

## John the Baptist – Fore-runner of Christ

Matthew 3:1-12; 11:7-15; 14:4-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-20; John 1:19-28

Jesus heralded John the Baptist as the greatest man ever born when He said, “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist:” (Matthew 11:11) Let’s take overview this man and learn what caused Jesus to say this of him. All four Gospels record the ministry of John the Baptist. This is significant, very few events are found in all four Gospels.

### I. John the Baptist’s Character

- A. Obedient to his calling – When asked who he was by the Religious Leaders in John 1:19-22, John the Baptist quoted Isaiah 40:3. He saw himself as that voice preparing the way of the Lord. He had been called before conception and John was obedient to that calling. Luke 1:76
- B. Showed no partiality – We will see that John the Baptist’s audience was a very diversified. They came from every background, socially, economically, and religiously. He never played favorites or adjusted his message to fit the crowd. He was true to his ministry and without partiality!
- C. Willing to preach a hard message to a tough crowd - Luke 3:10-14 - I’m not sure who would have been harder to preach to: Roman soldiers, Religious leaders, tax collectors, cynical Jews, or a wicked king! John the Baptist had a difficult crowd. And remember the bulk of his message was repentance!

### II. John the Baptist’s Background:

- A. Born after a series of miracles - angel appeared to his father, father struck deaf/dumb, parents old, leaped in his mother’s womb at sound of Mary’s voice, father received his speech/hearing back at circumcision
- B. Fulfilled Prophecy – Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1, 4:5-6 – All four Gospels make this fact very clear. John the Baptist was a fulfillment of prophecy and ultimately a fulfillment of prophecy to the coming of Christ! Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:2; Luke 3:4; John 1:23 He was sent from God. John 1:6
- C. Always named John - John was named of God and his name given by Gabriel to Zachariah
- D. Born a priest - John was born into a family of priests. Both his parents were from priestly lines.
- E. Called of God to be a prophet - Matt 11:7-10; Luke 1:76; 3:2; John 1:6 – God called John the Baptist to the special job of preaching repentance to the people, preparing the way of the Messiah! Luke 1:17 tells us he came in the spirit of Elijah; both came preaching repentance.
- F. Preached outside normal religious circles – Began his ministry about 28 AD (Luke 3:1-2)

1. Location – We are told that John preached in the wilderness all around the Jordan River extending down along the western shore of the Dead sea. This was a barren waste land but the people actually came to him! Luke 3:2-3, 7 Matter of fact, when God was ready for John to begin preaching, he was already in the wilderness! Matt. 3:5, Luke 1:80
2. Dress – Matthew 3:4 John was quit the sight to see. Camel’s hair and a leather girdle was not the mainstream fashion in that day. He was dressed like a prophet, and the people knew it! (2 Kings 1:8; Zech.13:4)
3. Diet – John the Baptist lived off the land to what was available, locust and honey! This was the diet of the very poor or desperate. We know several people in the Bible that ate honey. Eating locust was allowed by the law! Lev. 11:22

### III. John the Baptist’s Audience:

- A. John’s audience came from all over Israel. Matthew 3:5; Mark 1:5 Jerusalem – Largest city/Religious center; Judea – “state” greater area; Jordan – surrounding areas
- B. Multitudes came to hear him! The multitudes flocked to John because of the authority and freshness of the truth he gave. His message of repentance and a turning to God was set as a preparation for the coming Messiah!
  1. Religious leaders – saw themselves as righteous Matthew 3:7, John 1:19 Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, Levites They saw themselves as in good standing with God because of who they were – Abraham’s sons John preached directly to this need by calling them vipers needing repentance. Matt. 3:7-10
  2. Social outcasts – saw their needs Luke 3:10-15 Publicans, soldiers These knew they were sinners and wanted to change. They were not deceived by their belief system or standing. These were the people who were looking for the Messiah and they wondered if John was He.

### IV. John the Baptist’s Message:

Contrary to the religious thought of the contemporary Jews - Matt. 3:9 Jews believed that with Abraham as their father, it was their birth, not faith in God, that determined their **standing with God**.

1. Spoke of judgement - Urgency - Matthew 3:2, 7-8 This was always a message of prophets and the Israelites hadn’t had one for over 400 years! Those that listened knew this was a prophet. He looked like one and he preached like one! John was a fearless prophet. He confronted the sins of the Roman soldiers, Religious leaders, and even the king.
2. “Repentance for the remission of sins” Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3 Repentance was an unusual message in that day and age. This repentance was more than words, sorrow, a prayer, or even baptism! It was leaving sin behind, turning to God in faith, and obedience to God that resulted in change in conduct.

3. Show fruit of repentance Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8 Just as fruit is the natural by-product of a fruit tree, so good works and good conduct is produced by true repentance.
  
4. Declared the coming baptism of the Holy Spirit Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8 In the Greek, these verses seek to show a deep contrast between John and Christ. John was used of God to prepare the way for the Jesus the Messiah. But the One who was greater, Jesus, will bring men under the influence of the Holy Spirit.
  
5. “bear witness of the light” John 1:7-9 John’s message was Messianic! Here we find Jesus called the Light. Light illuminates, I like light at night, I like a good nightlight, - I like to walk into a room and see what is in my path. I like to wake up and know where I am and find where I want to go! I am sure I have cost my husband plenty over the years in burning extra light. Here Jesus is called an illuminator---what does He reveal? His Father! In verse 18 John goes on to explain, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (Other English translations – revealed, interpreted, made known, shown, expounded, made plain, brought him to light, unfolded the full explanation) Later in John 8, Jesus will say, “I am the light of the world.” John the Baptist came to introduce that Light!
  
6. Prepare for the Kingdom of heaven Matthew 3:2 John the Baptist preached repentance because that is the beginning to become a child of the Kingdom of heaven. Ultimately, that heart is one that is broken over sin and seeks to follow God. Jesus will have a message close to this! But instead of staying prepare for the Kingdom of heaven, He tells His listeners “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 4:17)

## V. John the Baptist’s Baptism:

- A. Old Testament Baptism – Baptism was not new for the Jews. This was an Old Testament practice which might be done differently depending on purpose – washing, sprinkling, dipping. Most often it pictured cleansing from sin, cleansing from contamination, consecration to something new, and identification with something. proselytes, Passover cleansings, priests cleansings mikveh – 700 found in Israel; 200 – Jerusalem, 50 - Temple Mount
  
- B. John’s Baptism – “immersion”- Ever wonder how our English language refers to John as John the Baptist. It actually has to do with the type of baptism he performed. A better translation or literally it means, John the Baptizer or Immerser. 8 different translations use Baptizer and two use the word Immerser. This means John dipped those that came to him. His name indicates it and the need to be near the Jordan River. This was also the mode of baptism for Jesus’ followers. (and continues to be)
  1. Took place over a long period of time Mark 1:5 “baptized” Gk indicate over a long period of time.
  
  2. It was a sign of true repentance of sin. Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:4 Repentance came first, then baptism.

3. It was a picture of a greater baptism coming. Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16 Acts 19:1-7
4. It was NOT an action that gave forgiveness it showed repentance John's baptism was an outward sign of an inward decision! Baptism could never and continues to be powerless to remove sin! Only the blood of Jesus can wash away sin! I John 1:7 "...the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

## VI. John the Baptist's Attitude toward Christ:

- A. Not worthy to be Christ's servant Matt. 3:11, Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16 Sitting down in the dirt and putting on or removing shoes, and washing feet was done by the lowest level servant in the house. And this is where John the Baptist, the prophet sent from God, saw himself! Who was John the Baptist talking to? Matt. 3:7 – the Religious Elite Really, none of us are worthy to serve Jesus, yet He loves and chooses us!
- B. John's job was to prepare and declare the Messiah. John 1:6-9, 15; 3:23-30 Jesus will verbalize this fact in Matt. 11:9-10
  1. Realized Christ was eternal. John 1:15 eternal creator of all
  2. Realized Christ would give light John 1:7-9 the awaited Messiah
  3. Realized Christ was worthy to be followed John 1:35-40 John was not jealous of his disciples but knew Christ was the One that should be followed.
  4. Realized Christ would be exalted over himself. – John 3:30

**VII. Christ's Attitude toward John the Baptist:** Matthew 11 John was the last great prophet sent from God, but yet he was a sinful man that became impatient with God in the depths of discouragement. In Matt. 11 John sent a message from prison to Jesus asking, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" Jesus graciously revealed through action who He was and then went on to give a beautiful accolade on John the Baptist. This is where He said,

1. (vs. 9) "yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet."

The world talks about clearly defined purposes in one's personal life, their work, and home. In the case of John the Baptist God gave him purpose and responsibility before he was even conceived! But the truth is we all have God-given jobs throughout the different stages of our lives. Prayerfully consider what your purposes are at this time of your life and write them down. Try and attach a Bible verse to as many as you can.

2. (vs. 11) "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist:"

## VIII. John the Baptist's Martyrdom:

John was killed for preaching against the adultery of the king. Matt. 14:4-12 We will cover this incident in the life of Christ, but I do want to say John was consistent in his preaching against sin and the need for repentance. Herod Antipas did not like being called out for his sin and put John in prison and was later tricked into killing John. Mark 6:18-20, 26

Please realize, by this time, Jesus had been introduced to the world and His ministry begun. The purpose for which God sent John had been completed.

### **Believer's Application:**

The world talks about clearly defined purposes in one's personal life, their work, and home. In the case of John the Baptist God gave him purpose and responsibility before he was even conceived! But the truth is we all have God-given jobs throughout the different stages of our lives. What are your purposes are at this time of your life? Let's consider some from these areas and support the purpose with Bible verses: [This is from HW Vol. 2 #1](#)

Spiritual and Ministry Life:

Homelife:

Relationships:

Personal Life: