

Part Two: Early Ministry of the Messiah

III. Introduction to the Messiah (3:1 – 4:11)

A. The Forerunner of Christ

First Impressions of John the Baptizer

What do we know of John the Baptizer?

- We find him in Matthew “preaching in the wilderness”
 - Matthew quotes from the book of Isaiah (Isa. 40: 3)
 - This is another example of Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled throughout the Gospel of Matthew.
- We find John wearing camel hair clothing and wearing a leather belt. We also know that his diet consisted of locusts and wild honey (Matt 3:4).
 - This type of wardrobe and diet was not normal at this time.
 - In fact, John would have resembled a prophet that we would find in the old testament more so than any of his contemporaries.
 - Note there is about a 400-year gap between the end of Malachi’s ministry in the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.
- From the Gospel of Luke, we can gain additional insight regarding John.
 - He is the son of Zechariah, A Levitical priest. This would make John a Levite by Jewish tradition.
 - We don’t however find John acting like a priest as we might expect. “Perhaps like Habakkuk he was shaken by the ritualism and emptiness of the region of his day” ¹
 - We see John’s response to the Sadducees and Pharisees calling them a brood of vipers which would seem to support this concept.
 - He is the son of Elizabeth
 - Elizabeth, was also a relative of Mary, Jesus’ mother, and therefore, John and Jesus would also be related.

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What significance or relation is there between Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist?

- Another prophecy, not quoted by Matthew reveals another messenger that would act as a Forerunner for the Messiah from Malachi.
 - Malachi 3:1 - “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messengers of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of Hosts.”
 - We note though, that in Malachi 4:5 this “messenger” is named.
 - “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord’s come.”
- Similarities between John and Elijah
 - They dressed similarly
 - John in Camel hair clothing
 - Elijah wore a garment of hair (2 Kings 1:8)
 - Their ministries were located in the same area
 - John preached from the wilderness East of Jerusalem and near the Jordan River.
 - Elijah parted the Jordan and was taken up near it.
 - Their diets were even the same
 - John ate locusts and Honey
 - Elijah was instructed to go into the wilderness where the Ravens brought him bread and flesh in the mornings and evenings.
- There are some major problems with making John and Elijah out to be the same person though.
 - According to the Gospel of John (John 1:19-23), John the Baptist directly denies being Elijah
 - More importantly, John being Elijah would have required some sort of reincarnation or rebirth for Elijah. This wouldn’t be possible because Elijah never died (he is one of only two people mentioned in the Bible who were taken up directly to heaven).
 - Elijah is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11)
 - He couldn’t be born again.
 - At Jesus transfiguration (an event recorded in all three synoptic gospels (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36)) Elijah the prophet is there.
 - Not John the Baptist.
 - Elijah and John cannot be the same person

- Note that Jesus does say in Matthew 11:14 that “if [people] are willing to accept it, [John the Baptist] is Elijah who is to come”
 - This isn’t a contradiction though, because Jesus is saying that he served in the same role that Elijah will serve in his own second coming.
 - None of the contemporaries listening to Jesus say this would have thought that Elijah was resurrected or reincarnated (because he didn’t die).
- Even King Herod (not a Jew) speaks about John the Baptist and Elijah as two separate persons in Mark 6:14-16
- The significance then is that while John the Baptist and Elijah play similar roles in preparing the way for Christ, they are separate and therefore too the prophecies found in Isaiah and Malachi are separate.

B. The Baptism of Christ

Significance of Baptism

What is the contemporary significance of Baptism?

- Contemporary Baptisms
 - Signify to everyone witnessing that a person had died with Christ to their sinfulness and been restored through Christ by accepting Him as a personal savior.
 - Baptisms are a public proclamation
 - Baptisms symbolize the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
- John however was not calling for a Baptism like the ones we see today.
 - There were no Baptisms of Salvation, like what we can see today because there was not yet a savior who could rescue us.
 - John was preparing a way for the one who would come after him (Jesus).
 - Instead, John was calling people to take part in a Baptism of Confession.
 - Matthew 3:6 demonstrates that those who were being baptized in the River Jordan were also confessing their sins.
 - Matthew 3:11 makes it clear that John was baptizing with water for repentance.

What are the differences between a Baptism of Repentance and Baptism of Salvation?

- Repentance was called for by both John and Jesus
 - To Repent (Greek, *metanoia*) means to change one's mind and attitude. This is a decision that should literally change one's direction in life.
 - John's message was to believe in the one who is greater than himself, who is Jesus, and prepare by repenting (changing directions) back onto a path that was in accord with God's word.
 - We repent today as we acknowledge our sinfulness and need for a savior. The difference is that today, salvation has already been purchased on our own behalf.
- Major differences
 - There is no security in a baptism of repentance.
 - The problem with cleaning something up is that it can become dirty again.
 - John warns those he baptized to bear fruit in "keeping" with repentance in Matthew 3:8
 - Salvation offers us security and freedom from the bondage of sin.

If repentance didn't offer permanent security, why did the people bother with it?

- John offered warnings against those who failed to repent.
 - He compared them to the dust that settles off of wheat that can be separated simply by tossing it up in the air. The picture created separates out the religious people who either had or had no substance.
 - Specifically, John was speaking towards the spiritual elitists who were busy playing the politics game in the Sanhedrin and elsewhere.
 - These people thought they were safe – because they "have Abraham as [their] father".
 - John's reminder to them is that privilege and placement on earth, won't matter in eternity.
- These warnings are not irrelevant for contemporary application.

- Just because some people are able to make their way to church each week, maybe three times a week, it does not necessarily mean they are continually allowing their path to be corrected to point towards God.

Jesus' Submission to Baptism

Did Jesus need to repent of sinfulness?

- No!
- We know Jesus did not need to repent of any sin because he was without sin all together. He was God from the beginning.

Why would he consent to a Baptism of Repentance if he had nothing to repent of?

- First, Jesus is endorsing the Baptism of Repentance that John was calling for.
 - Like contemporary baptisms that symbolize salvation, Jesus endorses John's teaching that confessing one's sinfulness and need for a savior is a part of salvation.
- This is the moment where Jesus launches his public ministry
 - Jesus' baptism is the starting place for his public ministry.
 - Some would say that the three trials that he faces in the desert are where his ministry begins; but, though his Baptism, he legitimizes the work of the Forerunner, John the Baptist.
- Jesus was identifying with the sinfulness of the people he had come to save.
 - Because Jesus had no sin, there was no reason for him to repent or take part in a baptism that symbolized repentance. By doing so though, Jesus identified with the sinfulness of all man which made the baptism of salvation become possible.
 - Jesus' public ministry begins the same way that it ended, with He without sin identifying/becoming sin, so that God's relationship with man could be restored.

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