

# Doctrine of John the Baptist

## Preface

1. I want to begin this doctrine with a Scripture from the gospel of John.

KJV

Joh 1:6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John (*the Baptist*).

Joh 1:7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

Joh 1:8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

Joh 1:9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

Joh 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

Joh 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

Joh 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Joh 1:13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

## Introduction

1. John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ.

1.1 All four Gospels describe John's preparation ministry, and Luke gives a full description of his remarkable birth. (Luk 1:5-25, 57-80)

1.2 John the Baptist, is called by this name by Josephus in his book *Antiquities*. John did his preaching near the Jordan River in the northern part of the wilderness of Judea, a barren wasteland extending along the west shore of the Dead Sea.

2. Repent means "to change the mind" concerning the Messianic kingdom promised in the Old Testament.

3. Jesus would soon be offering this Kingdom to Israel. This is the Kingdom Jesus was about to present as King. This Messianic kingdom of heaven would be based on spiritual principles, and demand an acceptance of Christ's platform described in Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7.

4. John was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 40:3-5) and definitely relates the prophecy to John, a fact noted in each Gospel.

Isa 40:3 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

Isa 40:4 Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

Isa 40:5 And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Mar 1:2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" --

Mar 1:3 "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

Luk 3:4 As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

Luk 3:5 Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.

Luk 3:6 And all mankind will see God's salvation.'"

Joh 1:23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

5. Garb made of Camel's hair and a leather girdle is probably intentionally similar to Elijah's clothing (2Ki 1:8; cf. Luk 1:17; Mat 17:10-13), and was the usual dress of prophets. The eating of locusts was not uncommon food, especially for prophets. (Lev 11:22)

2Ki 1:8 They replied, "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." The king (*Ahaziah*) said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite."

Luk 1:17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous -- to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Mat 17:10 The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

Mat 17:11 Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things.

Mat 17:12 But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."

Mat 17:13 Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

Lev 11:22 Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper.

6. John's preaching was received with a mood of expectancy that had gripped many hearts, and caused a general enthusiasm. As they came, they were being baptized to indicate acceptance and with an identification with his message.

### **John the Baptizer**

1. Baptism was practiced by Jews when making proselytes, and for remedial and purifying purposes; and thus, the outward form was no innovation by John, although the significance was new.

1.1 Even the Qumran community observed a ritualistic baptism, though certainly not for the same reason as John. (W.S. LaSor, *Amazing Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 205 and 206)

2. The Pharisees were members of a prominent religious party. They claimed to be guardians of the Mosaic law and adhered rigidly to the traditions of the fathers. Both Christ and John characterized them as hypocrites.

Luk 11:43 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

Luk 11:44 "Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it."

Luk 12:1 Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

3. Sadducees were members of a party of religious rationalists, who denied the future life. They were politically powerful, including the priestly aristocracy in their number.

4. John realized that the coming of both the Pharisees and Sadducees was for mere display, not indicative of spiritual change, and likened them to vipers fleeing before the onrushing brush fire.

5. Having Abraham as their national father would not insure them against divine judgment.

### **Wycliffe Encyclopedia**

“The Pharisees and other religious leaders of the nation he denounced as a brood of vipers, trying to escape the flames of divine judgment which were overtaking them.

“He denied any value in natural descent from Abraham; he called for a new beginning. From the Jewish people ... he called out a loyal and repentant remnant that would make ready for the imminent advent of the greater than John who was to inaugurate the work of judgment.

“John spoke of himself as the preparer of the way for this Coming One, for whom he declared himself unworthy to perform even the humblest service.

“His own baptizing with water was to be followed by the more powerful baptism with the Spirit and Fire which the Coming One would carry out. That John's converts formed a distinct group in Israel is implied both by the fourth Gospel, with its reference to the disciples of John, and by Josephus, who records that John bade his hearers "come together by means of baptism" (Ant. xviii.5.2).

“Josephus means probably that John called a religious community into being by his baptism of repentance. But when he further represents John as teaching that "baptism was acceptable to God provided that it was undergone not to procure remission of sins but for the purification of the body, when the soul had first been purified by righteousness," his account deviates from that of the Gospel writers, and probably reflects the baptismal doctrine of the Essenes, with which Josephus had some acquaintance.

“To those of his disciples who sought his practical guidance, John gave some simple rules of charity and justice which demanded no such abandonment of their normal vocation as the strictest Essene code required.

“Among those who received baptism from John was Jesus. After Jesus' baptism (which took place by his own request), John recognized in Him the Coming One of whom he had spoken-although later, during his imprisonment, he began to doubt this, and had to be reassured that the features of Jesus' ministry were precisely those which the prophets had said would mark the new age.

“John exercised a baptismal ministry in Samaria, at Aenon near to Salim (Joh 3:23), as well as in the Judean wilderness.

Joh 3:23 And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

Joh 3:24 For John was not yet cast into prison.

“This ministry, which was probably of short duration, would explain certain features which emerged subsequently in the Samaritan religion, and it also explains Jesus' words to His disciples in (Joh 4:35-38), referring to that neighborhood: "Others have labored, and ye are entered into their labor" (ASV).

Joh 4:35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

Joh 4:36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

Joh 4:37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true.

Joh 4:38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

“The last phase of John's career was located in the Perea region of Herod Antipas' tetrarchy. John aroused Herod's suspicion as the leader of a popular movement which might have political implications. He also incurred the personal animosity of Herodias, Herod's wife, by denouncing the illegality of their marriage.

Mat 14:3 For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.

Mat 14:4 For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.

Mat 14:5 And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

Mat 14:6 But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.

Mat 14:7 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.

Mat 14:8 And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.

Mat 14:9 And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

Mat 14:10 And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

Mat 14:11 And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.

“He was accordingly arrested and imprisoned in Herod’s Transjordanian fortress of Machaerus, where some months later in A.D. 29 he was beheaded.”

## **The Death and Ministry of John**

1. John’s disciples preserved their identity for some decades after his death. Machaerus was a fortress located 16 miles southeast of the mouth of the Jordan on the eastern side of the Dead Sea.

Footnote: Herod Antipas was appointed tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea. Herod Antipas divorced his wife (a daughter of the King of Arabia) to marry Herodias previously the wife of Herod’s brother Phillip. As a result, he suffered the public ire of John the Baptist. It was at the suggestion of Herodias and her daughter Salome who instigated the execution of John.

2. To the New Testament writers John's significance lies in his being Christ's forerunner. For some time, his ministry and Christ's overlapped.

Joh 3:22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.

Joh 3:23 And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

3. John's baptism provided the starting point for the apostolic preaching.

Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

Acts 10:35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Acts 10:36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

Acts 10:37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

4. Jesus declared him to be the promised Elijah of Mal 4:5-6.

Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

Mal 4:6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Mar 9:13 But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.

Mat 11:14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

5. Jesus also declared John to be the last and greatest of the prophets.

Luk 16:16 The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

6. John's ministry was said to be the end of divine revelation under the old order: "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached" and so it has been preached today.