

Hymns: 40 He Leadeth Me! Oh Blessed Thought 47 I Surrender All
Scripture: Psalm 51:1-10

Big Idea: John the Baptist Is Relevant Today

Let's start out today with a guessing game. I'll give you some clues. As soon as you think you know who it is, just raise your hand. Ready?

1. He is politically incorrect.
2. He says what he thinks – unfiltered.
3. He is anti-establishment.
4. His message is to return to former greatness.
5. He draws multitudes to hear him.
6. He is hated by the power brokers.
7. Some want him beheaded.

Who is he? If you said President Trump, you are correct. But someone else also fits this bill. He's the character of our study today. Here are some more things about him:

1. He **ate bugs** (Henry, what do you think about that?).
2. He lived in the wilderness,
3. He wore strange clothes.
4. His message was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.."
5. He **baptized** Jesus.
6. He blasted the religious leaders of his time.
7. He spoke out against King Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great) for marrying his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, was thrown in prison, and was beheaded.

John the Baptist is the subject of today's study. But before we begin looking at him, let's set the context with a review and a bit of history.

Review

Last time, we looked at the Old Testament prophets -- men chosen by God to:

1. forth-tell – speak God's word primarily to His people and mostly to Judah
2. foretell – perfectly predict the future, both near-term and far-term – often regarding the Messiah

We learned something in particular about predicting the future. Do you remember?

We stared with *Gray's Sports Almanac* from the future and Biff Tanner saying:

[Hold Gray's Sports Almanac in your hand. Speak in Biff's voice]

Do you see this book?

This book tells – the future.

[Hold a Bible and raise it in your hand. Speak in your voice]

Do you see this book?
This book tells – the future.
How is that possible?
The one who wrote it
perfectly
knows
the future.

The eternal God is not bound (as we are) by the constraints of time or even space for that matter.

Bible prophets were classified as:

1. non-published – e.g. Abraham, Moses, Elijah
2. published
 1. major – Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel
 2. minor – twelve starting with Hosea and ending with Malachi

Context – Inter-Testamental Period

Before we take a look at John the Baptist, we really need to add a little historical perspective. After the last Old Testament authors, Nehemiah and Malachi, none spoke for over 400 years.

When the prophets went silent, Israel was under the oversight of Medo-Persia (the ram in Daniel chapter 8). That empire was defeated by Alexander the Great (the goat in that same chapter). Israel became a battleground and buffer state between the Ptolemies in Egypt from the south and the Seleucids in Syria from the north.

Antiochus Epiphanes – a type of the coming Antichrist – came on the scene at 170 B.C. He was the one who desecrated the temple. This led to the Maccabean revolt in 165 B.C. named after Judas Maccabaeus (literally *hammer*) who heroically kicked out Antiochus and restored the temple.

General Pompey of Rome conquered Judea including Jerusalem in 63 B.C. Herod the Great was made king of the Jews in 40 B.C. He was succeeded by Herod Antipas in 4 B.C. Antipas is the king ruling during all but the earliest few years of the life of John the Baptist. When this new prophet finally burst on the scene after **all of those years** of waiting, it was a **very** big deal.

John the Baptist

As we begin our study of John the Baptist today, we'll start to see how he fits into the Dispensation of Law and what we can learn from him. From this point on, we'll refer to him as just *John*. Interestingly, only Luke chapter 1 describes his early **life** which is the topic for today. Let's get started.

John the Baptist's Conception and Birth Announced

Luke 1

[5] *There was in the days of Herod [this is Herod the Great], the king of Judaea, a certain **priest** named Zacharias, ...: and his wife ..., and her name was Elisabeth.*

[6] *And they were both **righteous** before God, walking in **all** the commandments and ordinances*

*of the Lord **blameless**.*

[7] And they had no child,

[Why?]

1. *because [] Elisabeth was barren,*
2. ***and** they both were now well stricken in years.*

[8] And it came to pass, ...,

*[9] According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot **was** to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.*

[This was a high honor for a priest.]

*[11] And there appeared unto him **an angel of the Lord** standing on the right side of the altar of incense.*

*[12] And when Zacharias saw him,
he was **troubled**,
and **fear** fell upon him.*

*[13] But the angel said unto him,
Fear not, Zacharias:
[Why?]
for **thy prayer** is heard;*

Note this. Zacharias likely prayed for a child (as Isaac did before him) many times. Being childless was a burden -- particularly in that culture. We'll see in a few minutes (v. 25) his wife referred to being childless as "a reproach." This was one of those sorrows he carried with him throughout most of his married life.

Do you have a burden that you have taken to the Lord in prayer? Are you **still waiting** for an answer? Don't give up. Often, the issue is that we must **be patient** and **wait** for God's timing. That was the case in the life of Abraham, Isaac, as well as for John's parents. Certainly, I too have had many prayers answered -- but in God's timing.

Jesus says it this way:

Matthew 7

*[7] Ask, and it shall be given you;
seek, and ye shall find;
knock, and it shall be opened unto you:
[8] For every one that asketh receiveth;
and he that seeketh findeth;
and **to him** that knocketh it shall be opened.*

[11] If ye [], being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how

much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

*and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son,
and thou shalt call his name John.*

John means “Jehovah is gracious.” He was gracious in answering Zacharias’ prayer as well as in giving the world salvation from sin through His gracious gift of a Savior.

[14] *And thou shalt have
joy and
gladness;
and many shall rejoice at his birth.*

Note this near-term prophesy. We will see its fulfillment in just a few minutes.

[15] *For he shall*
1. *be great in the sight of the Lord,*
2. *and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink;*
3. *and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*

[16] *And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.*

Note the phrase *turn to* in this verse and a similar reference in the next verse. Next time, we’ll see John’s message was all about **turning**.

[17] *And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of [Elijah],*
1. *to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, [very unnatural indeed]*
2. *and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just;*
3. *to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

He will effect the **turning of hearts** of many to conform to God’s righteous standards in a way that Elijah did. This appears to be a reference to the last verse in the Old Testament (Malachi 4:6) which is associated with the *great and dreadful day of the Lord* (v. 5). Along that same line of reasoning, let’s consider another passage that speaks of that day:

Matthew 10

[21] *And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.*

Family conflicts are some of the most vexing and telling of hearts not in tune with the Lord. John came to **change** hearts.

Now let's return to Luke chapter 1.

*[18] And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I **know** this?
for I am an old man,
and my wife well stricken in years.*

As we shall see, Zacharias revealed his lack of faith as he asked the angel for a sign. He received more than he bargained for.

[19] And the angel answering said unto him,
• *I am Gabriel, [his name]*
• *that stand in the presence of God; [his high credentials]*
• *and am sent to speak unto thee, and to sh[o]w thee these glad tidings.[his mission]*

[20] And, behold, thou shalt ... not [be] able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed,

[Why?]

because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

*[24] And ... his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,
[25] ... the Lord dealt with me ..., to **take away my reproach** among men.*

Next, we have the angel *Gabriel* speaking to Mary the mother-to-be of Jesus. We're going to skip down to pick up when the story of John resumes:

*[36] And, behold, [your relative] Elisabeth, she ha[s] also **conceived a son in her old age**: and this is the sixth month with her, **who was called barren**.*

Note what we learned here:

1. Elisabeth and Mary were relatives.
2. John was about six months older than Jesus.
3. Elisabeth was not just barren, she was *identified* by that sad fact and yet she was blameless before the Lord.

[37] For with God nothing shall be impossible.

Of course, there are things that God cannot do. He cannot do anything against His nature. For example, He cannot lie. What it's saying here is that God is greater than His creation.

[39] And Mary arose ..., and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;

This was likely somewhere near Jerusalem.

[40] *And entered into the house of Zacharias, and [greeted] Elisabeth.*

[41] *And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the [greeting] of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:*

John the Baptist Born

[57] *Now Elisabeth's full time **came** that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.*

[58] *And her neighbours and her [relatives] heard how the Lord had **sh[o]wed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced** with her.*

Do you remember Gabriel's prophesy? He said they would rejoice.
What a happy time that must have been! .

[59] *And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.*

[60] *And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.*

Now how did she know that? Zacharias, her husband could not speak. We could assume some angel told her, but we don't have to. Certainly, her husband could have written (v. 63) that name to give her the information.

[61] *And they said unto her, There is **none** of thy kindred that is called by this name.*

[62] *And they **made signs to his father**, how he would have him called.*

At least the priests must have thought Zacharias was also deaf.

[63] *And he asked for a writing table, and **wrote**, saying, His name is John. And they [all] marvelled [].*

Apparently, they were amazed that he would name his son *John* instead of *Zacharias*.

[64] *And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.*

[65] *And **fear** came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea.*

They had just witnessed a miracle of Zacharias' being able to speak again.

[66] *And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying,*

*What manner of child shall this be!
And the hand of the Lord was with him.
[67] And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost,*

Notice we now have John, his mother, and his father all filled with the Holy Ghost.
and prophesied, saying,

[76] And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest:

[Why?]

for thou shalt

1. *go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;*

[What a high honor that was to be the one to:

1. *come before*
2. *and announce*
3. *and present the Messiah to Israel.]*

2. *[77] To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,*
3. *[79] To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,*
4. *to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

[80] And the child

*grew,
and waxed strong in spirit,
and was in the deserts till the day of his sh[o]wing unto Israel.*

We'll have to break off there and pick up next time (in just two weeks) with the next installment of this story of John. But, before we go, let's consider one other person.

Application

We'll try our guessing game one more time. Here's some questions. Raise your hand when you know who it is I'm referring to?

This person:

- is not of this world (John 17:16).
- knows the Lord.
- is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
- is blameless before the Lord.
- serves the Lord.
- obeys the Lord.

loves the Lord and his people.
is a person of prayer.

Is it the Pope? Billy Graham?

Of course, this person is anyone who knows and seriously follows the Lord Jesus Christ. It is you, and it is I. John, Zacharias, and Elisabeth were righteous, obedient, and blameless before the Lord. We must order our lives to do no less. This is the high calling each of us has as Christians. As we live our lives, let us never lose sight of our standing and calling in Christ Jesus.

Benediction

*[25] Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel,
and the preaching of Jesus Christ,
according to the **revelation** of the **mystery**,
which was kept secret since the world began,
[26] But now is made manifest,
and by the **scriptures of the prophets**,
according to the commandment of the everlasting God,
made known **to all nations** for the obedience of faith:
[27] To God only wise,
be **glory** through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)*

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