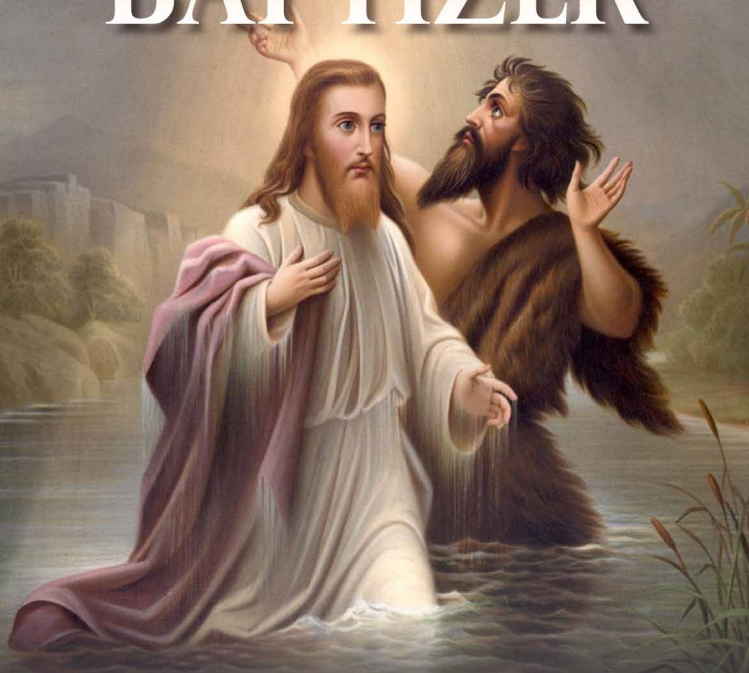


BIBLE STUDY SERIES

# JOHN THE BAPTIZER



WAKE UP AMERICA SEMINARS  
Proclaiming the Revelation of Jesus

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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

May God bless you as you study this fascinating topic!

Larry Wilson

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## Foreward

Nothing excites me more than to discover deeper insight from the Scriptures. As I began to focus my study on prophecy, I was amazed how many well-known Bible stories have such profound end time parallels. This is one of ten stories which were originally published in a monthly newsletter during the first ten months of 2002. Here are my reasons for republishing these stories:

First, I hope each booklet will be widely distributed because everyone needs to know that the Bible has never been more relevant and timely than right now! I realize many other Bible stories have end time parallels, but I have chosen these particular stories because they are rich in content. As each story is placed into proper context, it is easier to understand *how* and *why* God's people will be tested during the Great Tribulation.

Second, I want you to have enough background information about the character in each story to feel as though you were there when the story took place. Understanding the tests, struggles, mistakes, and victories experienced by the characters should encourage and prepare us for the days ahead.

Last, I want you to know that faith in God means to submit to His demands and remain loyal to Him in the face of life-threatening adversities. If any concept stands out, I hope it is this: Faith in God is much more than believing there is a God. When people truly love God, their everyday actions will reflect a dedicated commitment to honor

His ways, which are distinctly different from the ways this world honors. A faith-filled Christian often stands in direct opposition to what the world esteems;<sup>1</sup> therefore, honoring God is not always a pleasant experience.

The pressure to conform to the status quo explains, in part, why ancient Israel frequently apostatized.<sup>2</sup> Tragically, the priests of Israel failed to lead the people to understand that as a nation, they must be vigilant because mankind is inherently rebellious toward God.<sup>3</sup>

When the draw of our carnal nature is combined with the pressure to conform to the world's ways, serving God becomes a frustrating challenge and requires *patient* faith.<sup>4</sup> God understands our dilemma. This is why He preserved so many stories of faith in the Bible. Unless we examine and understand the failures and the victories of our forefathers, we will repeat their mistakes.

The Bible is clear; salvation comes through faith in God. Given this sublime truth, I hope you will gain a new appreciation about many aspects of faith as you read these booklets. Faith in God is so much more than intellectual assent to, or agreement with, an idea. Faith in God leads to adventure and fills your heart with peace and joy. True happiness springs from knowing and loving the great "I AM."

Larry Wilson, September 2020

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1 Romans 8:7

2 2 Kings 17:15

3 Ezekiel 22:26

4 James 1:3

## **John the Baptizer**

In a previous booklet, the story of Elijah provided several end-time parallels. Let's now examine John the Baptist's life, because John and Elijah had similar backgrounds. For example, both were singularly notorious in their day for speaking boldly against sin and challenging an apostate church-state system. Both men rose out of obscurity. Both men grew up in the desert wilderness. Neither man was formally educated nor were any of their writings preserved. Exceptional Holy Spirit power filled Elijah and John, and God granted them the honor of seeing Jesus!

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 twelve years older than the apostle John. The apostle John wrote the gospel of John, three other epistles which bear his name, and the book of Revelation. John the Baptist wrote no books of the Bible.

John the Baptist's birth, like Isaac's, was a miraculous event because his parents were of an advanced age.

The Bible reveals John's father was a Levite priest named Zechariah and his mother's name was Elizabeth. Like the prophet Jeremiah, God chose, named, and ordained John as a prophet *before* he was even born!<sup>1</sup> Amazingly, Jesus selected John to be His forerunner before either of their births! To stretch your mind even further, Jesus not only chose Mary and Joseph as His parents, but also chose Zechariah and Elizabeth to be John's parents. Because Zechariah 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. Through this study, John learned that Messiah

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:13-17

would appear *at the beginning* of the seventieth week 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.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the Jews ridiculed John for his beliefs, but many 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 God's prophet.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Ritual of Baptism**

There is interesting history behind John's title, "John the Baptist." Obviously, "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 today. John lived and died a Jew. He was among the few in Israel who believed Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. When John began his public ministry, he became notorious for performing an act most people considered strange. John insisted on baptizing *Jews* in the Jordan River. Typically, Jews were not the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3:2, 11; Luke 3; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:18-19

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 14:5

ones baptized, because they were the descendants of Abraham *by birth*. Conversely, Jewish priests 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 these baptisms were scarce.<sup>1</sup>

The Jews regarded a Gentile’s baptism as both a mystical and a practical experience. In a mystical sense, the Jews believed a Gentile’s past was “washed away” when baptized. Emerging from the water, the person became a new child of Abraham! Today, baptism, like the marriage ceremony, is a public declaration. In baptism before witnesses, you demonstrate your allegiance to God and to the principles of His kingdom. In marriage before witnesses, you state your allegiance to your spouse. Even though the origin of baptism is uncertain, baptism symbolized to Israel its experience as a nation.

When God delivered Israel from their old life of slavery in Egypt, they had to pass through the waters of the Jordan River. With this simulation of a new birth, the children of Israel inherited a new nation. After being symbolically immersed

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 23:15



and emerging from the water, they entered the Promised Land. When the Jews baptized a Gentile, they *adopted* him into one of the twelve tribes 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* needed to convert to *a new and better* religion – a religion centered on worshiping Messiah instead of slaughtering animals. The old religion 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 to be baptized in the fall of A.D. 27, the Holy Spirit gave John utterance and he cried out, **“Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!”**<sup>1</sup>

### **Why Was Jesus Baptized?**

Many people are puzzled that Jesus asked John to baptize Him. Jesus did not need to have His sins washed away because He never sinned.<sup>2</sup> Je-

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1 John 1:29, KJV

2 Hebrews 4:15

Jesus did not need to repent of rebellion against His Father in heaven because Jesus and the Father are one.<sup>1</sup> Jesus did not have to be born again because He did not have a carnal nature.<sup>2</sup> Then, why did Jesus request to be baptized?

Jesus submitted himself to be baptized by John because He was born “under law”<sup>3</sup> and He was subject to the Levitical system He was about to end.<sup>4</sup> Jesus terminated the entire Levitical system when He died on the cross. 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 Messiah had arrived and was going to establish 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 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.

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1 John 10:30

2 Colossians 2:9

3 Galatians 4:4

4 Hebrews 7

Jesus is not arbitrary or dictatorial. If He were, God would be inconsistent and chaos would fill the universe. God established order<sup>1</sup> and where there is moral order, there is a rule of law.

Jesus told the timid Nicodemus, **“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.”**<sup>2</sup>

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. 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. The Bible clearly teaches that works or rituals do not save us.<sup>3</sup> 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 to Jesus. However, even if a person is baptized, it does not necessarily guarantee salvation.<sup>4</sup> Baptism – like marriage vows – is a public

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1 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40

2 John 3:5

3 Ephesians 2:8-9

4 Matthew 7:20-23

declaration of loyalty and God implemented it 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.<sup>1</sup> Paul elaborates on the beauty of this concept in Romans 6-8. In submitting to baptism, Jesus declared His loyalty to the principles of God's coming kingdom.

Another reason Jesus chose to be baptized is *because He does not ask His followers to do what 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. **“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.”**<sup>2</sup> Jesus chose to be baptized, not because He had a car-

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1 John 3 and Matthew 28

2 John 13:14-16

nal past to wash away, but to encourage us to step out of our inherited religion and choose to accept 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.”**<sup>1</sup> 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;

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1 Matthew 28:19-20

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.

### **The King James Translation**

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. The Church of Rome concluded around the third century A.D. that a person could not be saved without 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, they allowed the reader to choose the meaning. The translators also transliterated John’s title to “John the Baptist” instead of “John, the one who immerses.”

### **An End-Time Parallel**

There are some important end-time parallels associated with John the Baptist. The role John the Baptist played as the First Advent approached will be the same role the 144,000 will fulfill as the Second Advent approaches. During the Great Tribulation, God will use 144,000 “baptizing Johns” to announce the appointed time of Jesus’ appearing as the “King of kings and Lord of lords” and the establishment of His kingdom! The 144,000 will come from every race, language, religion, and nation. Assuming there are eight 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 55,000 people. Assuming God's servants are evenly distributed throughout the world during the Great Tribulation, China would have about 27,000 of the 144,000, India would have about 26,000 of the 144,000, and the United States would have about 6,000 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 Malachi's words: **"See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."**<sup>1</sup> The prophet Malachi gave this prophecy about 350 years before Jesus was born. Jewish leaders during the time of Christ were not certain of its meaning, but they did know that God took Elijah to heaven in a fiery chariot<sup>2</sup> and the great and dreadful day of the Lord was still

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1 Malachi 4:5-6

2 2 Kings 2



in the future.<sup>1</sup> 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 the Messiah would appear imminently, 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 to reflect seriously on their lives. This often caused fear to fill the hearts of the people.

They listened and asked, "Who is worthy to receive God's salvation?" The Holy Spirit's pres-

<sup>1</sup> Joel 2, Obadiah 1, Isaiah 13, and Ezekiel 30

ence 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 salvation. 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, ‘Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.’”**

**“Even tax collectors 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.’”<sup>1</sup>**

John taught that God’s kingdom would coexist with a world of evil kingdoms for a time. Eventually, there would be a purified Earth. Three reasons why John’s message was believable were: First, it was based on Scripture. Second, it was timely. John showed from the prophecies that the time had come for Messiah to appear. 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 Sadducees and Pharisees came, presented themselves before John, and asked him to baptize them just in case his predictions might come true. Of course, they had no intention of humbling themselves to do what John was proclaiming and be right in

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 3:9-14

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]?”**<sup>1</sup>

### **God's Timing**

Let there be no mistake, John the Baptist's appearance 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. In John's day, the promise was so old that many people had begun to question its truthfulness as if God had forgotten! By the time John appeared, 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 heavily on 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.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3:7, insertion mine

Then, John came. 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 Messiah.”**<sup>1</sup> At this moment in history, people were filled with expectancy. Anticipation soared as John explained Daniel 9 to his audiences. The prediction that Messiah would appear in the 484<sup>th</sup> year after the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, captivated them.<sup>2</sup> John explained how 69 prophetic 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 soon establish His kingdom. Many Jews began to seriously 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. **“Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to**

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1 Luke 3:15

2 Daniel 9:25

**ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, ‘I am not the Messiah.’**

**“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 wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”<sup>1</sup>**

Did you notice the order of their questions? Did you notice whom 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. Verifying his

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:19-23, insertion mine

identity was the subject of many of these discussions. 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,<sup>1</sup> 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 being Elijah. Trying to reconcile the transfiguration experience of Jesus with the prophecy of Malachi, they

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 17:9

asked the Master, **“The disciples asked him, ‘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.’”**<sup>1</sup>

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.

### **If You Are Willing to Accept It**

A few months before Jesus was transfigured, King Herod had arrested and imprisoned John the Baptist because John had offended him. The ar-

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 17:10-12



rogant 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 Caesar's ears.

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 his beliefs. Jesus had appeared right on time and He 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 appeared to begin establishing 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 his ministry and some of his beliefs. When several of

his disciples came to visit, he instructed them to ask Jesus a pointed question.

**“When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, ‘Are you the one who is 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 cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.’”**<sup>1</sup> Jesus answered John’s question in veiled language.

He knew John was a keen student of Scripture and 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 Jesus’ response was affirming that He was the Messiah. It was not time to disclose this publicly. In fact, it was Jesus’ desire to keep His identity hidden un-

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:2-6

til He was resurrected, knowing that premature promotion of it would thwart His mission.<sup>1</sup>

**“As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness 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.”* Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever 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 subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding 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.’”**<sup>2</sup>

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1 Matthew 17:9

2 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 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 that *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 the prophecy still awaits

fulfillment. I do not believe this conclusion is true. If you 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 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”<sup>1</sup> would have happened shortly after the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> week if Israel had met the conditions God established 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

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<sup>1</sup> Zephaniah 1:14

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 as "any one who now receives Christ" is an heir of Abraham. In Christ, racial origin has no meaning.<sup>1</sup> Second, Jesus raised up new trustees of the gospel. These trustees became known as Christians.<sup>2</sup> Third, God established a new prophetic schematic that is found in the book of Revelation. I call this new course of action, "Plan B." There are many parallels

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 3:28-29

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 11:26

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 Jerusalem. Under “Plan B,” Jesus will govern His kingdom from His throne in *New Jerusalem*.<sup>1</sup> The point is that Elijah’s appearance, 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. But 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 the 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**

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 22:3

**to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him 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 before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel 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 parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’”**<sup>1</sup> 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 spirits from a bottle.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:13-17, italics mine



for the Lord's coming. 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 responsibility to be a loving father and noble mentor for their children. John also condemned fathers and mothers for spiritual neglect. He used Israel's history of apostasy to prove how nations degenerate rapidly if parents do not teach their children and demonstrate the importance of loving and obeying God. Fathers had been lax about being spiritual role models and they neglected to maintain the family altar. Furthermore, they had abdicated their parental responsibilities to religious schools. The Holy Spirit's powerful conviction fell upon those who listened. Many fathers repented of their sins, transformed their ways, and were baptized! 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 spoke to the youth as well. After all, He was a single young man around 30 years of age, himself. As young people listened, the boldness and

penetration of his message impressed them. He minced no words when he pointed out that most of them were unfit to participate in the coming kingdom of God. Their rebellion against parents and teachers made them essentially worthless for the purposes of God. John was firm, but kind. He 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 of 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! There will be 144,000 servants of God who will have the spirit and power of Elijah. This is the *next* prophetic event.

Currently, God is holding back the four winds of His wrath until His Elijah servants are prepared and ready to do their work. The Holy Spirit will then empower these Elijah-messengers for 1,260 days. An important end-time parallel is that most, if not all, of the 144,000 will be martyrs for Christ just as John the Baptist became a martyr.

**“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 John a prophet. On Herod’s birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests 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.”<sup>1</sup>**

Through the years, people have asked me 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 offer 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 events he predicted at the Jordan River would not have happened. Two thousand years later, these events have not occurred, nor will they ever come to pass! The provisions given under “Plan A” are dead. “Plan A” will not happen. John was not a false prophet; the truth he preached was conditional. Israel re-

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 14:3-11

<sup>2</sup> Acts 12

jected “Plan A” so God abandoned them. The good news is that “Plan B” is unconditional. “Plan B” will occur. All that God has said will happen *at the appointed time*; Revelation 9:15 provides one example. The Second Coming and the establishment of God’s kingdom (“Plan B”) are not dependent 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.”**<sup>1</sup> The gospel will be preached to everyone before the end of the world. Most of the 144,000 will perish for speaking God’s truth before the Second Coming occurs!<sup>2</sup> 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

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1 Matthew 24:14

2 Revelation 11:7

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 their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”**<sup>1</sup>

### **The Highest Authority**

When Jesus stood before Pilate, He gave Pilate a powerful revelation. **“Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, ‘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.’**

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:20-21

**“The Jewish leaders 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.’”<sup>1</sup>**

Re-read Jesus’ words in the last two sentences. Jesus told Pilate a very shocking fact. The Father allowed Jesus to be handed over to Pilate; otherwise, Pilate would have had no power over Him! This principle reveals that God is intimately involved in the affairs of 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 per-

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<sup>1</sup> John 19:4-11

son surrenders his or her will to God, as did John and Jesus, 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.

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 they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed."** *This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people*<sup>1</sup> 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 He can fulfill the purpose for which we were born?"

Remember, Jesus 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. Lucifer and his unseen demons instigated the mob to hand Jesus over to Pilate. **The Jews rejected Messiah and they handed Je-**

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 13:10, italics mine



sus over for destruction. Later, their punishment was total destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. From the beginning, Lucifer has been, and still remains, the instigator of hatred against Christ. He is the original Antichrist and the father of sin, and will bear its guilt. At the appointed time, God will ensure that Lucifer and his demons provide full restitution for their deeds.

### **144,000 Streets of Gold?**

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. It is no different today. When the 144,000 appear and begin to proclaim God's truth, the result will be the same. The 144,000 will be harassed and tortured and most, if not all, will perish at the end of their ministry. Nevertheless, the story does not stop there. God will resurrect and reward each one! The Bible says the 144,000 will wear the names of the Father and the Son on their foreheads.<sup>1</sup> They will be Jesus' personal attendants in God's kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 14:1

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 22:3, 4

Scripture 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. I 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 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 whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”**<sup>1</sup> 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 coming of Christ 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?

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:11

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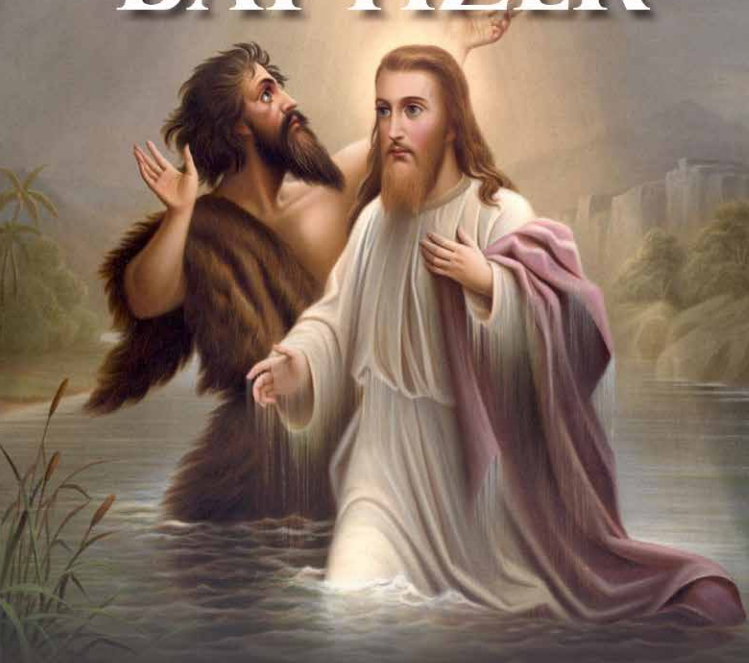
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