

Life of John the Baptist

Lesson 2.05

The life of John the Baptist was short, but very meaningful to Jesus Christ. Let's study the life of this great prophet.

Please read [Matthew 3:1-17](#) before starting GraspingGod.com's free Bible study lessons, #2.05

Preliminary Bible Study Questions:

- 1) What did John the Baptist eat?
- 2) What was John the Baptist's message to the Jews?
- 3) How did John the Baptist die?

The life of John the Baptist dates back to the time of Isaiah. I know that seems outlandish, but listen to John quote [Isaiah 40:3](#), "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness; Make straight the way of the Lord.'" [Malachi 3:1](#) confirms it, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts."

Like bulldozers clearing the earth for a new roadway, John the Baptist cleared religion for a new Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The Birth Of John the Baptist

John the Baptist was in God's plan long before He was in his mother's womb. He was prophesied by God's prophets hundreds of years before being conceived. John is an integral part of God's plan of redemption, which means he was actually in God's plan before anyone or anything was created. With the magnificence of God and his plan in mind, let's begin studying the life of John the Baptist.

John's father was the priest Zacharias and his mother was Elizabeth. She had been barren for her entire life – and now the two were much too old to even consider children. But the angel Gabriel visited them, and described the approaching birth. Like Abraham's wife, Sarah, Zacharias didn't believe the angel, so Gabriel cursed him by muting him until after the baby was born. John was miraculously conceived in the womb of a very aged woman.

John flipped in the womb of Elizabeth when her relative, Mary, visited with her unborn baby, Jesus. Mary remained with them for several months, as the little cousins grew in their mother's wombs. The year was about 4 B.C. when these two babies would come onto the world stage near Jerusalem. The earthly life of John the Baptist was about to begin.

Elizabeth's baby boy was born, and everyone thought they were going to name him Zacharias, or

another family name, but when Elizabeth demanded it, they turned to Zacharias, who was still mute. Through writing, he confirmed that the boy would be named John, and immediately God loosened his tongue allowing him to speak. Zacharias then beautifully proclaimed glory to his God ([Luke 1:64-79](#)). The curse God placed on Zacharias obviously brought him to repentance. There is a good lesson there for us, as well!

John the Baptist Is a Prophet

John the Baptist grew in stature and spirit, and eventually lived in the wilderness. He became much like the wild outdoors he lived in. He wore a hairy mantle, which is a cloak made from a camel. He wore a leather belt around his waist. His diet was simple – locusts and wild honey. Jesus later said that John never ate bread or drank wine, like Jesus did himself ([Luke 7:33-35](#)). Jesus was calling out the hypocrites who pointed fingers at both John and Jesus. Anyway, my point is that the life of John the Baptist was extremely simple.

Luke says the word of God came to John in the wilderness ([Luke 3:2](#)), which makes John the Baptist a true prophet. He is set apart by God to proclaim his word. John was “on mission” in the desert near Judea. This wilderness is where the Israelites were with God when they came out of Egypt. This is a place where the Jews searched for hope, and John was in the midst of it. He was on mission with a message. And the people were coming to him by the thousands, thinking that the prophet Elijah had come again.

The Message Of John the Baptist

The life of John the Baptist was lived in order to proclaim that Jesus was coming. The Messiah's sudden arrival would have been too much to handle for the Israelites. The Jews would have rejected Jesus, if not for John the Baptist. John paved the way for Jesus by proclaiming God's message of hope to his lost nation. Jesus' arrival and message, and even Jesus' life were all made successful, in part, because of the life of John the Baptist.

The content of the message we're talking about is found in [Luke 1:76-77](#), where Zacharias gives us exactly what John will be proclaiming, “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.” Once again, the message is “To give knowledge of salvation to His people.” The life of John of Baptist was lived so people could be saved.

Repentance!

John the Baptist was calling on people to repent of their faulty views of God. They were to repent of their views of the coming Messiah. They were to repent of their views of themselves and their sins. They had the wrong idea of God and things related to Him. They thought God gave up on them, so they in turn gave up on the idea of a coming Messiah. He said “Repent!”

and what that means was “You’re wrong! Change your minds! God is alive and well and concerned about you. Our Messiah is on His way!”

To repent means to change your thinking about something, and God was calling these people to return to him. They thought wrong thoughts about him. Their minds had been led astray by the religious leaders of their day. They were all wrong. The life of John the Baptist had a message, and that message was, "Repent!"

John added to the message, “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;...The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire... His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” ([Matthew 3:8,10,12](#)). A severe warning for all people everywhere and of all times, including you and me – it’s a simple message – “Change your mind about God, and make your life glorify Him!” He says in [John 3:36](#) that if you believe in the Son you will have life, “but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

The life of John the Baptist was lived in order to preach the good news of the coming Messiah. Oh, it was needed. The Jews hadn’t heard from God in nearly 400 years. That’s 10 generations of people who had not heard directly from God. They were so out of touch that they thought John might have been the Messiah, but were quickly corrected by him.

John was on mission. God sent him to prepare the way for the Messiah. He called for repentance. He challenged them and taught them how to live. And he offered them the baptism of repentance. The life of John the Baptist made the way straight for Jesus. Religion was cleared out of the picture. People had to individually come to God, in repentance, and place their faith solely in him.

Jesus' Baptism

Jesus' baptism will be deeply discussed in our next lesson, but, it has to be mentioned here, in the life of John the Baptist. John's mode of baptism was the first baptism which featured someone other than the baptizee performing the ritual. Previous baptisms, such as Judaism's baptism, and Greek religion baptisms, called on the baptizee to perform the rite. People would hear John's strong preaching, confess their sins publicly, and then step into the Jordan River with John and get baptized. It was a baptism of righteousness, which is, a turning away from sin towards God's law. The life of John the Baptist ushered in a new form of baptism.

Jesus walked up to John the Baptist at the Jordan River one day, and asked to be baptized. John initially refused to administer the rite, because Jesus was the sinless Lamb of God. Jesus' answer though persuaded John to baptize him, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires" ([Matthew 3:15](#)). Jesus wasn't repenting, for he had done nothing wrong. But, the Father wanted Jesus fully identifying himself with humanity ([Hebrews 2:17](#)). God let Jesus take no shortcuts on the way to the cross. He is also our supreme example, and we are to follow his

footsteps ([1 Peter 2:21](#)). God confirmed Jesus' baptism verbally, and by sending his powerful Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove.

Impending Death Of John the Baptist

Thrown into prison by King Herod, out of which he would never emerge, John was still unclear about Jesus being the Messiah. Many unexpected events had taken place: John was caught in prison, Jesus was encountering unbelievers, and many rumors had begun spreading. [Luke 7:18-23](#) reports that John called for some of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Messiah, or if they needed to look for someone else. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them."

In other words, Jesus said, "Yes, John, my bold, faithful friend, be in peace, and know that I am the Messiah." The life of John the Baptist was nearing a terrible end.

The Beheading Of John the Baptist

The testimony about Jesus killed John the Baptist - let me explain. Please read ([Luke 7:14-29](#)). Ironically, King Herod loved listening to John preach. Even when Herod was pinpointed for having an affair with his relative, he feared John and would never have harmed him. Herod admired the great preaching style and delivery, for which John was noted. King Herod also struggled with the guilt of his affair because of John's preaching. The relative happened to be Herod's brother, Philip's wife. Herod stole her away from him. John condemned the very public affair. Herod was personally forced to imprison John because of the public nature of the scrutiny.

Unfortunately, the out-roar caused by the preaching was too strong and convicting for his wife, Herodias. She schemed a plot to bring John's demise. Herod was entertaining friends for his birthday celebration, and Herodias sent out her daughter, Salome, to dance for the men. The men and Herod were so pleased and grateful, that Herod told the girl she could ask for anything, up to half his kingdom. The unsuspecting girl retreated to consult with Herodias.

The girl demanded that Herod kill John the Baptist by beheading him. Herod detested the request, but in order to save face, he called for his executioner. Oaths were considered sacred at that point in Roman history. So, Herod fulfilled the morbid request, and had John the Baptist's head delivered to Herodias on a platter. Much like what would happen to Jesus a couple years hence, John the Baptist ended his life in a very inglorious manner.

The hatred for truth can be incredibly brutal to the messenger of God's word. The martyrdom of John the Baptist is recorded as the first direct death, because of the earthly life and message of Jesus Christ. I believe John the Baptist to be the first true Christian martyr, but many believe

Stephen to be the first. No matter, John the Baptist, like the prophets before him, met an untimely death at the hands of those who hate God.

Grasp This!

One Bible commentator wondered what kept John the Baptist so humble. He said the obvious answer is that John had a keen awareness of God's sovereignty; he fully understood his own unworthiness, and he grasped the preeminence of Christ in the world. In [Luke 7:26-28](#), Jesus said of him, "But what did you go out and see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet... I say to you, among those born of women there is no greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." Great praise from Jesus for the life of John the Baptist.

Both John and Jesus had a core message: Repent, and believe in God through Jesus Christ. Repentance means that you agree with what the Bible says about God, and about you. Belief means that you trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation and eternal life. Repent and believe. That is your calling. Your eternal life rests on your ability to repent and believe.

Repenting requires that you learn the Bible. You have to believe the Bible. You can't be scared of it, and you're not allowed to run from it. You have to read and believe the Bible, from cover to cover. There is no other way. Let me help in your journey to grasp God with your mind and your heart. This is why GraspingGod.com exists. I am here to help you understand the Bible. We can learn and grow together!

Finally, to be God's man or woman, one has to be called and anointed. The life of John the Baptist in the unfolding plan of redemption was to make a path for Jesus Christ. What is your role in God's plan? You will discover your purpose in life while learning Jesus' words, found only in the Bible.

Bible Study Questions:

- 1) John's message of repentance and belief is directed at all people everywhere. What have you done with the command?
- 2) What was John the Baptist's baptism of righteousness? How is it different from today's Christian baptism?
- 3) What is the importance of Jesus' baptism?

Inspirational Bible Verses:

I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel. Then John testified, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. I

didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God." [John 1:31-34](#)

To this John replied, “A man can receive only what is given him from heaven... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” [John 3:27,36](#)

Faith Quotes!

Baptism signifies that the old Adam in us is to be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and perish with all sins and evil lusts; and that the new man should daily come forth and rise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Martin Luther Quotes

We believe that as in baptism we have been united with Christ in his death and resurrection, so we have died to sin and should walk in newness of life. Moravian Covenant for Christian living

Baptism is the sign of initiation by which we are admitted to the fellowship of the church. John Calvin Quotes

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

Dear Lord, Your Son needed no repentance. Nor did he need baptism, but, he trusted in your plan and we thank you. He is our supreme example. I am so sorry for my sins, Father. I'm grateful that you allowed me to be baptized just as your Son did. May you wash away my sins forever. In Christ's name. Amen