

Week #:	238	Series:	The Gospels	Title:	John the Baptist
Scriptures:	Luke 1:5-25; I Chronicles 24; Acts 1:26; Daniel 8:16; Danile 9:21; Luke 1:26; Proverbs 18:21; Matthew 3:10; Isaiah 40:3-5; Matthew 3:1-3; John 1:19-23; Mark 1:4; Matthew 3:1; Luke 1:76-77; Malachi 3:1; Matthew 11:7; Matthew 11:10; Matthew 26:28; John 3:25-30; Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 11:13-14; Luke 1:17; John 10:40-42;				
Songs:					

## John the Baptist:

### Luke 1:5-7

<sup>5</sup> There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elizabeth. <sup>6</sup> And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. <sup>7</sup> But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

We are set up here with the names of these two righteous individuals. As we dive into the lives of these two people, let's take a look at their names:

- Zecharias' name means "YAH's remembrance"
- Elisheva (Elizabeth), John's mother, means "God of oath"

We can see in each of these names the path God is setting up for this very important person to be born.

We learn that Zacharias is a priest, a Levite, as is Elizabeth – she is referred to as a "daughter of Aaron." This refers back to Aaron, the first high priest, who was the brother of Moses. So both were from the tribe of Levi.

They were also both referred to as being righteous and blameless before God. However, even though they were doing all the right things, they had never been blessed with a child, and now they were too old for that blessing to come by natural means. But God had not forgotten. Look back at their name meanings – "Yah's remembrance," and "God of oath." We see through this story how God set them up for this blessing even from the beginning with their individual names.

Zacharias is of the priestly order of Abijah. David was the one to set up the divisions of the priesthood. He divided the descendants of Levi into smaller divisions so that each family would have an equal opportunity to minister (I Chronicles 24). There were 24 divisions, which allowed each division, or order, to serve for two weeks each year, plus the requirement that all serve during the three pilgrimage feasts (Passover, Shavu'ot, and Tabernacles). The order of Abijah was the eighth order of the twenty-four.

During the Second Temple period, the twenty-four priestly divisions served in the temple at Jerusalem in a rotation system.

Josephus confirmed this division:

"He divided them also into courses; and when he had separated the priests from them, he found of these priests twenty-four courses... and he ordained that one course should minister to God eight days, from Sabbath to Sabbath... And this partition hath remained to this day." (Ant. VII 14:7)

### Luke 1:8-10

<sup>8</sup> So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, <sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. <sup>10</sup> And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.

Zacharias was chosen to offer the incense in the Temple. There were hundreds of thousands of priests, so the priestly duties, including that of the incense service, were performed *by a team of priests* whose individual duties were selected by lot. God's people often used lots (or in Hebrew, purim) to discern His

will and direction. Acts 1:26 refers to the twelfth disciple position (after Judas) being filled by Matthias through the casting of lots.

A priest may never in his lifetime win the right to serve a duty in the temple. They "won" various rights: the right to offer the incense, the right to prepare the incense, the right to scoop up ashes from the inner altar, the right to remove the ashes from the candlestick, etc. Once you had served a duty, you could never serve that duty again in your lifetime. Being chosen to offer the incense was a rare experience and so it is significant that God has chosen Zacharias to serve him in the holy place at this particular moment.

Luke 1:11-15

<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

<sup>12</sup> And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

<sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. <sup>14</sup> And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. <sup>15</sup> For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

When we discussed Samson, we went into some details about the Nazarite vow. Early in the history of Israel, God established the Nazarites as a unique category of people. They were totally devoted to His service. Nazarites took a vow of total separation from the community for a short time (or occasionally, for life). They became a living reminder to the Israelites of their call to be set apart from the pagan culture around them.

Samson was meant to be in this category from his birth, however his constant rebellion from God and the pagan influence on his life drew him away from this vow and the blessings God gave him because of this vow (that of supernatural strength).

John was another who was called, like Samson, from birth to be a Nazarite. It is referenced in this scripture as "*he shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.*" This is one of the vows of a Nazarite. The other vows are not listed here, but it is pretty evident that God wanted John to be set apart from the crowds to be used for His purpose, and unlike Samson, John accepted this role and did as God wanted.

Luke 1:16-17

<sup>16</sup> And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

John's mission is laid out right here from God's messenger to Zacharias: his mission would be to turn many of the children of Israel back towards God. They had, once again, strayed. John's job would be to prepare them for Jesus. Samson had supernatural physical strength from the Holy Spirit. John's supernatural Holy Spirit given power was for boldness. It is his brash and bold stance that refers to him as coming "*in the spirit and power of Elijah.*" John's mission here would be identical to Elijah in that both men were sent to prepare the hearts and turn them back towards God.

Luke 1:18-20

<sup>18</sup> And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

<sup>19</sup> And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. <sup>20</sup> But behold, you will be mute and not

able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.”

God’s messenger here is Gabriel. This particular messenger is mentioned four times in the scripture. In the book of Daniel (Daniel 8:16) Gabriel is the messenger sent to give the interpretation to Daniel of this very odd vision he has had. Later (Daniel 9:21), when Daniel is praying and confessing his own sins and the sins of the people of Israel and pleading with God, Gabriel again shows up in glorious fashion to give Daniel an explanation of a vision. The third appearance of Gabriel is here in Luke when he comes to talk to Zacharias about the birth of John. The fourth time we see Gabriel mentioned in scripture is when he is given the task of telling Mary of the wonderful news of her pregnancy and the coming of Jesus (Luke 1:26).

Zacharias questioned God’s intentions and power in being able to give a child to old people, and because of this unbelief Gabriel tells Zacharias that he will be mute until the events come to pass. This event was so significant to the world that God could not allow Zacharias’ lack of faith to be spoken.

Proverbs 18:21

<sup>21</sup> The tongue has power over life and death; those who indulge it must eat its fruit.

God did not want the fruit of his unbelief to come to be. He had a plan for life, and speaking unbelief would only bring death to the plan God had in place for John and for Jesus. So, Zacharias had to be mute until such time as the fulfillment could take place and he could see with his own eyes the promise of God fulfilled.

Luke 1:21-22

<sup>21</sup> And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. <sup>22</sup> But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

He lingered in the Temple so long that they wondered if something had happened to him. They wondered if God had struck him down, because this was a real possibility. The priests wore bells on the hem of their garment so that they could hear them ringing and know that the priest was still alive. God’s tabernacle and temple were sacred places and God took them entering very seriously. If the priest who entered was not worthy of being in that place, God would strike them down. In this case, He had mercy on Zacharias and only struck his speech because of his unbelief.

Luke 1:23-25

<sup>23</sup> So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house.

<sup>24</sup> Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying,

<sup>25</sup> “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among people.”

After his service time is complete, Zacharias goes home to his wife Elizabeth, and has to tell her what the messenger of God told him. She got pregnant then with John – proving God’s faithfulness to bless them both for their righteous and blameless lives. John the Baptizer was **the herald** of God’s faithfulness and holiness.

Interestingly, because of knowing when Zacharias was chosen to fulfill his service in the Temple, we can easily point to the time of year in which it is likely that John was born. The scripture says that when he returned to his wife, she got pregnant. We can (I think rightly) assume that this event took place immediately upon his return home. So that would put John’s birth at the time of the Feast of Shavu’ot – or the feast that celebrates the gathering of the harvest. What a wonderful picture we have here of God’s

mission for John's life being shown in when He was born. John's mission was to gather the wheat for the harvest of souls, and he was born at the time of year that the harvest was being gathered from the fields.

### **Prophecies About John the Baptizer:**

Elijah was a fiery prophet – who literally called down fire on the prophets of Baal in an attempt to turn the people's hearts back to God. John was also a fiery prophet, and although he did not cause literal fire to fall, he spoke a lot about the fire of God and judgment.

Matthew 3:10

<sup>10</sup> Already the axe is at the root of the trees, ready to strike; every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown in the fire!

The Old Testament has three prophecies about a man who would one day come – the man we know of now as John the Baptist or John the Baptizer.

### **Prophecy #1:**

Isaiah 40:3-5

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries out: "Clear a road through the desert for *ADONAI*! Level a highway in the 'Aravah for our God! <sup>4</sup> Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill lowered, the bumpy places made level and the crags become a plain. <sup>5</sup> Then the glory of *ADONAI* will be revealed; all humankind together will see it, for the mouth of *ADONAI* has spoken."

How can we be 100% certain that this message was about John the Baptizer? The message of Matthew 3 proves it:

Matthew 3:1-3

<sup>1</sup> It was during those days that Yochanan the Immerser [John the Baptizer] arrived in the desert of Y'hudah [Judah] and began proclaiming the message, <sup>2</sup> "Turn from your sins to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!" <sup>3</sup> This is the man Yesha'yahu [Isaiah] was talking about when he said, **"The voice of someone crying out: 'In the desert prepare the way of *ADONAI*! Make straight paths for him!'"**

Thus, Isaiah, who lived about 700 years before the birth of John and Jesus, foretold John's work.

John himself acknowledged that he was not the Christ, and when asked gave this response:

John 1:19-23

<sup>19</sup> Here is Yochanan's [John's] testimony: when the Judeans sent *cohanim* [priests] and *L'vi'im* from Yerushalayim [Jerusalem] to ask him, "Who are you?" <sup>20</sup> he was very straightforward and stated clearly, "I am not the Messiah." <sup>21</sup> "Then who are you?" they asked him. "Are you Eliyahu [Elijah]?" "No, I am not," he said. "Are you 'the prophet,' the one we're expecting?" "No," he replied. <sup>22</sup> So they said to him, "Who are you? — so that we can give an answer to the people who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?" <sup>23</sup> He answered in the words of Yesha'yahu [Isaiah] the prophet, "I am **The voice of someone crying out: 'In the desert make the way of *ADONAI* straight!'"**

John literally preached in the wilderness of Judea, or the desert.

Mark 1:4

<sup>4</sup> So it was that Yochanan the Immerser [John the Baptizer] appeared in the desert, proclaiming an immersion involving turning to God from sin in order to be forgiven.

Matthew 3:1

<sup>1</sup> It was during those days that Yochanan the Immerser arrived in the desert of Y'udah and began proclaiming the message,

In what sense did he prepare the way of the Lord, as Isaiah foretold?

John's work was one of preparation, helping to get ready the soil, that is, the hearts of the Jewish people, who were waiting and looking for the Messiah. By declaring God's word to the Jews, John fulfilled what his own father also foretold:

Luke 1:76-77

<sup>76</sup> You, child, will be called a prophet of *Ha'Elyon*; you will **go before the Lord to prepare his way**

<sup>77</sup> by spreading the knowledge among his people that deliverance comes by having sins forgiven

### **Prophecy #2:**

Malachi 3:1

<sup>1</sup> "Look! I am sending my messenger to clear the way before me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple. Yes, the messenger of the covenant, in whom you take such delight — look! Here he comes," says *ADONAI-Tzva'ot* [*Lord of Hosts*].

Again, how can we be sure that this is a reference to John? Jesus said so.

Matthew 11:7 & 10

<sup>7</sup> As they were leaving, Yeshua [Jesus] began speaking about Yochanan [John] to the crowds: "What did you go out to the desert to see? Reeds swaying in the breeze?"

<sup>10</sup> This is the one about whom the *Tanakh* [scripture] says, '**See, I am sending out my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.**'

So, Malachi, like Isaiah, spoke of John's role of preparing the way of the Messiah. Notice in the text of Malachi that the word "messenger" is used twice. In the first case, it refers to *John* as Jehovah's messenger. The second time, it points to "the Messenger of the covenant" – that would be *the Christ*, Who is the Speaker of the new covenant, which He established with His blood.

Matthew 26:28

<sup>28</sup> For this is my blood, which ratifies the New Covenant, my blood shed on behalf of many, so that they may have their sins forgiven.

John himself was not in the Messiah's kingdom, but he preached the greatness of the One Who would establish that temple/kingdom. How wonderful that John, despite having the great privilege of being singled out and chosen as the one to prepare the path for the Christ, remained humble and satisfied with his role of being, in his own words, "*the friend of the Bridegroom.*"

John 3:25-30

<sup>25</sup> A discussion arose between some of Yochanan's *talmidim* [John's disciples] and a Judean about ceremonial washing; <sup>26</sup> and they came to Yochanan [John] and said to him, "Rabbi, you know the man who was with you on the other side of the Yarden [Jordan], the one you spoke about? Well, here he is, immersing; and everyone is going to him!" <sup>27</sup> Yochanan [John] answered, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from Heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves can confirm that I did not say I was the Messiah, but that I have been sent ahead of him. <sup>29</sup> The bridegroom is the one who has the bride; but the bridegroom's friend, who stands and listens to him, is overjoyed at the

sound of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine is now complete. <sup>30</sup> He must become more important, while I become less important.

### **Prophecy #3:**

Malachi 4:5-6

<sup>5</sup> Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

How can it be true that John was Elijah, the great oral prophet of Israel who lived over 800 years before John did? As with the two other Old Testament messages about John which we observed, the New Testament gives us a clear explanation.

Matthew 11:13-14

<sup>13</sup> For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup> And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who is to come.

So, John was Elijah? Yes, but not literally – he was not Elijah reincarnated as some have fantasized. Luke sheds light on John being called "Elijah."

Luke 1:17

<sup>17</sup> He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

So, in some ways John came "*in the spirit and power of Elijah.*"

- Elijah did miracles, but John did not

John 10:40-42

<sup>40</sup> And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed. <sup>41</sup> Then many came to Him and said, "John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true." <sup>42</sup> And many believed in Him there.

- But, just as Elijah did, John cried out for God's people to turn from their sins and come back to Jehovah.
- Like Elijah, John was a powerful preacher who, in the spirit of Elijah, spoke with great boldness to an evil king (Elijah to Ahab and John to Herod Antipas).

From the beginning John held a special role in God's ultimate plan for sending His Son Jesus.