

Character Study: John the Baptist
Part 1 - The Forerunner of Jesus Christ
Luke 1-3

What's happening?

- John the Baptist was born to Zacharias and Elizabeth. His birth had been predicted to Zacharias by the angel Gabriel, though Zacharias initially questioned how he and his wife could bear a child in their old age. Yet, the angel told of how their son would prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. Because of his doubts, Zacharias remained mute until the birth of their son. (1:5-24, 57-80)
- John was a wilderness man. He wore clothes of camel's hair and had a leather belt. For food he ate locusts and wild honey (note Mark 1:6).
- While in the wilderness, the word of God came to John and explained his mission. John understood that he was the one referred to by the prophet Isaiah as "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight..." (Is. 40:3-5; Luke 3:1-6; John 1:22-23). Jesus testified that John was the fulfillment of Malachi's promise as well (note Mal. 3:1a; Matt. 11:7-10).

What's God doing?

> There had been 400 years of "silence" following the conclusion of the Old Testament and the time of John the Baptist. With the arrival of John the Baptist, God was declaring that He was about to act again in history.

> It is interesting to see how God used these years of silence to set the stage for the arrival of Jesus Christ. With the expanse of the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great, followed by the powerful Roman Empire, Israel became a mix of Hebrew, Greek, and Roman cultures. This resulted in an increased interest in philosophical and religious thought. It also brought persecution to Jewish people (for example, from Herod the Great), which caused many Jews to spread out to surrounding countries. Such things drew more attention to Jesus and His message, and enabled a means for the gospel to easily spread to other countries (note Gal. 4:4).

What's to learn?

→ Just as the prophecies of John the Baptist came to pass according to God's perfect timetable, so too will prophecies concerning the future!

→ Though John the Baptist's mission was unique, we must recognize that God can also use our lives today to prepare the hearts of others to receive Christ when we demonstrate godliness and point others to Him!

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