

JOHN THE BAPTIZER

WHO WAS JOHN THE BAPTIST? He is credited by the religious world with many things today. Perhaps some of those things he did not do. We are not trying to take away from John, the baptizer, we should say. What we are trying to do is tell it like the Bible tells it.

Jesus introduced His John the baptist to His disciples in this way, (9 "*But wherefore went ye out? to see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. (10) This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way before thee. (11) Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*" (Matthew 11:9-11)

What a great tribute and honor Jesus bestowed on this cousin from the hill country of Judea. For this was a country preacher that even the city folk traveled to hear: MARK 1:5 "*And there went out unto him all the country of Judaea, and all they of Jerusalem; And they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*" He was accepted, even by them, as a great prophet from God.

NO SPIT AND POLISH HERE

A lot of people today, and many of them in the church, would be offended by such a "rustic", barbaric preacher in today's cultured society. The Bible continued description of him in MARK 1:6 "*And John was clothed with camel's hair, and {had} a leathern girdle about his loins, and did eat locusts and wild honey.*" Most people believe that John ate of the swarms of locusts that often infest that land. But visitors to the site of David and Goliath's contest, will be enlightened by their guides by stripping the locusts of their heavy beans, and feed them to the visitors. They are now sweet and savory, but they can easily sustain life. There are plenty of bees in that part of the country and they produce wild honey. This sustained the wilderness hill man, and he was content without the kings feasts. Jesus asked, "(25) *But what went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that are gorgeously appparelled, and live delicately, are in king's courts. (26) But what went ye out to see? a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. (27) This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way before thee.*" (Luke 7:25-27) Those who flocked to hear him preach saw one clothed in camel's hair, and wearing a leather girdle about his loins. He wasn't dressed for afternoon tea! He came to preach, to the souls lost in sin and steeped in hundreds of Jewish tradition that was standing in the way of their salvation.

THE MESSAGE WAS CHALLENGING

Addressing the religious leaders of his day, when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said unto them, "*Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance: (9) and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. (10) And even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*" (Matthew 3:7-10) He evaded no hard problems in dealing with the publicans and soldiers, but bluntly told them what they had to do.

(12) "And there came also publicans to be baptized, and they said unto him, Teacher, what must we do? (13) And he said unto them, Extort no more than that which is appointed you. (14) And soldiers also asked him, saying, And we, what must we do? And he said unto them, Extort from no man by violence, neither accuse {any one} wrongfully; and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:12-14)

Then he said to the rest saying unto them all, "*I indeed baptize you with water; but there cometh he that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and {in} fire.*" Luke 3:16

THE PURPOSE OF JOHN'S BAPTISM

The purpose of John's baptism is still largely misunderstood today. Even among Bible scholars there are differences. John cannot be properly appreciated and neither can the new testament church without a proper understanding of it. Notice the following scriptures: Mark 1:4 "*John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins.*" Luke 3:3 "*And he came into all the region round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins;*"

They were baptized for the remission of their sins! Some say that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance or a baptism of preparation. John's baptism, unmistakably, according to these scriptures, was for the remission of sins. We have associated baptism and salvation too often to argue otherwise the meaning of this plain teaching in the scriptures.

On Pentecost, Peter set forth this same plain teaching: ACT 2:38 "*And Peter {said} unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the*

remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". Later Paul added his note to this: (Acts 19:4-5) (4) *"And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus. (5) And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus."* They were baptized because they had been baptized with John's baptism after it has expired, if you please. Jesus had come, given his life on the cross, and it had been made known by the Father he was the one to be heard. From Pentecost the baptism into Christ was the only authorized baptism. Since they had not been properly baptized into Christ they could not be added to His church, therefor they were baptized again.

HIS GREATEST BAPTISM

Candidates for John's baptism came from all parts of Israel:(Matthew 3:13-15)
(13) *"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. (14) But John would have hindered him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? (15) But Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer {it} now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffereth him."* You accept the rule, but suffer the exception: so why did John resist? Because his baptism did not fit the need; for Jesus was an exception! John's baptism of repentance was for the remission of sins. Jesus could not repent for He had no sins of which to repent! This provided the basis for John's latter statement: (John 1:32-34) (32) *"And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon him. (33) And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize in water, he said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit. (34) And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."* This open display of God's manifestation affirmed God's approval of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ!

JESUS DEFENDS JOHN

At no time did Jesus Christ ever speak about John the baptist except in commendation. (Matthew 21:23-26) (23) *"And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? (24) And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one question, which if ye tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. (25) The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why then did ye not believe him? (26) But if we shall say, From men; we fear the multitude; for all hold John as a prophet".*

Jesus knew they couldn't deny that John was a prophet of God, and they had rejected him. They stood without excuse, yet they were trying to indict Jesus Christ, who came as John had promised. Ironically, popular belief in John had previously saved his life at the hands of Herod: (4) *"For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. (5) And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.* (Matthew 14:4-5) His acceptance by the people is seen.

Where the kingdom of God is concerned, where does John stand? Lest some should venerate John the baptist, we need to make sure this is clear. The Bible says, (John 1:6-9) (6) *"There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. (7) The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. (8) He was not the light, but {came} that he might bear witness of the light. (9) There was the true light, {even the light} which lighteth every man, coming into the world."* In these few words from John 1:6 through 9 we have office and work of John the Baptist. He was sent to bear witness of Christ and to the end that all men would believe on Christ....not on John. He testified of Christ, not John. He exalted the Christ, not himself, and was willing to bask in the influence of His greatness. He was never jealousy or envious in their relationship. Jesus said of him, LUKE 7:28 *"I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there is none greater than John: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of God is greater than he."* Now if the least in the kingdom is greater than John the Baptist, it stands to reason that John was not in the kingdom. The kingdom did not come until the day of Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of our Lord and John was dead long before that, and Jesus was crucified and arose from the grave and went back to heaven before the kingdom came.

John lived at a crucial spot in spiritual history: "The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the Kingdom of God is preached and every man presseth into it." Luke 16:16. All prophets before had proclaimed the law, and instructed in its observance. But with John, a new order began. The preaching turned to extol the kingdom of God; and all were pressed into proclaiming it. No, the kingdom had not come, but the preaching of the kingdom had. The burden of preaching was, "The kingdom of God is at hand." (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 21:31, ETC). THEY WERE NOT PREACHING :*"IT IS HERE."* But rather, "the kingdom draws nigh." It was only a short time later that we find the gospel preached in fullness to those on Pentecost, and three thousand became obedient to the faith. The kingdom began its existence, and grew mightily. Read about it in the book of Acts.