

John the Baptizer - Cousin of Jesus

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John the Baptist is not the Apostle John

In the previous issue of *Day Star*, we found several end-time parallels in the story of Elijah. This month we will examine the life of **John the Baptist** where we will also find two interesting end-time parallels. It is fitting that we examine John's life after studying Elijah, because John and Elijah have several things in common.

For example, when it came to speaking boldly against sin, both men were singularly notorious in their day. Both men challenged an apostate church-state system. Both men rose out of obscurity.

Both men grew up in the desert wilderness. Both men were not formally educated nor were any of their writings preserved for us to read. Exceptional Holy Spirit power filled both men and God granted both of them the honor of seeing Jesus with their own eyes!

Some people confuse John the Baptist with the apostle John. They are not the same person. John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus and about ten or twelve years older than the apostle John. The apostle John wrote the Gospel of John, three epistles that bear his name and the Book of Revelation, whereas John the Baptist wrote none of the books found in the Bible.

John's birth (like that of Isaac) was a miraculous event because his parents were of an advanced age. The Bible record indicates that John's father was a Levite priest named Zachariah and his mother's name was Elizabeth. Like the prophet Jeremiah, God chose John, gave him a name, and ordained him as a prophet *before* he was even born! (Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:13-17)

Even more, Jesus selected John to be His forerunner before either of them were born!

To stretch your mind even further, Jesus not only chose Mary and Joseph as His parents, but He also chose Zachariah and Elizabeth to be John's parents. Because Zachariah and Elizabeth were too old to have children, John's miracle birth gave added credibility to his message when he began his ministry and became known as the Baptizer.

John was born in the hill country of Judea, but he spent most of his life in the solitude of the desert wilderness. Evidently, his elderly parents died when he was a young man. As in the life of Moses, the wilderness prepared John for his difficult mission.

John carefully studied the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit led him to understand many prophecies in the Old Testament that pointed to the appearing of Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom. John discovered that Messiah would appear *at the beginning* of the seventieth week, which is mentioned in Daniel 9.

Therefore, in the Spring of A.D. 27, at the beginning of the seventieth week of seven years, John began proclaiming *the year had come* for the Messiah to appear and He would establish His kingdom shortly. (Matthew 3:2,11; Luke 3; see also the comments of Jesus in Mark 1:15; Luke 4:18,19)

Of course, the Jews ridiculed John for his beliefs, but many of them listened to John and believed his testimony. There is no record of John the Baptist ever performing any miracles, but many people still regarded him as a prophet of God. (Matthew 14:5)

The Ritual of Baptism

There is an interesting history behind John's title, "John the Baptist." Of course, the title, "the Baptist," was not part of John's name at birth nor was he a member of the Baptist Church, as some Christians naively believe. John lived and died as a Jew.

He was among the few in Israel that believed Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. When John began his public ministry, he became notorious for doing something considered very strange. John insisted on baptizing *Jews* in the Jordan River.

Typically, Jews were not the ones baptized, because they were the descendants of Abraham *by birth*. Conversely, they baptized the Gentiles as "a pledge of allegiance" when they wished to become sons of Abraham. (Few Gentiles converted to Judaism in those days, so baptisms by the priests were scarce. Matthew 23:15)

The Jews regarded the baptism of a Gentile as both a mystical and a practical experience. In a mystical sense, the Jews believed a Gentile's past was "washed away" when he or she was immersed in the river, and emerging from the water, became a new son or daughter of Abraham!

Today, baptism, like the marriage ceremony, is a public declaration. In baptism, you demonstrate your allegiance to God and to the principles of His kingdom before witnesses.

In marriage, you state your allegiance to your spouse before witnesses. Even though the origin of baptism is uncertain, baptism symbolized to Israel its experience as a nation. When God delivered Israel from Egypt (the old life of slavery), they had to pass through the waters of the Jordan River (immersed in the river) and when they emerged from the water, they inherited the Promised Land (the birth of a new nation).

When the Jews baptized a Gentile, they *adopted* him into one of the twelve tribes and his name and they entered the date of his baptism into the genealogical records of Israel.

When John began preaching that Messiah was about to appear and set up His kingdom, John insisted that baptism was a necessary pledge of allegiance. In effect, John was preaching that Jews, yes Jews, needed to convert to *a new and better* religion – a religion centered on the worship of Messiah instead of the slaughter of animals. (The old religion of slaughtering animals

was about to disappear.)

John understood that salvation from sin required an atonement which animals could not satisfy.

When Jesus appeared on the banks of the Jordan River in the Fall of A.D. 27 for baptism, the Holy Spirit gave John utterance and he cried out, "**Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!**" (John 1:29, KJV)

Why Was Jesus Baptized?

Many people are puzzled that Jesus asked John to baptize Him. Did Jesus need to have His sins washed away? No. Jesus never sinned. (Hebrews 4:15) Did Jesus need to repent of rebellion against His Father in Heaven? No. Jesus and the Father are one in spirit and truth. (John 10:30) Did Jesus have to be born again? No. Jesus did not have a carnal nature. (Colossians 2:9) Then why did Jesus request to be baptized?

Jesus submitted Himself to be baptized by John for two reasons. First, Jesus was born "under law" (Galatians 4:4) and He was subject to the Levitical system He was about to end. (Hebrews 7) By His death on the cross, Jesus terminated the entire Levitical system.

After His resurrection, Jesus planned to establish a new world order on Earth and a new kingdom based on a new and much better covenant. At just the right time, John appeared in the desert proclaiming the arrival of Messiah and His coming kingdom.

John's call to be baptized was an invitation to be part of the new order; it was a pledge of allegiance. *Jesus submitted to John's baptism to declare His loyalty to the principles of His coming kingdom.* This is a profound point about the character of God. The Omniscient Creator of the Universe, is subject to His own laws. Jesus is not arbitrary nor dictatorial. If He were, God would be inconsistent and chaos would fill the universe. God loves order and where there is moral order, there is a rule of law.

Jesus told the timid Nicodemus, ". . . **I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.**" (John 3:5) Some people distort the words of Jesus to mean that unless a person is baptized he or she cannot be saved. This is not so.

Many circumstances can prevent a person from being baptized. For instance, the thief on the cross was not baptized in his final moments of life, yet he sincerely surrendered his life to Jesus and the Lord Himself assured him of salvation.

Furthermore, the Bible clearly teaches that works or rituals do not save us. (Ephesians 2:8,9) We are saved through our faith in Jesus. When a person lives by faith, he or she is willing to go, to be and to do all that God asks, without compromise.

A life of faith is demonstrated by a loyal life. However, even if a person is baptized, it does not necessarily guarantee salvation. (Matthew 7:20-23) Baptism – like marriage vows – is a public

declaration of loyalty and God requires them for our benefit! Public declarations provide a way to tell others who we are and what we stand for.

For the person who believes in Christ, baptism symbolizes the death and burial of their carnal nature and the resurrection of a new person controlled by a spiritual nature. (John 3 and Matthew 28) Paul elaborates on the beauty of this concept in Romans 6-8. In submitting to John's baptism, Jesus declared His loyalty to the principles of God's coming kingdom. God loves order and where there is order, there is law.

Second, *Jesus was baptized because He does not ask His followers to do something that He has not done first. He is our example.* Remember, Jesus stooped to wash the feet of His disciples and He commanded them to do the same to each other. **"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him."** (John 13:14-16)

Jesus chose baptism, not because He had a carnal past to wash away, but to give us an example of stepping out of our inherited religion and joining in His inheritance!

Jesus affirmed with His baptism that everyone – Jew and Gentile alike – must declare allegiance to the kingdom of God. Baptism is a public declaration of one's loyalty to God and the principles of His kingdom! Baptism is to God's people what the mark of the beast will be for those who worship the Antichrist during the Great Tribulation.

Just before Jesus returned to Heaven, He told His disciples, **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matthew 28:19,20) In a practical way, baptism is *an event* that separates yesterday from tomorrow.

Baptism declares severance – the old life is over and a new life has begun. Baptism should reflect an inner transformation – from unbeliever to believer – from a carnal person to a spiritual person – from dominion by the sinful nature to dominion by the spiritual nature – from being a part of this world to being a part of the world to come.

King James Translators

Because of his urgent message and his strange insistence that *Jews* be baptized into the coming kingdom of God, John the Baptist became known in the Greek language as "John, the one who immerses." The Greek word *baptizo* means to immerse or dunk.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the meaning of *baptizo* presented a problem for the translators of the King James version of the Bible. Most Christians did not practice baptism by immersion in the seventeenth century.

Instead, the ceremony of baptism came to mean the sprinkling of water, most often, the sprinkling of infants soon after birth. (**Note:** The Church of Rome concluded around the third century A.D. that a person could not be saved unless he or she underwent the ritual of baptism.)

Since infant mortality was very high in those days, the practice of infant baptism became necessary to insure that all children would be saved. Centuries later, many Protestants carried this doctrine with them when they left the Catholic Church.)

The translators realized they could not translate the Greek word *baptizo* as immersing or dunking without causing a big theological problem for the king, so they chose to transliterate *baptizo* rather than translate it. By placing the English word "baptize" in the Bible without explaining the meaning as the act of immersing or dunking, everyone could interpret baptism as he thought best. The translators also transliterated John's title to "John the Baptist" instead of "John, the one who immerses."

First End-Time Parallel

There are some important end-time parallels associated with John the Baptist. First, the role John the Baptist played as the First Advent approached will be the same role the 144,000 will fulfill as Second Advent approaches. As we continue to examine John's ministry, please keep this in mind.

During the Great Tribulation, God will use 144,000 "Baptizing Johns" to announce the timely appearing of the King of kings and the Lord of lords and the establishment of His kingdom!

The 144,000 will come from every race, language, religion and nation. Assuming there are six billion people on Earth when the Great Tribulation begins, the ratio of God's servants to the population of Earth will be approximately one per 50,000 people.

Assuming God's servants are evenly distributed over the world during the Great Tribulation, China would have about 29,000 of the 144,000, India would have about 28,000 of the 144,000 and the United States would have about 7,000 servants of God. Of course, God will insure that every nation has enough "baptizing Johns" to accomplish the gospel commission during the Great Tribulation.

Elijah-type People

Notice the words of Malachi: "**See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.**" (Malachi 4:5,6) The prophet Malachi gave this prophecy about 350 years before the birth of Jesus. Jewish leaders during the time of Christ were not certain of its meaning, but they did know two things.

First, they knew that God took Elijah to Heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2). Second, they knew

that the great and dreadful day of the Lord was still in the future. (Joel 2, Obadiah 1, Isaiah 13 and Ezekiel 30) The Jews in Christ's day believed that the great and dreadful day of the Lord came in a two-part installment.

The *great part* would be their exaltation as a nation and the *dreadful part* would be the destruction of their enemies – which by inference were God's enemies. This was the egocentric mind set of the Jewish leaders regarding Malachi 4 when John the Baptist began to preach in the desert.

Many people were drawn to the wilderness to hear John's compelling message because he spoke with unusual clarity and penetrating power. His preaching brought hope, but it also caused fear. When he preached about the imminent appearing of the Messiah, John's careful explanation of the prophecies brought hope to the hopeless.

When he preached about God's love and His willingness to save sinners, there was joy. However, when he preached about God's wrath toward sin, John's sobering words caused people seriously to reflect on their lives and fear often filled the hearts of those present.

People listened and asked, "Who was worthy to receive the salvation of God?" The Holy Spirit's presence and power gave John's words depth and scorching relevance. *All people who listened to John felt the unseen, but obvious presence of the Holy Spirit* – it could be compared with the experience of standing in the authoritative presence of Elijah on Mount Carmel.

With this compelling power and the evidence of Scripture to back his words, John warned men and women to repent or be destroyed. The options were simple. John insisted upon heartfelt repentance, full restitution and baptism for everyone. There could be no love for sin in the coming kingdom of God.

One day, after preaching to a large crowd, John began to answer questions. Notice his answers:

"The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. 'What should we do then?' the crowd asked. John answered, 'The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.'

Tax collectors also came to be baptized. 'Teacher,' they asked, 'what should we do?' 'Don't collect any more than you are required to,' he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, 'And what should we do?' He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.' " (Luke 3:9-14)

John taught that God's kingdom would coexist with a world of evil kingdoms for a time. Eventually, there would be a purified Earth. I can think of at least three reasons why John's message was believable. First, it was based on Scripture. Second, John's message was timely.

He showed from the prophecies that the time had come for the appearing of Messiah. Third, the

Holy Spirit gave John's words great power, clarity and effectiveness. If a person listened, he or she could not help but be moved – either into submission or rejection.

One day, some scribes and Pharisees came, presented themselves before John and asked him to baptize them – just in case John's predictions might come true. Of course, they had no intention of humbling themselves to do what John was proclaiming and be right in God's sight. The Holy Spirit enabled John to see their pretense and his response was harsh. ". . . **You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath [of God]?"** (Matthew 3:7, insertion mine)

God's Timing

Let there be no mistake – the appearing of John the Baptist was a prophetic fulfillment. His single purpose – assigned before birth – was to prepare people for the coming of the Lord, Jesus Christ. The appearing of John the Baptist should have put the priests on notice that Messiah was not far behind!

For centuries, the Jews had discussed the promise of a Deliverer and in John's day, the promise was so old that many people had begun to question its truthfulness, as if God had forgotten!

At the time of John, the nation of Israel was in trouble because Rome had removed Archelaus, the son of wicked Herod, and many Jews had died during the revolt. The iron hand of Rome rested heavy upon the neck of Israel. The Romans occupied Jerusalem and the occupation provoked their mutual hatred of each other. This tiny tribal Jewish nation, within the vast Roman empire, desperately needed a Savior.

Then came John. Imagine the interest he aroused when he began to preach about the imminent appearing of the Savior. The Bible says, "**The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.**" (Luke 3:15) At this moment in history, people were filled with expectancy.

This expectancy soared as John explained Daniel 9 to his audiences. Daniel 9 predicted that the Messiah would appear in the 484th year after the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. (Daniel 9:25)

John explained how 69 weeks had expired since the decree of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem (457 B.C.). Therefore the actual year for the appearing of Messiah had come and God would establish His kingdom soon afterwards. Many Jews began seriously to consider the possibility of John being the Messiah.

The number of people visiting the wilderness to see John continued to escalate. Concerned, the Sanhedrin sent a deputation of priests to investigate this mysterious man and his message. Note their words: "**Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed**

freely, 'I am not the Christ.' They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet [predicted by Moses]?' He answered, 'No.' Finally they said, 'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' 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.' " (John 1:19-23, insertion mine) Did you notice the order of their questions? Did you notice who the priests were expecting? What they believed about Malachi's prophecy prompted their questions.

Why Must Elijah Appear?

Israel's religious leaders talked openly and frequently about the coming of Elijah, although verifying Elijah's identity was always the subject of many discussions. For example, they wondered how they could distinguish someone who may be masquerading as Elijah from the true Elijah, especially if the false Elijah performed miracles?

Would Elijah come down from Heaven in a fiery chariot? Would Elijah appear in the body of a human being? If Elijah came as an ordinary man, how could they positively identify him?

After Peter, James and John had seen Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, they had positive proof that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. They were anxious to share what they had seen, but Jesus forbade them to reveal this information until after His resurrection.

He knew that these claims from His disciples would limit His effectiveness among the Jews. (Matthew 17:9) But, the transfiguration of Jesus did raise a prophetic issue. The disciples wondered why Elijah had not appeared, since this is what Malachi predicted. The disciples knew that John the Baptist was not Elijah. John had clearly denied he was Elijah.

Trying to reconcile the transfiguration experience of Jesus with the prophecy of Malachi, they asked the Master, ". . . **'Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?'** Jesus replied, **'To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. 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.'** Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist." (Matthew 17:10-12)

These verses contain more substance than most people realize. First, Jesus affirms the validity of Malachi's prophecy saying, **"To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things."** Then, Jesus said, **"Elijah has already come and they did not recognize him."** Even though the disciples understood that Jesus was speaking about John the Baptist, they were still puzzled. They had just seen Moses and Elijah, yet Jesus was saying that John the Baptist was Elijah. Here is the problem:

If You Are Willing to Accept It . . .

A few months before the transfiguration of Jesus occurred, King Herod had arrested and

imprisoned John the Baptist because John had offended him. The arrogant king had taken his brother's wife, Herodias, to be his own and John the Baptist told Herod that he had committed a grievous sin.

Of course, Herod did not want to hear the truth and Herodias was shamed. Herod was so furious with John that he wanted John killed. However, Herod was not stupid. He knew that the people regarded John as a prophet and Herod did not want to jeopardize his position as king by starting another Jewish uprising that might reach the ears of Caesar.

So, Herod did the next best thing and put John in prison. From the silence of his prison cell, John began to reflect on his life's mission, his teachings and beliefs. Yes, Jesus had appeared right on time and Jesus had begun His ministry just as John had predicted.

Yet, he could not understand why Jesus had not declared Himself to be the Messiah, nor had He done anything to establish the kingdom of God! In the darkness of that prison cell, it did not seem to John like events were unfolding as the Scriptures predicted.

Lonely, cold and troubled, John began to question some of his beliefs and his ministry. When some of his disciples came to visit, he asked them to ask Jesus a pointed question.

"When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?' Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.' " (Matthew 11:2-6)

Jesus answered John's question with veiled language.

He knew John was a keen student of the Scriptures, and so Jesus answered John's disciples with words from Isaiah 61. He also knew that His affirming response would give John the assurance he needed to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Other people who were present had no idea that Jesus' response was affirming that He was the Messiah.

Jesus knew it was not time to make this public disclosure. In fact, it was Jesus' desire to keep this fact hidden until He was resurrected, knowing that premature promotion of His identity would thwart His mission. (Matthew 17:9)

"As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see?

A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. *This is the one about whom it is written:* "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not *risen anyone greater than John the Baptist*; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.

For all the Prophets and the Law [the Scriptures] **prophesied until** [about the appearing of] **John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.**' " (Matthew 11:7-14, insertions and italics mine)

In response to John's request, Jesus quoted Malachi 3:1. In this passage, it indicates that God would send a messenger to announce the appearing of Messiah and Jesus was assuring John the Baptist that he was that messenger. Jesus clearly told the crowd that John was "the Elijah to come." However, Jesus phrased His declaration in an interesting way, "**if you are willing to accept it. . . .**"

Why did Jesus say it this way? Jesus had been on Earth long enough to know that "the great day of the Lord" mentioned in Malachi 4 was not going to happen during His lifetime on Earth. In fact, Jesus knew that establishing His kingdom on Earth would not be possible.

Said another way, Jesus was saying to His disciples, *if you can accept this by faith, John the Baptist would have been the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5,6 if the nation of Israel had been faithful to the terms and conditions set forth in Daniel 9!*

"Plan A" – "Plan B"

The fulfillment of Malachi 4:5,6 is inseparably connected to "the great day of the Lord." Since "the great day of the Lord" has not happened, some people believe Malachi 4:5,6 still awaits fulfillment. I do not believe this is the case. If the reader can accept the following two statements, there is a simple explanation for the prophecy of Malachi 4:5,6:

1. - Israel knew the redemptive conditions outlined in the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel 9. If they had met these conditions, the plan of salvation and "the great day of the Lord" would have been completed long ago. All of the Old Testament prophecies given by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Amos, Ezekiel, Malachi and others would have been fulfilled just as *they were written*.

"The great day of the Lord" would have happened shortly after the end of the seventieth week if Israel had met the conditions God set forth in Daniel 9. In other words, if Israel had satisfied these conditions, John the Baptist would have fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 4 to the letter and that would have been the end of the story.

2. - Since Israel failed, God's plan for Israel and the establishment of His kingdom on Earth was not implemented at the end of the seventieth week – simply put, Israel rejected the Messiah. This is a profound point: A person must have a Messiah's heart to accept the teachings and truths taught by the Messiah. For this reason, we must be born again. Most of the people in Israel rejected and crucified the Messiah because they did not have a Messiah's heart.

The character and principles of the Messiah's kingdom were foreign to the people of Israel and

they rejected Him. Because God's original plan could not be fulfilled, the prophecies of the Old Testament ("Plan A") **were made null and void.**

To keep His promise and the covenant He made with Abraham, God made several changes. First, He redefined Israel. Everyone who now receives Christ is an heir of Abraham. In Christ, racial origin has no meaning. (Galatians 3:28,29) Second, Jesus raised up new trustees of the gospel.

These trustees became known as Christians. (Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 11:26) Third, God established a new prophetic schematic that is found in the book of Revelation. I call this is new course of action "Plan B." There are many parallels between "Plan A" and "Plan B," **but** these parallels are separate and distinct.

One cannot merge "Plan A" events into a "Plan B" schematic. For example, under "Plan A," Messiah would have governed His kingdom from the City of David, e.g., Jerusalem.

Under "Plan B" Jesus will govern His kingdom from His throne in *New Jerusalem*. (Revelation 22:3) The point is that the appearing of Elijah, predicted in Malachi 3 and 4, was connected to "the great day of the Lord" which was supposed to happen soon after the first advent of Messiah.

However, after the Jews rejected Christ, God scrapped "Plan A" due to Israel's failure to meet the conditions placed upon them in Daniel 9. However, a parallel of Malachi's prophecy remains. The parallel ("Plan B") is found in Revelation 7. The heralds that will appear before "the great day of the Lord" will be 144,000 servants of God!

The Spirit and Power of Elijah

Notice what the angel said about John the Baptist before his birth. **"But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. *He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. 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.*' "** (Luke 1:13-17, italics mine)

It is interesting that God forbade this all-important herald of Jesus from drinking anything that would alter his mind. God's servants must be filled with the Holy Spirit, not a bottle of spirits.

God gave John the spirit and power of Elijah so he could *turn* the hearts of fathers toward their children and the disobedient toward the wisdom of the righteous – to make a group of people ready for the Lord's coming. How did John do this? John's message explained God's love for sinners, but simultaneously called sin by its right name.

John condemned fathers for bringing children into the world, only to shirk their God-given responsibility to be a loving father and a noble mentor for their children. John also condemned fathers and mothers for their spiritual neglect.

John used Israel's history of apostasy to prove how nations degenerate rapidly, especially if parents do not teach and demonstrate to their children the importance of loving and obeying God. Fathers had been lax about being spiritual role models and they had neglected to maintain the family altar.

Furthermore, they had abdicated their parental responsibilities to religious schools and others. The Holy Spirit's powerful conviction fell upon those who listened. Many fathers repented of their sins, transformed their ways and were baptized! Remember, John was not conducting a baptismal campaign and counting heads. He was preaching a life-transforming gospel that bore fruit and baptism by John was a pledge of allegiance.

John did not neglect to speak to the youth, either. After all, John was a single young man himself – only 30 years of age. As young people listened, the boldness and penetration of his message impressed them. John minced no words when he pointed out that most youth were unfit to participate in the coming kingdom of God.

Their rebellion against their parents and teachers made them essentially worthless for the purposes of God. John was firm, but kind. John used the circumstances surrounding his own birth to impress young people that God had a purpose for each life, but that purpose could be fulfilled only when God had dominion in the heart.

He reminded the youth that God did not agree with their focus on pleasure and the acquisition of money. John's abstemious life in the desert reflected a high calling, and I am sure he asked, "Where are those willing to forsake the world and serve God?"

Malachi 4 and Revelation 7

The parallel between the promise of Elijah ("Plan A") and the appearing of the 144,000 ("Plan B") awaits fulfillment. Revelation reveals the identity of Elijah for our generation! Revelation reveals there will be 144,000 servants of God who will have the spirit and power of Elijah.

This is the *next* prophetic event. Revelation also tells us that God is holding back the four winds of His wrath until His Elijah servants are prepared and ready to do their work. Revelation also reveals that God will empower the Elijah messengers for 1,260 days.

Most (if not all) of the 144,000 will be martyrs for Christ, just as John the Baptist became a martyr for the cause of Christ. The martyrdom of John brings up a good point. Notice the text:

"Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: 'It is not lawful for you to have her.' Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for them and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, 'Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.'

The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother." (Matthew 14:3-11)

Through the years, several people have asked why God did not rescue John the Baptist from prison, like He rescued Peter. (Remember, an angel came and released Peter from chains while his guards slept. Acts 12) Why did God allow the wicked Herodias and the even more detestable Herod to kill one of the greatest prophets?

The best answer I can find is this: When Israel apparently would not accept Jesus as the Messiah and it became impossible for Jesus to establish His kingdom on Earth, the Father allowed John the Baptist to be killed, rather than suffer the humiliation and ridicule of being called a false prophet.

If John the Baptist had lived to be as old as Methuselah (969 years), the things he predicted at the Jordan River would not have happened. This is year 2002 and still these events have not occurred, nor will they ever come to pass!

The provisions given under "Plan A" are dead. John was not a false prophet. The truth he preached was conditional. Israel rejected "Plan A" and God abandoned them. The good news is that "Plan B" is unconditional. All that God has said will happen *at the appointed time*. (Revelation 9:15 shows one example of this.) The Second Coming and the establishment of God's kingdom ("Plan B") is not dependant upon human cooperation.

During the Great Tribulation, the 144,000 will accomplish their mission. **"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."** (Matthew 24:14)

The gospel will be preached to everyone before the end of the world comes, but most of the 144,000 will perish for speaking God's truth before the Second Coming occurs! (Revelation 11:7) John the Baptist was murdered for condemning sin, Jesus was murdered for condemning sin, and the 144,000 will suffer the same fate.

Is the servant greater than the Master? Understand the powers of good and evil: Those who love sin hate the truth, and they will do everything they can to eliminate the condemnation of sin *except to repent!*

People who love truth will do everything they can to remain loyal to it, even if allegiance brings death. Jesus warned, **"Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."** (John 3:20,21)

The Highest Authority

There is one last point in this study that I would like you to consider. When Jesus stood before Pilate, He gave a powerful revelation to Pilate. Consider these words, "**Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.'** When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify! Crucify!' But Pilate answered, 'You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.' The Jews insisted, 'We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.' When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. 'Where do you come from?' he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. 'Do you refuse to speak to me?' Pilate said. 'Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?' Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.'" (John 19:4-11)

Reread the words of Jesus in the last two sentences again. Jesus told Pilate something very shocking. The Father handed Jesus over to Pilate; otherwise, Pilate would have had no power over Him! This principle reveals that God is intimately involved in the affairs on Earth.

From this statement, I conclude the Father also handed John the Baptist over to Herod. I am not endorsing fatalism – "what will be – will be." Rather, I am saying that when a person surrenders his or her will to God – as John and Jesus did – God uses that person to accomplish His intricate purposes.

When that purpose is complete, God often allows His loyal soldiers to rest in death until the day comes for life eternal.

I am highlighting this point because the Great Tribulation is soon to begin and God's people have nothing to fear as long as they submit to the higher authority of the King of kings. Revelation says, "**If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. *This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.***" (Revelation 13:10, italics mine)

God has a plan for His saints. He already knows where we will end up. The question before each of us is this: "Are we willing to allow God to use us so that He can fulfill the purpose for which we were born?"

Jesus also told Pilate, "**Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.**" Jesus was speaking about Lucifer and his demons who were present in Pilate's judgment hall. Ultimately, Lucifer and his unseen demons handed Jesus over to Pilate.

Yes, the Jews rejected Messiah and they handed Jesus over for destruction, but later, their punishment was total destruction in A.D. 70. Lucifer has been and still remains the instigator of

hatred against Christ from the beginning. Lucifer is the original Antichrist.

Lucifer is the father of sin and Lucifer will bear his guilt. At the appointed time, Lucifer and his demons will provide full restitution for their deeds. God will see to it.

144,000 Streets of Gold?

Ultimately, John the Baptist and Jesus met the same fate. God did not establish His kingdom in John's day. These cousins died for the same reason: They spoke the truth and the world could not bear to hear it. Is it any different today? No. When the 144,000 appear and begin to proclaim God's truth, the results will be the same.

The 144,000 will be harassed and tortured and most, if not all, will perish as a result of their ministry. Nevertheless, the story does not stop there.

God will resurrect and reward every one of them like Elijah! The Bible says the 144,000 will wear the names of the Father and the Son on their foreheads. (Revelation 14:1; 22:4) They will be Jesus' personal attendants in God's kingdom.

The Bible says the New Jerusalem has twelve gates named after the twelve tribes of Israel, and the city's twelve foundations are named after the twelve disciples of Jesus. I just wonder if the holy city has 144,000 streets of gold – each bearing the name of God's loyal servants. Wouldn't it be wonderful if those who received salvation during the Great Tribulation lived on the street named after the servant of God who invited them to receive Jesus?

Jesus said, "**Among those born of women there has not *risen anyone greater than John the Baptist*; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**" This brings our study to a close. John the Baptist was not the greatest prophet to live on Earth because of who he was. John the Baptist was the greatest prophet because he preached the greatest message ever told.

If announcing the first advent was the highest honor that God could bestow upon one person, what honor will be given to those who stand firm against the same rejection to herald the second and more glorious coming of Jesus?