

Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

Matthew 3:1-12 John – More Than a Prophet

The backstory of John *Yoch'anan* the Baptist.

- **The Levitical priestly role of his father** Luke 1:5
- **Priest named Zacharias** – Za'karia "of the course of Abia"
" whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense" Luke 1:10
- **The timeline of John's birth and Jesus' birth.** Elizabeth conceives six months before Mary conceives
Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:26-36

Dan Bergan wrote about the "course of Abia/Abijah" in His article entitled "When was Jesus Born?" for *Israel's Messenger* (Winter 2017). Dan wrote, "Focus in on the phrases "course of Abia" and "order of his course." Zachariah was of the course (or family) of Abijah. According to 2 Chronicles 23:8, these courses rotated from Sabbath to Sabbath. This rotation would repeat twice a year. It is inferred by Luke that Elizabeth would conceive John shortly after Zachariah's return from Jerusalem. Shmuel Safrai, in his work *A Priest of the Division of Abijah*, details for us the timing of service for Zachariah's priestly course:

'During the Second Temple period, the twenty-four priestly divisions served in the temple at Jerusalem in a rotation system. A list of priestly divisions can be found in 1 Chronicles 24:7-18... The priests themselves lived not only in Jerusalem but also in other settlements in the land of Israel. When it was "time for the division to go up [to Jerusalem]" (Mishnah, Ta'anit 4:2), the priests left their homes, went up to Jerusalem for a week, and afterwards returned to their homes in Judea or Galilee... Abijah was the eighth priestly division.'

Once we examine the timing of these rotations, we can get a little bit closer to nailing down a more concrete time frame. Zachariah's course was the eighth.⁸ The courses started with the first month in the Hebrew calendar *Nisan* (March or April of our calendar). His shift would be on the tenth week of this rotation.

'Why the tenth week? Because all divisions served during primary feast weeks of the Jewish year. So all of the divisions of the priesthood would serve during Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread (the third week of the year). Likewise, all of the divisions of the priesthood would serve during the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (the ninth week). Thus, the eighth course of the priesthood would end up serving on the tenth week of the year.'

Now we must make an assumption here. Remember we said that Zechariah's division served at the temple twice a year. The Bible does not specify which of the two shifts of service it was. Regardless, nine months after one of the two dates John the Baptist was born. This would place his birth in March or September.'

We will assume that Luke is recording Zechariah's first shift of service for the year. We will find that assumption tends to prove true as we discover the dates of John the Baptist's and Jesus' birth. Therefore, the date of Zechariah's service (in Luke 1) would be the Jewish date of Sivan 12-18 (mid-June).'

Due to time of travel for Zachariah, at least one additional week should be counted before we can assume John was conceived. If the above timing is correct, John the Baptist would be born almost exactly at the beginning of Passover! What is even more amazing is that the announcement to Mary of her conception of the Messiah comes in the sixth

month of Elizabeth's pregnancy according to Luke - *The Festival of Light* - Chanukah! This fits very well with the words of John:

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

One of their duties was to make sure that incense was burning before the Lord at all times. (1 Chr 23:13). Zechariah is offering incense when we meet him in the book of Luke (Lk 1:9)."

The backstory of John the Baptist. (cont'd)

- **The Aaronic genealogy of Elizabeth** - *Elishevah* "daughters of Aaron"
Question: If Elizabeth is from the priestly line, the tribe of Levi, how can she be related to Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is from the line of David, the tribe of Judah?
Answer: Mary has at least some Levite blood in her. Why couldn't Mary be both from David's line and Aaron's line? Joseph (a Judahite) marrying a relative of (a Levite) indicates that intermarrying between tribes was acceptable before Mary's time. "Cousin" isn't limited to first cousin. Think of the 12 tribes of Israel of which two "sons" are not sons of Jacob but of Joseph therefore grandsons with an Egyptian mother. Technically Arabs and Jews are "cousins" with the same father different mothers. There are a number of possibilities in the intermarriage of Mary's ancestors neither of which disqualified Zacharias from being a priest by marrying Elizabeth nor disqualified Mary being a descendant of David through Nathan and of the tribe of Judah. Family trees are complicated. Modern DNA testing could have proven that Mary was from David and that she was at least distantly related to Aaron through marriage.
- **The miraculous vision in the temple about Elizabeth's late midlife conception** 1:17 "well stricken in years"
 Note the other previously barren women who had given birth: Sarah, Rachael, Hannah
- **The Nazarite vow requirements** Luke 1:15, Numbers 6:2-21; Judges 3:5-17
 Of Sampson it was told to Hannah "unto God from the womb" Luke 1:15 John was to be "filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb"
- **The prophesied mission of John as Messiah's forerunner** Luke 1:16
- **The prophesied partial fulfillment of the Messianic role of Elijah** Luke 1:17; Malachi 4:5,6; Matthew 10:17-13

The Ministry and Message of John the Baptist

- **Preparing people by turning them to the Lord**
- **Message - Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand** Matthew 3:2

How did John the Baptist tell them to prepare to receive the Gospel of the Kingdom?

- **PREPARE your heart for the Lord**
 Luke 3:4-5 "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways *shall be* made smooth"
- **REPENT**
 Matthew 3:2 "Repent ye"

- **BE BAPTIZED**

Matthew 3:6 “were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.”

- **GIVE LIFE EVIDENCE**

Matthew 3:8 “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance” Share with the poor. Stop cheating people. Do no violence. Don’t falsely accuse. Be content with your wages. Luke 3:10 – 14

Were people that only believed John’s message and followed in baptism saved?

- **John the Baptist said:** “I am not the Christ.” John 1:19,20
- **John said RECEIVE HIM when He arrives - He will save you.**
Luke 3:6 “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”
- **The Apostle Paul found disciples of John.** They were not saved because they had only believed John’s half of the message – Repent so you can believe on the one who comes after me. **Acts 19:1-5**
- **Even baptism by John THE Baptist is insufficient to save. In fact, baptism has never saved anyone.**
So how were people saved in the Old Testament? (which continued until Jesus’ death) **Simply by Faith.**
By faith Abraham “believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” Gen. 15:6
Repentance toward God and faith in the LORD to forgive and cleanse, is the only way salvation has ever been received.

Uniqueness of John’s prophetic style Matthew 3:3-12

- **Location** - Wilderness of Judea
- **Appearance** - raiment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle about his loins;
- **Diet** - his meat was locusts and wild honey.
- **Demeanor** – “spirit of Elijah” prophet of repentance from sin Matthew 17:10-12

“O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” Luke 3:7

“now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” Luke 3:9

“he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.” Luke 3:17

“reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done” Luke 3:19

- **Audience** “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan”
- **Messianic Expectation** – “And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not” Luke 3:15

Partial Prophetic Fulfillment Luke 3:4-6 by John Matthew 11:7-15 More than a prophet – the greatest...

Isaiah 40:3-5 In this prophecy the identity of the speaker commanding “to cry” is unidentified by Isaiah. Not until the New Testament do we learn the identity of the speaker in 40:2. The importance of the message over the messenger fits perfectly with John’s words “He must increase but I must decrease.”

The Masoretic Hebrew text in verse 4 accents a parallel of both commands as happening in the wilderness/desert.

“In the wilderness, Prepare the way of the LORD,
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

The cry is coming from God’s messenger in the wilderness/desert to:

- Prepare the way of the LORD
- Make straight the highway/path

The *rekasim* – rough is to be made *mishor* – smooth with the final surface of the path and contours to be made easy and even. If the king is riding through your town, you don't want his chariot to hit a pot hole. In the same way the sinfully damaged pathways of our hearts requires God given preparation and repair called regeneration repentance and saving faith. That's what John's message called for, the preparation of Israel's heart for the way of the LORD's salvation when Messiah comes. Verse 6 speaks of eschatology yet to be fulfilled when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom.

The Baptism of Jesus Matthew 3:13-17

Location Bethabara beyond Jordan John 1:28 (see map at <https://bibleatlas.org/full/jericho.htm>)

According to the UNESCO website, it is "Situated on the eastern bank of the River Jordan, nine kilometres north of the Dead Sea, across the plane from Jericho the archaeological site. Situated in a pristine natural environment the site is believed to be the location where Jesus of Nazareth was baptized by John the Baptist. The Roman and Byzantine remains including churches and chapels, a monastery... testify to the religious character of the place."

What was Jesus Baptized?

Mark Robinson in his article on Baptism in Israel's Messenger, Fall 2021 issue makes the connection of the Hebrew word "*mikveh*" which is used of ritual emersions required in the Torah to it's translation as "The *hope of Israel*" is Messiah, here referred to as the "*mikveh of Israel*." With *mikveh* used as "*the hope of Israel*," and the reference to the LORD as "*the fountain of living waters*," the tie-in becomes clearer... In light of the Jeremiah usages and the introduction of the *mikveh* (100 B.C.) in the late 2nd Temple period consider the use of "baptism" with John and Jesus" (John 1:29-31.33; Matthew 3:13-17). Mark draws the excellent conclusion from the Jewish context "The *baptism* of Jesus, and God's approval of Him, symbolized that the "*hope (mikveh) of Israel*" has now come. The use of water is to remind the participant in *baptism* that Jesus the Savior is the "*fountain of living water*." (John 4:14).

In the same way, every usage of baptism (Acts 2, Romans 6, 1 Peter 3, etc.) should be understood as symbolic, representing the "*hope of Israel*," Messiah Jesus! When a believer is baptized today the focus is on the picture of what the Lord Jesus has done for that individual. As one is immersed in the Jewish practice of *mikveh*, so the mode of *baptism* should be immersion as it pictures the individual dying from his old life and raised to a new life because of what the "*Hope of Israel*" has done.

If baptism is necessary for salvation, why is it absent from the Old Testament? It is absent because it wasn't until about 100 B.C. that it was adopted in the Jewish world.

God's plan of salvation was always through faith, see Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4:1-5, 9-11, 16, 19-22. Being immersed in water was and never is part of salvation. It was only a picture of the "*Hope of Israel*." There are hundreds of verses."

It is interesting that the two ordinances that Jesus required in the local church by believers in Him; Baptism and Communion have no Old Testament basis, but are drawn from 1st Century Jewish practices. There was no juice element on the Exodus Passover Table, only Lamb, bitter herbs and unleavened bread. The Church could not be more Jewish in it's foundation – Jesus the Messiah, and in it's ordinances, the Jewish Apostles and in it's mission to the Jew first with their Gospel of salvation by faith through grace to be accepted by faith just like Abraham did.

It was through this symbolic ritual that God chose for Jesus to be revealed as the Passover Lamb and it was at this moment that the Holy Spirit's anointing rested on Jesus the beloved Son of God. to inaugurate His earthly ministry.