

#294 Kingdom: John the Baptist

John the Baptist stands out as one of the most unique prophets of all times because he stood between two eras. He was what we might call a “transition prophet” and was the first to herald the coming of the Kingdom at the actual time of the Kingdom. Of course several Old Covenant prophets spoke of the coming King, the Kingdom and the Messianic kingdom but John stood between the Old and New Covenants and proclaimed the “time of the Kingdom is now so repent.” John’s message was “turn around the Kingdom is here.” After so many millennium of promise, now the arrival of the promise has come.

As in every former time, at that time and in subsequent times there were two kinds of people to confront. Those who were hungry for God and were anticipating His Presence and those who couldn’t care less. There is always “desire” and “no desire” in every generation. My opinion is that the heart condition is what separates the two groups. The resistance to the “gospel” came from the religious fundamentalists (Pharisees) and the religious agnostics (the Sadducees) like the modern church today. Both of these groups believe in certain doctrines and hold to certain creeds and are careful about certain religious observances but are only being prepared for hell and follow their father, the devil. Each has a following that are influenced by their religious views and blindly follow their lead but don’t bother to search out the truth for themselves. Today these groups are dead weight upon the church that He is building but still set the world view. Those that change the world view are generally unknown people hidden away from public view until the time of restoration. John the Baptist was such a person.

This is another time similar to the time of John the Baptist. Much of our theology has been set or profoundly influenced by the fundamentalists and about one universal “view of the Kingdom” generally exists. In announcing the Kingdom it is necessary to “relieve ourselves of the constipation of former doctrines” and look at the scriptures again without preconceived ideas or prejudice of position. Just laying aside the opinions of men from former times is a major adjustment and sets us swimming against the tide.

If we say the “gospel age” began with John the Baptist we will be confronted by probably 6 different views of when the “gospel age began.” Some say at Calvary, some say at Pentecost, some say at Antioch, some say at Jerusalem after the church was formed. Some say that when Philip carried the message to Samaria and the Gentiles heard the message. Some say that the “gospel age began when Steven was stoned” and the persecution began etc

John stands between two times and is connected to each period. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets and the first one to announce the gospel of the Kingdom. We have exactly the same problem when we say the Old Covenant ended with John and the New Covenant began. There will be various times set by various groups for the “end of the age of the Law.” Some say that the Law ended at Calvary and the Gospel Age begins following Calvary.

Mat 11:11 “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. [12] **“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and**

violent men take it by force. [13] “For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

Acts 10:34 “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, [35] but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him. [36] “The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)-- [37] **you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed.**

Acts 3:23] “From the offspring of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, [24] after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. [25] “And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’ [26] “Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God, to us the word of this salvation is sent out.

John 4:23] **“But an hour is coming, and now is,** when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. [24] “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” [25] The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” [26] Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

There are many such verses that show that the “age of the Kingdom” message began with John. But why is this important for us to understand that the gospel began with John” Because the fundamentalists declare that Matthew 5 - 6 & 7 was only preached to the Jews and is NOT for the church. They preach that the “gospel age” was that short period up to Calvary but when Israel rejected the Messiah and he Kingdom was postponed, but it will be in effect once again during the Millennium.

The confusion is over the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God and the Millennial kingdom. Even if the millennial kingdom was not established at Jesus’ first coming and some have waited for 2000 years, the Kingdom of God was announced and established from the preaching of John. The fact is that the Kingdom of Heaven has always existed, exists now and always will exist. The question remains as to when the Kingdom of God would be established upon earth. If the Kingdom was just going to be an outward, mechanical and natural or a “kingdom of this world” then His disciples would fight. John preached “repent for the Kingdom is as near as your hand.” If the Kingdom was just outward there would be no need to repent because it would come regardless by the sovereignty of God. “Repent” immediately indicates that the Kingdom is a spiritual government. We also see it is personal and internal as the “Kingdom within.”

Even Balaam knew about the Millennial kingdom. David spoke about it as well as Isaiah. To mix these two aspects of God’s government is just being uninformed and leads to wrong conclusions. The internal government of God in the believer’s life affects our position in Christ, our obedience and our preparation for eternity. In this the believer’s responsibility is to establish the Kingdom as a personal reality. We could call this; The experiential Kingdom! This aspect of the Kingdom will soon affect our objective ministry and our subjective life with God.

In our relationship to the Lord there is grace and mercy, longsuffering and gentleness as with the Lamb slain. In our relationship to the Kingdom there is responsibility, obedience, eternal position, authority and multiple demands upon our life. Therefore, when we ignore the gospel of the Kingdom and substitute the gospel of salvation we are accepting 1 / 2 of the full gospel of the King and His Kingdom..

John's message was focused upon the grace of the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. With that small introduction let us investigate what the scriptures say about John the Baptist. This will involve a lot of scripture which in itself carries the revelation of John.

Mat 3:1 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, [2] "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [3] For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'"

All confusion is taken away concerning John the Baptist about God's foreknowledge and calling and how he is introduced as "A voice crying in the wilderness." His message is to warn the people about the coming of the Lord. Many today take up this same responsibility of warning the people about the coming of the Lord. The difference is that when John announced the coming of the Lord, the Lord really did come. John then was the "forerunner" who came along before the King to announce the "King is coming" and prepare the people so they could be ready to meet the King. He was to tell them to line up in a straight line. Not literally of course but to make a straight path for the Lord and get serious.

Mat 3:4 Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. [5] Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; [6] and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

Two groups were coming out to meet John. Some were sincerely looking for reality and the others were religious sightseers. We can expect the same response in the next transition. The amazing thing is how did the people know that they should go to the wilderness of Jordan and be baptized. There is no mention of public advertising or the distribution of hand bills. Not only were they coming out to meet this strange fellow but they were being baptized while they confessed their sins. Obviously, they recognized that they were sinners and that confession and baptism was the solution. Here we can draw upon Paul's revelation of John's baptism.

Acts 19:3] And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." [4] And Paul said, "**John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.**"

It is clear that John's baptism was different from Paul's baptism. It is not that John's baptism was wrong but that it was for an entirely different purpose. It was for repentance and an awakening of faith to believe in Jesus. John's baptism was all part of his preparing the way of the Lord. By repentance and through baptism and confession of sins. From Acts 19 we see that John's baptism

was great then but is not valid following Jesus' death, burial and resurrection..

Mat 3: 7] But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [8] "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; [9] and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. [10] "And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore **that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.** [11] "**As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** [12] "And 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."**

It is amazing how broad the revelation of John was concerning this coming visitation and the judgement connected to the visitation. John is the first one to announce that the difference between his baptism and Jesus' baptism is that John uses an immersion in water but Jesus uses an immersion in the Holy Spirit. Along with this visitation is going to be a separation of the wheat from the chaff "on the threshing floor. The chaff will then receive a baptism of fire which will remove the chaff permanently. John announced the first negative kind of baptism with fire that deals with objective "chaff." Most of us have experienced the baptism of fire that removes the subjective chaff that is a great blessing when viewed from the viewpoint of the coming King and His Kingdom. It seems that the "baptism of fiery trials" should be a normal Christian experience and one that is connected with and related to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This baptism of fire is part of the Holy Spirit's work in us and is probably connected to our sanctification that is preparing us for glorification.

John's father, Zacharias, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied about the call and the work that was assigned to John when he was born.

Luke 1:76] "**And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;** For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS; [77] **To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins,** [78] Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, [79] **TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH,** To guide our feet into the way of peace."

John's work was **NOT to provide the forgiveness of sins** but to be a forerunner **to give "the KNOWLEDGE of salvation through the forgiveness of sins."** It appears that John's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" was something connected to the Old Covenant but entirely new in its concept. "Washing" in the Old Testament probably is now replaced by John's baptism. Washing in the Old Covenant was for uncleanness, generally with a time of separation. Repentance seems to be connected to both O.T. washings and John's baptism.. John's baptism was just for this transitional period and passed away following Calvary where baptism was into Christ's death and burial. The "sins" problem was handled by the blood of Calvary. "The knowledge of salvation" through forgiveness of sins seems to indicate that John's work, including

his baptism of repentance, removed some barrier to receiving the knowledge of salvation.

Some say that John was announcing the grace of God that was soon coming. Since John preached the gospel of the Kingdom let us examine his message and make up our own mind about the context.

Luke 3:7 He therefore began saying to the multitudes who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [8] "Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. [9] "And also the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." [10] And the multitudes were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" [11] And he would answer and say to them, "Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none; and let him who has food do likewise." [12] And some tax-gatherers also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" [13] And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." [14] And some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And what about us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages."

Luke 3:15 Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he might be the Christ, [16] **John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. [17] "And His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."**

Luke 3:18 So with many other exhortations also he preached the gospel to the people. [19] **But when Herod the tetrarch was reproved by him on account of Herodias, his brother's wife, and on account of all the wicked things which Herod had done, [20] he added this also to them all, that he locked John up in prison.**

To question if this IS the gospel that John preached is ignorant because this says it is. To interpret this as "grace" requires that we change the definition of "grace as we know it today."

John 1:19 And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" [20] And he confessed, and did not deny, and he confessed, "I am not the Christ." [21] And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." [22] They said then to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" [23] He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said." [24] **Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. [25] And they asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" [26] John answered them**

saying, **“I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. [27] “ It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” [28]** These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, **“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! [30] “This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’ [31] “And I did not recognize Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” [32]** And John bore witness saying, **“I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. [33] “And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ [34] “And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”.**

John 1:35 Again the next day John was **standing with two of his disciples, [36] and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” [37]** And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

John 3:22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them **and baptizing. [23]** And **John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there;** and they were coming and were being baptized. [24] For John had not yet been thrown into prison. [25] There arose therefore a discussion on the part of John’s disciples with a Jew about purification. [26] And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have borne witness, behold, **He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him.” [27]** John answered and said, **“A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven. [28]** “You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ [29] **“He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. And so this joy of mine has been made full. [30] “He must increase, but I must decrease.**

While it is clear that the age of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God had begun there was still much preparatory work to be done. For a time BOTH Jesus and John were baptizing but not as a team. John was baptizing in the north but south of the Sea of Galilee and Jesus was baptizing in the south in Judea. John was fulfilling his calling and Jesus was fulfilling His calling by baptizing in different locations. John had no allusions to a greater ministry which would branch out into other dimensions. He understood that he must decrease and Jesus must increase. Still he knew that his calling didn’t stop immediately after Jesus appeared.

The transition ministries were working side by side but the former one would fade away and the present one would increase and details and the fuller message of the Kingdom was part of the increase. While John announced the Kingdom is at hand, Jesus was the Kingdom in their midst. John pointed to the Kingdom while Jesus manifested the Kingdom.

John was permitted to declare the first real proclamation concerning the Bridegroom and the

bride. He also knew that he stood as a friend of the Bridegroom. What we might call “the best man.”

But what did Jesus say about John and his position in the history of Israel?

Mat 11:11 “Truly, I say to you, **among those born of women there has not arisen**

anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. [12] “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. [13] **“For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. [14] “And if you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah, who was to come.**

Mat 11:7 And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John, **“What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? [8] “But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ palaces. [9] “But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. [10] “This is the one about whom it is written, `BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.’**

Mat 11:2 Now when John in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, [3] and said to Him, **“Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?” [4] And Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: [5] the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. [6] “And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me.”**

Mat 21: 24] And Jesus answered and said to them, “I will ask you one thing too, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. [25] **“The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?” And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, “If we say, `From heaven,’ He will say to us, `Then why did you not believe him?’ [26] “But if we say, `From men,’ we fear the multitude; for they all hold John to be a prophet.” [27] And answering Jesus, they said, “We do not know.” He also said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. [6] “And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me.”**

Mat 25:31----- Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. [32] **“For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.**

Luke 7:28 **“I say to you, among those born of women,** there is no one greater

than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” [29] And when all the

people and the tax-gatherers heard this, **they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. [30] But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.** [31] "To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like? [32] "They are like children who sit in the market place and call to one another; and they say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.' [33] **"For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has a demon!'** [34] **"The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!'**

John 5:33] "You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. [34] "But the witness which I receive is not from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. [33] **"You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. [34] "But the witness which I receive is not from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. [35] "He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. [36] "But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.**

John 10:40 And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there. [41] **And many came to Him and were saying, "While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true."** [42] And many believed in Him there.

Acts 1: 4] And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; [5] **for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."**

Acts 19:1 And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples, [2] and he said to them, **"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."** [3] **And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism."** [4] **And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."** [5] And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [6] And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. [7] And there were in all about twelve men.

Acts 18:24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and **he was mighty in the Scriptures.** [25] This man had been **instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus,** being acquainted only with the baptism of John; [26] and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Acts 13: 24] after **John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.** [25] “And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’

While the calling and work of John the Baptist preceded Calvary and he was announcing the Lamb of God and the Kingdom and was summing up the Old Covenant period, his influence continued on into the Kingdom / New Covenant period. John was definitely a “transition prophet” who existed just for this calling and high purpose. He was born for this purpose, he responded to his calling, was faithful to the call, lived a separated life, completed his ministry, fulfilled his calling and died as a martyr. **Yet the least in the Kingdom is greater than John.**

Those who foolishly expect to participate in the Kingdom never consider that there might be some cost connected to the Kingdom or even a perfection of character. Completing their calling and being faithful until the end never seems to enter their mind. Rather, they have some kind of false hope that all that is necessary to attain to the Kingdom is to believe something about Jesus or be “saved.”

While we wish them well, we have very little confidence in that shallow experience of attaining to any more than the New Earth.. They may only see the Kingdom from a long distance, from the New Earth. They may see it shining like the sun in its brightness but only the citizens of the New Jerusalem will be granted access. Even though John will not be the bride he will certainly have a place of great honor at the wedding feast as the “best man” to the Bridegroom. While he may not be on “THE” Throne in the New Jerusalem, he will most likely have “A” throne in New Heaven.