is Beheaded by Herod Antipas Because He Had Denounced His Marriage to Herodias.

- a. Recorded In Mark 6:14-29 and Matthew 14:1-13.
- b. Herodias was the wife of Herod's Half-Brother and he had taken her.

NOTE: Philip, the husband of Herodias, is not to be confused with another half-brother who was the Tetrarch of Ituraea. This half-brother lived in Rome.

- c. 

The daughter of Herodias who danced before Herod is called <u>Salome by Josephus</u> , but the Gospel writers do not mention her name.
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d. John Was Probably Put Into Prison At Machaerus.

(1) Edersheim says that, "A rugged line of upturned squared stones shows the old Roman paved road leading to the fortress, in which, according to Josephus, John the Baptist was confined."

(2) Smith, in his Days of His Flesh, says that "John's disciples conveyed their master's mutilated corpse, it is said, to Sebaste, the capital of Samaria, not far from Aenon, the scene of his later ministry, and buried it there beside the tombs of Elisha and Obadiah."

III. OUR MASTER PAYS A GREAT TRIBUTE TO JOHN THE BAPTIST WHEN HE HEARD THAT HE WAS DEAD.

- A. Luke 7:24-28: "When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?" Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I sent My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You." For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

(See also Matthew 11:8-14)

Contrast to Modern "Ministers".

B. John Is The Type of Preacher We need Today.

1. A Good Percentage of Our Preachers Are Effeminate.
  - a. They are afraid to get their hands dirty. In fact, physical labor is beneath them.
  - b. Even their handshake is like shaking with a fish.
2. They Dare Not Condemn Sin For What It Is.
  - a. They think they are doing the brethren a favor by being a jolly-good fellow.
  - b. They are afraid of their jobs and plan to play it "cool."
3. Our World Needs a John the Baptist to Cry Again and Again "Repent ...."

IV. AT ABOUT THE AGE OF THIRTY, OUR MASTER CAME TO THE JORDAN TO BE BAPTIZED OF JOHN.

- A. Luke 3:21-23: "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased' ... Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, ... ."
- B. Mark 1:9: "It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan."
- C. Matthew 3:13-17: "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him. Then Jesus, when he had been baptized, came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"

Foster says, "The New Testament offers exactly ten verses as the historical record of the baptism of Jesus. Luke tells the story in two verses, Mark in three, and Matthew in five verses. John does not describe it, but alludes to it by presenting the impressions of John the Baptist concerning it."

Studies in the Life of Christ, Vol. I, p. 323