

## Let The Bible Speak Series

Ronny F. Wade

### His Name Was John

Good morning and welcome to Let The Bible Speak. It is really good to have you with us today. Our study today is based on Luke 1:59-63. These verses tell of the birth of John the Baptist. At his birth the question was asked "what shall be his name?" "His mother answered and said, No he shall be called John. But they said to her, there is no one among your relatives who is called by this name. So they made signs to his father, what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, 'His name is John' so they all marveled." This event opens during the reign of Herod, known historically as Herod the Great, a savage Idumean. He was a descendant of Esau and fully as profane as his fore-father. We are also introduced to Zacharias, a priest of the course of Abijah (uh BIGH juh) And his wife Elizabeth, who was also a descendent of Aaron, her name meaning "God is an oath." She was a cousin to Mary the mother of our Lord.

This Godly couple, conducted themselves in the fear of God, and walked in harmony with all His commandments and ordinances. But they were childless. Being childless was considered a deplorable state among the Jewish people. One day as Zacharias executed this duties in the temple of the Lord a strange thing happened. About 3:00 in the afternoon an angel of the Lord appeared unto him. The angel was on the right hand or north side of the alter. Such a sight struck fear into Zacharias. But the angel said unto him "fear not" thy supplication is heard, and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. "And thou shall have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth." "Many shall rejoice" has reference to the message he would bring about the coming Messiah. "He shall not drink wine nor strong drink" supports the idea that John, like Samson, Samuel, etc would be a Nazarite for life."

I. John, The Forerunner For Christ According to Mt. 3:1-4 John came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. The wilderness of Judea was an almost uninhabitable mass of barren ridges extending the whole length of the Dead Sea, and a few miles farther North. It is from five to ten miles wide, and lay along the western bank of the Jordan. He was not sermonizing, but crying out a message like a king's herald. Or like a policeman crying "fire" in a slumbering town. His message was one of repentance i.e. change your will in reference to sin, resolving to sin no more. The Kingdom of God is at hand. It is approaching, getting near.

**He Came to Prepare the Way for Jesus.** A forerunner was one sent before a king to see that the way was prepared. His coming was written in the prophets. Isa. 40:3 "The voice of one crying in the wilderness; 'prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" Mal. 3:1 "Behold I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare the way of the Lord." He was there to lay the groundwork for the coming Christ and His Kingdom. "The law and prophets were till John, since then the Kingdom of Heaven is preached." Mt. 11:13 It was the signal of a new order. He was the harbinger of better things to come. He did not go to the people, but compelled them to come to him.

**John Himself. Mt. 3:4.** What kind of person was John? How did he live? His manner of life probably differed from that of his disciples. He did not demand that they adopt his lifestyle. His clothing was

made of camel's hair, not the finer hair but that which was coarser and shaggier. His girdle that bound his garments to his body was made of undressed leather, not silk or linen (the usual fabric used) His food: locust (declared clean Lev. 11:22) They were like our grasshoppers. Honey was plentiful.

**The Crowd Mt. 3:5-11** "there went out unto him all the country of Judea, and all they of Jerusalem and all the region round about the Jordan." Not literally everybody, but a huge crowd. Great preachers usually go to where the people are. Not so with John. He went to the wilderness, the people came to him. They were baptized of him in the river Jordan.

### **The Baptism of Jesus. Mt. 3:13-17**

One day Jesus appeared and requested baptism of John. John felt that Jesus did not need his baptism. It certainly was not for the remission of sins. For Jesus explains "suffer or permit it that we might fulfill all righteousness." The baptism of John was a precept of God, given by his prophet. Jesus wanted to comply with the precept. Hence he was baptized to "fulfill all righteousness."

II. John, The Baptizer Part of the work of John, when he came preparing the way for the Lord, was to induce people to repent and be baptized. Mark 1:4 "John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Luke 3:3 "And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," Those people who heard John preach and refused to repent and be baptized, were in disobedience to God, because God so ordained it. To reject the act, was to repudiate him who commanded it, the Lord himself. So today, anyone who refuses to be baptized for the remission of sins, is repudiating God who through his inspired ambassadors commanded it. Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 2:38 and 1Peter 3:21. The people and publicans, when they heard John preach baptism for the remission of sins, "justified God being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized of him." Luke 7:29-30. If those people who rejected God's counsel by refusing to submit to the baptism John preached, were in rebellion to God for this, how much more the guilt of those who regard as unimportant and refuse to submit to the baptism which Christ commanded. Question: were those baptized with John's baptism re-baptized on Pentecost? No. Those people baptized by John became a part of the body which, on Pentecost, constituted the New Testament church. To assume otherwise is to conclude that even the apostles were in their sins until that day; and, there is no indication that any were baptized on that day except those addressed by Peter as having been apart of the movement, who had condemned Christ and encouraged his death. It is specifically stated that those who responded to Peter's command to be baptized "for the remission of sins" were added to "the church" (KJV) or "unto them" (ASV). One does not add something to nothing; hence it follows that the body of disciples which became the nucleus of the New Testament church on the day of Pentecost consisted of John's disciples, plus those garnered by the Lord and his associates prior to that day. The twelve who were baptized by Paul in Acts 19:1 had submitted to John's baptism after the day of Pentecost and after the baptism of the great commission became effective, after the beginning of the Christian dispensations.

### III. John, The Friend of the Bridegroom. John 3:22-30

These passages indicate that the disciples of John were concerned over the success Jesus was having in baptizing people. John essentially says "this is the way it is supposed to be." "I am not the Christ, I came to prepare the way for him." He then uses a figure of the bridegroom and the friend of the bridegroom, or we might say "the best man." The friend of the bridegroom served an important role at ancient weddings by arranging many of the details. Yet he did not take the bride, for the bride belonged to the bridegroom. John planned for the coming of Christ, the bridegroom. He now realizes that his work is finished, for the bridegroom's voice is already heard and Israel is responding to the call of Jesus. In the O. T. Israel is pictured as God's bride: Isa. 54:5 "For your maker is your husband..." Jere. 3:20 "Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt

treacherously with me O house of Israel, says the Lord." Jesus pictures himself as the bridegroom in Mark 2:19-20 "And Jesus said to them, Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then, they will fast in those days." The church is pictured as the bride of Christ in the New Testament. Rev. 21:9, 22:17. If Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride, then the church should wear the name of the bridegroom, not the name of the "friend of the bridegroom or best man." John pointed out that "He (Christ) must increase, but I must decrease." He was not filled with envy, for he realized that his work was being fulfilled in Christ assuming his rightful place in God's plan. Mt. 11:11 "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist: but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." How could this be? John was great, but he was never in the kingdom. The kingdom had not been established at that time, hence those who were privileged to enter it, were greater than John. The new age held greater privileges and blessings than John enjoyed.

#### IV. John, The Preacher.

Mt. 14:1-12 John was known for his plain, straight-forward manner of preaching.

He did not beat around the bush. People both knew what he said and what he meant.

He called the Jews "offspring of vipers" and demanded that they bring "forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance." Mt. 3:7-8 His message to tax-collectors was "extort no more than that which is appointed you" And to soldiers "extort from no man by violence, neither accuse any one wrongfully" Luke 3:13-14. Sinners may not have liked his message, but they knew where they stood. At some point in the past John had come face to face with Herod, and had preached to him his message of repentance.

John did not soft-pedal the truth. "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." Mark 6:18

Herod's marriage to Herodias was wrong for three reasons: 1. He was already married; 2. she was his niece; and 3. she was his brother's wife. Jewish law forbade a man's marrying his brother's wife, even after the brother's death, much less while he was still alive; the one exception being that when a man died without an heir, his brother was commanded to marry the deceased's widow and produce an heir to his estate (Lev. 18:16; Deut. 25:5-10). Herod had imprisoned John because of the hatred of Herodias, and shows what an evil influence can sometimes be exerted by an unprincipled woman in high place. John did not belong to that school of preachers who are always careful not to "stick out their necks." John felt no need to please men. Gal. 1:10 "For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." He was willing to take hold of and deal with vital subjects which directly affected his hearers. To beat around on the question of Herod's marriage would have been hypocritical. John refused that. On the occasion of his birthday the daughter of Herodias (Salome) came and danced, performing her seductive gyrations before the King and all present. He was greatly pleased by her lewd dancing and made an extravagant promise to supply her with anything her heart desired, even unto half of his kingdom. The giddy, irresponsible request came at the instigation of her mother, who was still smarting under John's fearless rebuke of her incestuous marriage with Herod.

As Burton Coffman remarked "one can only pity the little fool of a dancing girl who might have received something truly desirable instead of the ghastly thing she asked."

Herod sent and had John beheaded. We are not told how John received the abrupt message. There was no trial, no appeal, no compromise. He was gathered up and taken to the executioner, and his head delivered on a platter to those requesting it. "His name was John." What a man, what a preacher he was. One has to believe that without fear he walked the last few steps, placed his head on the crude block and died in the triumphs of a living faith. His disciples who loved him so much came and took his body for burial. This wonderful little baby born to unsuspecting parents, who had the great privilege of announcing to the world, the coming of its redeemer, now rested in the presence of the God he served.