

A Study of **John the Baptist**

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As always, I appreciate the opportunity to study and teach God’s Word. We can learn much from the attitude of John the Baptist: his humility, his boldness, and his devotion to the truth. I pray that we may echo his zeal as we teach the truth, always seeking followers for Christ and never for ourselves.

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Additional study materials are available, free of charge, at www.ConcerningJesus.com.

I. The parents of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-7)

- A. Zacharias was a priest, of the division of Abijah
 - 1. "Jehovah is renowned"
 - 2. "The great numbers of priests necessitated that particular choice for various functions should be made by casting lots; and no one was allowed to burn incense more than once, many never being permitted to do so at all."
(Coffman, *Luke*)
- B. Elizabeth was of the daughters of Aaron
 - 1. "God is an oath"
 - 2. A relative of Mary
 - 3. Barren
- C. They were both "righteous before God"
 - 1. "Walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord"
 - 2. "Blameless"

II. Zacharias' service in the temple (Luke 1:8-10)

- A. "The inside of the Temple-building was exactly like the inside of the Tabernacle. The Holy Place contained the Table of Showbread, the Menora (candelabra), and the Altar of Incense. Outside the Temple-building was the Altar of Burnt Offering and the Laver. Inside the Holy of Holies was where the Ark of the Covenant was supposed to be. Only the High Priest could enter there and only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Incense was burned on this altar (which stood just in front of the veil which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies) every morning and every evening so that it was literally, perpetual (cf. Ex. 30:8). It was customary for the Jews to stop whatever they were doing each day at these times of burning the incense in the temple and pray. Many made a special trip to the Temple courts to pray at those hours. It was one of the greatest experience in the life of an ordinary priest of the Jews to be chosen to burn the incense." (Butler, *Luke*)

III. Gabriel speaks to Zacharias (Luke 1:11-23)

- A. Fear was the normal response to the appearance of an angel
- B. The announcement of a son
 - 1. Call his name John – "gift of God" or "God's grace"
 - 2. Great in the sight of the Lord
 - 3. Drink neither wine nor strong drink
 - 4. Will be filled with the Holy Spirit
- C. John's work
 - 1. Turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord
 - 2. Turn the hearts of the fathers to the children (Malachi 4:6)
 - 3. Turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just
 - 4. Make ready a people prepared for the Lord
- D. Zacharias' unbelief

1. Because of his age
2. Punishment was to be made deaf (Luke 1:62) and dumb until John's birth
3. "Zacharias is not the only one to ask for evidence on which to base his belief: Gideon did; Thomas did....But since Zacharias didn't believe the word of the angel Gabriel, he was given a sign that would not only establish it in his mind but also cause the people to see that something unusual had happened while he was in the temple." (Applebury)

IV. Elizabeth conceives (Luke 1:24-25)

- A. The inability to bear children was viewed as a curse from God
- B. "The mores of that society were such that Elizabeth would indeed have suffered all kinds of reproach from her family, possibly even from her husband, and certainly from her community. Her gratitude at the lifting of such a reproach is beautiful and touching. If she had suffered a number of miscarriages in the past, it would have accounted for her period of hiding for five months." (Coffman, *Luke*)

V. The birth of John (Luke 1:57-66)

- A. The neighbors believed the child should be named Zacharias after his father, but Elizabeth and Zacharias rejected their suggestion
 1. Children were traditionally named after a relative
 2. "The officiousness of the neighbors is seen in their appealing over the mother's wishes to Zacharias himself." (Coffman, *Luke*)
- B. Upon the affirmation of the child's name, Zacharias was able to speak
- C. "The miracles surrounding the birth of John were talked about through all the hill country of Judea. Those who witnessed the miracles agreed, '...the hand of the Lord was with him.' No doubt there were many who remembered these testimonies when John began preaching 30 years later and repeated them to the younger generation so that great multitudes (Mt. 3:5) went out into the uninhabited Jordan river valley to hear him. After all, there had not been a *bona fide* prophet of God among the Hebrew people for over 400 years." (Butler, *Luke*)

VI. Zacharias prophesies (Luke 1:67-80)

- A. Zacharias praises God for the arrival of the times of the Messiah
 1. Verses 68-75 refer to the coming Christ
 - a. "He has visited and redeemed His people" (cf. Isaiah 29:6 [KJV]; Zephaniah 2:7; Psalm 8:4-6; Hebrews 2:6; Acts 15:14)
 - b. "A horn of salvation" (cf. Psalm 132:17; 148:14; Ezekiel 29:21)
 - c. "In the house of His servant David" (cf. Amos 9:11; Acts 15:15-18)
 2. Verses 76-79 refer to John's work of preparation for the Christ
 - a. "The imagery is that of a herald going before a king to prepare the way for a royal visitor." (Coffman)
 - b. One of his tasks: "To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins" (cf. Luke 3:3)
- B. Verse 80 is the only information we have about John's life until his work begins

WHO IS JOHN THE BAPTIST? // John 1:6-8; 1:19-40

I. The apostle introduces the baptizer (John 1:6-8)

- A. "Sent from God"
- B. "To bear witness of the Light"
- C. "He was not that Light" (cf. John 5:35; Matthew 5:14-16)

II. John answers the Pharisees (John 1:19-24)

- A. Not the Christ
- B. Not Elijah
 - 1. Malachi prophesied the return of Elijah (Malachi 4:5)
 - 2. Jesus identified John as Elijah (Matthew 17:12-13)
 - 3. Why did John deny his identity as Elijah? "The popular notion was that the original Elijah would rise from the dead; and, if John the Baptist had given an affirmative answer to their question, it would have been, in the context, a falsehood. Therefore, he denied that he was Elijah, in the sense in which the question had been asked." (Coffman, *John*)
- C. Not the Prophet
 - 1. Moses: "A Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren" (Deuteronomy 18:15-18)
 - 2. Notice the capital "P" in the many modern translations
 - 3. The use of capital letters indicate that the translators believed the noun referred to Deity – in this case, Christ
 - 4. John had already denied that he was the promised Christ. "It was the old reporter's trick of asking the same question again in different words, and John again answered it negatively." (Coffman, *John*)
 - 5. "He willingly and joyfully kept himself in the background in order that all might see the only Son of God. The Baptist was what every true follower of Christ ought to be – a servant willing to lay all the acclaim and honor given him of men at the feet of Jesus." (Butler, *John*)
- D. The fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 40:3)
 - 1. Also referenced in Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4
 - 2. His job was simply to prepare the people for the Christ
 - 3. Prepare and make straight (Isaiah 40:3)
 - 4. Prepare the way (Malachi 3:1)
 - 5. "John was literally in the wilderness of Judea doing his preaching. But there seems to be a spiritual application to the phrase 'a voice of one crying *in the wilderness*.' Especially this is true considering its prophetic background. This herald of God was also crying in a *wilderness* of wasted souls." (Butler, *John*)

III. John prophesies of the Christ (John 1:25-28)

- A. He was not "the Prophet," nor was he the actual Elijah resurrected, but he was *a* prophet ("sent from God" John 1:6)

- B. "It was the baptizing and not the preaching which cause the greatest perplexity in John's questioners. The extensive mass cleansing of the whole nation through repentance and baptism clearly suggested the great cleansing that had been prophesied by Ezekiel of the times of the Messiah (Ezekiel 36:25; 37:23); why then was John doing it if indeed he was not the Christ nor the kind of forerunner they expected to precede the Christ? This query shows that they had missed completely the implication of John's quoting Isaiah 40:3; in which he made it clear that he was actually the forerunner of the Messiah, but not the literal Elijah they had expected." (Coffman, *John*)
- C. Jesus' identity as the Christ was not yet made known to the general public
- D. John declares that the Christ was coming after him, but is preferred before him
- E. "Whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose"

IV. John testifies of the Christ (John 1:29-34)

- A. "The Lamb of God"
 - 1. The antitype of the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12-13; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:19)
 - 2. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7)
- B. "Takes away the sin of the world"
 - 1. "Christ did not come to solve the political problems of Israel, nor to break the back of Roman tyranny, nor for bringing improvements in agriculture, trade, medicine, or education, nor for any similar thing. Christ came to redeem people from sin." (Coffman, *John*)
 - 2. Luke 19:10; John 3:16-17; Hebrews 10:4-10
- C. John affirms that this was the One of whom he had previously spoken in 1:26-27
 - 1. John was conceived six months before Jesus (Luke 1:36)
 - 2. John says of Jesus, "He was before me" – indicating the eternal nature of the Christ
- D. "I did not know Him" probably means that John did not realize Jesus was the Christ until it was revealed to him from heaven on the occasion of Jesus' baptism
 - 1. He was given the sign of the dove (Matthew 3:16)
 - 2. He heard the voice from heaven (Matthew 3:17)
 - 3. Possibly, however, "Although their mothers were cousins, they lived eighty miles apart, and it is possible that they had not met." (Lipscomb, *John*)

V. John's disciples follow Jesus (John 1:35-40)

- A. Two disciples left John to follow Jesus
 - 1. "Some of the disciples of John were jealous that Jesus gathered followers at the expense of John, but John had none of this feeling. He came to make ready a people for Jesus, bear testimony to his claims, and direct his disciples to Jesus as the Lord, and rejoiced to see him increase, while he himself decreased in followers." (Lipscomb, *John*)
- B. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother
- C. The other, though not named, is thought to be John the apostle

1. "But who was the unnamed companion of Andrew? Probably the Evangelist himself. For: (1) the narrative in this place is very particular and graphic, making it probable that the writer was an eye-witness. (2) The writer of such a narrative would have been sure to mention the name of the other disciple as well as that of Andrew, unless there had been some reason for withholding it. (3) The writer of this Gospel never refers to himself elsewhere by name, and the same feeling which led him to withhold his name elsewhere accounts for his withholding it here." (Hovey)
2. "It is a trait of the author of this account never to mention his own name or that of his relatives." (Butler, *John*)

I. When (Luke 3:1-2)

- A. The fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar
 - 1. Ascended to the throne of the Roman Empire in 14 AD
 - 2. However, was joint-emperor beginning in 11 AD
- B. Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea (26-36 AD)
- C. Herod, tetrarch of Galilee (4 BC-39 AD)
- D. Philip, tetrarch of Iturea (4 BC-34 AD)
- E. Lysanias, tetrarch of Abilene
- F. Annas (7 BC-15 AD, but still considered by Jews as the true high priest after 15) and Caiaphas (18-37 AD), high priests

II. The general message of repentance

- A. Baptism of repentance for the remissions of sins (Luke 3:3)
 - 1. Repentance “is a change of the human will that issues a reformation of life....It is the basic condition of God’s forgiveness; and, as long as one is under the probation of life, the need of repentance is constant” (Coffman, *Luke*)
 - 2. “Benjamin Franklin, pioneer Restoration preacher, proclaimed that God appointed three changes in conversion and three actions designed to effect those three changes. These are FAITH to change the heart (mind); REPENTANCE to change the will; and BAPTISM to change the status.” (Coffman, *Matthew*).
 - 3. “He did all his preaching near water since response to his message required immersion (baptism).” (Butler, *Luke*)
 - 4. “The word *baptizo* in Greek means *immerse*; it can only mean immerse. There is a Greek word for sprinkle, *rantizo*; there is a Greek word for pour, *cheo*. Neither of these words are used in the Greek text for the action of baptism – only the word *baptizo*. All Greek lexicons, ancient and modern, give the definition of *baptizo* to be, ‘dip, plunge, immerse.’ The practice of sprinkling for baptism was not officially sanctioned by Christendom until the fourteenth century! To make changes in the mode of baptism is nowhere sanctioned in the Bible!” (Butler, *Luke*)
- B. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2)
 - 1. During his lifetime, John was never a member of the Lord’s kingdom
 - 2. The kingdom (the church) was not established until about 33 AD – after John’s death
- C. Fulfillment of prophecy (Mark 1:2; Luke 3:4-6)
 - 1. Malachi 3:1
 - 2. Isaiah 40:3-5
 - 3. “The conceit that physical descent from Abraham would entitle them to Messiah’s blessing, the foolish notion that the Messiah would be a secular king like Solomon, the conviction that he would drive out the Romans and

execute a vindictive and punitive judgment against their Gentile enemies, and the widespread hypocrisy and immorality of the people, the selfishness and hardheartedness of the rich, and the greedy gouging of the people by the concessioners in the temple itself, the gross ritualism and secularism that had buried God's true law under the priestly traditions – all these cried out to God for correction; and thus it was no small task that challenged the son of Zacharias!" (Coffman, *Luke*)

- D. Widespread acceptance of the message (Mark 1:5-6; Luke 3:7; Matthew 3:7)
 - 1. "Then **all** the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to hear him and were **all** baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5, emphasis added)
 - 2. This is obvious hyperbole, as one discovers from further reading that there were still many who did not believe and did not submit to John's baptism
 - 3. "Multitudes" (Luke 3:7)
 - 4. "Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 3:7)
- E. Addressing the religious elite (Matthew 3:7-10)
 - 1. "Who warned you?"
 - a. "Who indeed but the father of lies could have prompted these hypocrites to believe they could actually escape the wrath of God by mere outwardly religious, hypocritical acts?...Baptized hundreds of times, they would never be able to escape the wrath of God!" (Fowler, *Matthew*)
 - b. Just as faith alone cannot save, neither can baptism alone
 - c. It takes a life of submission, sacrifice, and service, to live faithfully
 - d. "True repentance is inward but it must affect all the issues of life." (Fowler, *Matthew*)
 - 2. Do not trust in your heritage (Luke 3:7-9)
 - a. "We have Abraham as our father"
 - b. "God is interested in character, not color of skin or cultural circumstance." (Butler, *Luke*)
 - c. Individual responsibility (cf. Ezekiel 18:20)
 - d. The importance of bearing fruit (cf. Matthew 7:15-20; Galatians 5:22-23)
 - e. How was the "ax...laid to the root of the trees" prophecy fulfilled? The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD
- F. Take care of those in need (Luke 3:10-11)
 - 1. Matthew 25:31-46
 - 2. James 2:14-17

III. Teaching to specific groups

- A. Tax collectors (Luke 3:12-13)
 - 1. John teaches them to practice fairness
 - 2. Society had a low opinion of tax collectors – in Scriptures, they were often mentioned in the same breath as sinners/heathens/harlots (Matthew 9:10-11; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31-32; Mark 2:15-16; Luke 5:30; 7:34; 15:1)
 - 3. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14)

4. The example of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8)
 5. "Significantly, John did not suggest that they resign their jobs....Not tax collecting, but dishonest extortion was viewed as sin." (Coffman, *Luke*)
- B. Soldiers (Luke 3:14)
1. Do not intimidate
 2. Be content with wages
 3. "They were not commanded to leave the army but to exhibit attitudes of restraint, truthfulness, and contentment." (Coffman, *Luke*)
 4. "He keeps his life free from the *love* of money (cf. Heb. 13:5; I Tim. 6:6-8). He does not have to give up a perfectly normal and socially useful vocation to come into a right relationship with God—he just has to let God's revealed will give sovereign direction to whatever vocation or avocation he chooses in life." (Butler, *Luke*)
 5. Colossians 3:23-24; Ephesians 6:5-9

IV. John denies that he is the Christ (Luke 3:15-18)

- A. "One of the things that made John the Baptist such a *great* man was his unfeigned humility. He was great because he was a servant." (Butler, *Luke*)
- B. John baptized with water; Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire
 1. Those baptized with the Holy Spirit were the apostles on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2)
 2. Those baptized with fire are those who refuse to repent in this life
 3. The fire, as indicated in verse 17, is "unquenchable"

I. Why did Jesus submit to baptism?

- A. John tried to prevent Him
- B. It was not “for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3; cf. Hebrews 4:15)
- C. “To fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15)
 - 1. “He learned obedience” (Hebrews 5:8)
 - 2. He came to do the will of God (Hebrews 10:7)
 - 3. “There are two aspects of baptism; first, it was an act in connection with the remission of sin, and an act of obedience to a positive command of God. Jesus had no sin to be forgiven, but he must obey the command of God.” (Boles, *Matthew*)
 - 4. “Could He have gone on in His sinlessness as heretofore and have remained sinless to the end if at this point He did not do everything God had commanded? No, perfect holiness involves doing all God says to do, without rationalizing. Had Jesus refused or neglected to obey this precept of God, He would have failed, coming short of perfect righteousness.” (Fowler, *Matthew*)
 - 5. “Our Lord came to set us a perfect example, hence it was needful for him, having taken the form of a man and a servant, to set us an example of obedience. He was baptized, not unto repentance, for he had no sins, but to fulfill all righteousness, and thus to show us how every disciple ought to do.” (Johnson and DeWelt, *Mark*)
 - 6. “How worthy of emulation is that sublime attitude of Jesus; and how unlike that attitude is that of men who set aside even the baptism that is greater than John’s, making it a non-essential, an elective privilege, rather than receiving it for what it is, namely, a divinely-imposed condition of eternal salvation, which if spurned cannot fail to bring everlasting remorse.” (Coffman, *Matthew*)
- D. Why are we supposed to be baptized today?
 - 1. “For the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38)
 - 2. “Wash away your sins” (Acts 22:16)
 - 3. “Into His death” (Romans 6:3-6)
 - 4. “Put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27)

II. The Spirit “descending like a dove”

- A. John 1:32-34
- B. “As in all Scriptural symbolism, the dove was a creature most admirably suited to serve in that situation as a vehicle for suggesting the Holy Spirit. Note: (1) The dove was a ‘clean’ creature under the ceremonial laws of the Jews; (2) it was used in their religious sacrifices, two, in fact, being offered upon the presentation of our Lord in the temple (Luke 2:24); (3) it is a monogamous creature! (4) it is a symbol of peace; (5) it is a marvel of gentleness, love, and affection; (6) it is a messenger (the homing pigeon is a dove); and (7) the dove

has no gall, suggesting that there is no bitterness in the service of God.”
(Coffman, *Matthew*)

- C. Jesus called doves “harmless” (Matthew 10:16)
- D. “The coming of the Spirit performed these all-important functions:
 - 1. “The divine authentication of His identity: HE, and no other, is God’s Son and Messiah;
 - 2. “His public anointing as God’s Messiah (Ac. 10:38);
 - 3. “The reinforcement of the human nature of Jesus for the great work and suffering which He must shortly commence.” (Fowler, *Matthew*)

III. The Father’s voice from heaven

- A. “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”
- B. Two other instances of the Father speaking from above in the New Testament
 - 1. At the mount of transfiguration: Matthew 17:5, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”
 - 2. At the feast: John 12:28-29, “‘Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.’ Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered.”
- C. Jesus’ status as the Son of God is different from other sons (and daughters) of God
 - 1. “Only begotten” (John 3:16-18; 1 John 4:9)
 - 2. Jesus is a unique, one-of-a-kind type of Son
 - 3. We are children through adoption (Galatians 4:4-7)

IV. The trinity

- A. “Here at the baptism of Jesus, we have one of the clearest and most complete revelations of the three Persons who make up the Deity: the Son of God standing incarnate upon earth, the Spirit descending out of heaven, and the Father speaking from heaven. Again, our obedience to the divine will brings together those mighty names in connection with our baptism.” (Fowler, *Matthew*)
- B. Matthew 28:19-20
- C. 2 Corinthians 13:14

I. John vs. Jesus?

A. Jesus and His disciples baptizing in Judea (John 3:22)

1. Judea/Jerusalem was the starting point for the spread of the gospel, as Jesus later commissioned the apostles (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8)
2. "This Gospel gives the Judean ministry of Christ, almost totally omitted by the synoptics....occurred before John the Baptist was cast into prison, a fact John stressed, thus making it very early in the Lord's ministry." (Coffman, *John*)
3. Jesus Himself did not baptize anyone (John 4:2). "There was Divine wisdom in this. The apostle Paul was forced to contend with division in the Corinthian church a few years later which had resulted from certain Christians taking pride in having been baptized by certain preachers and apostles (cf. I Cor. 1:14ff)." (Butler, *John*)
4. This was the same baptism that John was administering, with a view toward Christ's death and resurrection
 - a. New Testament baptism was not preached and practiced until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and thereafter
 - b. New Testament baptism mirrors the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord (Romans 6:3-6)

B. John baptizing in Aenon near Salim (John 3:23)

1. The exact geographical location is unknown today
2. However, the purpose of the location is given: "because there was much water there"
3. If baptism could be acceptably administered by sprinkling or pouring, there would have been no need for "much water"
4. "Immersion is the ceremony recognized as baptism by Christ and the apostles; and the appearance of other actions called baptism in the historical church should not obscure this fact." (Coffman, *John*)
5. "It would be well to pause here and define the word *baptize*. Every Greek Lexicon of any repute defines *baptize* as having a primary meaning of 'dip, plunge, immerse, submerge.' In the Greek language (the original language of the New Testament) this word *baptize* can never mean sprinkle or pour. It is to be feared that the translators of our English versions of the Bible have allowed religious prejudices to guide their translating. It is interesting to note how these translators contradict themselves. In II King 5:14 our English translators have rendered the verse thusly: 'Then went he down and *dipped* himself seven times in the Jordan...' (speaking of Naaman and his cure of leprosy). The amazing fact is that they interpreted the word *baptize*, here used in the Septuagint, to mean *dipped*. When these scholars came to the New Testament they merely transliterated (change of characters of one alphabet to corresponding characters of another alphabet) the word *baptize*. 'Consistency, thou art a gem!'" (Butler, *John*)

C. The dispute (John 3:25-26)

1. The precise question is not known, only that it had to do with “purification”
2. “Verse 25 informs us of John the Baptist’s disciples beginning a disputation or argument with a Jew (probably one who favored Jesus and His ministry) over the question of cleansing. From verse 26 it seems the whole disputation was over the authority and cleansing efficacy of the two baptisms. The disciples of John began the controversy and probably challenged the Jew because he had been baptized by Jesus’ disciples. That Jesus could baptize without consulting John they could not understand, and undoubtedly argued that the Jew had not been purified or cleansed because he had not been baptized by John.” (Butler, *John*)
3. Many commentators (Coffman, Lipscomb, Johnson, and Butler all included) attribute John’s disciples’ attitude to jealousy
4. “They seem to have grown somewhat jealous that the masses were leaving John to follow Jesus.” (Lipscomb, *John*)

II. John’s response to his disciples

A. John reaffirms his own identity as “not the Christ” (John 3:27-28; cf. John 1:19-20)

1. “To see his great popularity and influence gradually waning, and another coming up to take his place, was well calculated to arouse jealousy. But John, in the spirit of his mission, rose to a sublime superiority over carnal weakness. He declares, first, that what he is, and what Jesus is, is due to the will of heaven. Each will till his appointed mission ‘given him from heaven.’ Next, he cites his own words before spoken, of which they were witnesses, in which he declared that he was not the Christ, but only the messenger who went before the King to prepare his way. The superiority of Jesus was only what he himself had predicted.” (Johnson, *John*)
2. John’s words in verse 27 “are true in two senses. Jesus could not have enjoyed such widespread success unless God had given it; and John’s decline could not have occurred unless the Lord had willed it.” (Coffman, *John*)

B. The marriage analogy (John 3:29)

1. Used in Old Testament (Isaiah 54:5; Hosea 2:16,19-20)
2. Used in New Testament (Ephesians 5:25-27,32; Revelation 21:2,9; 22:17)
3. John rejoiced (cf. Romans 12:15)

C. John’s humility on full display (John 3:30)

1. Christ’s work was to build His church (Matthew 16:18-19)
2. His kingdom was such that “shall never be destroyed...and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44)
3. John’s mission as the way preparer was drawing to a close
4. “These last words of John are in the spirit of Christian sacrifice and are a fitting close of his work.” (Johnson, *John*)
5. Paul wrote, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” (1 Corinthians 3:6)

III. John's exaltation of the Son of God

- A. Christ—as “He who comes from heaven”—has supreme authority (John 3:31)
 - 1. While John's mission and message was from above, he himself was fully human, in contrast to Jesus who was God in the flesh (John 1:14; Romans 8:3; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 4:2)
 - 2. Since Jesus Himself (not merely His message) was from heaven, He has authority over all (cf. Matthew 28:18)
- B. The majority's rejection of Christ's testimony (John 3:32)
 - 1. “No one” is hyperbolic, as shown by the next verse – there were some who “received His testimony” (John 3:33)
 - 2. While we are told on other occasions that “great multitudes came to Him” (Matthew 15:30), it is evident from further examination that not all remained interested in His doctrine
 - 3. The parable of the sower shows the reasons why some fall away after being taught the truth (Luke 8:4-15)
 - 4. Jesus taught on the Sermon on the Mount that few would follow the way leading to life (Matthew 7:13-14)
- C. The truth of the Father (John 3:33-34; cf. 1 John 5:10)
- D. The love of the Father (John 3:35; cf. Matthew 3:17)
- E. The importance of belief (John 3:36)
 - 1. Obedient faith: second half is translated “does not believe” in NKJV; “does not obey” in ESV, NASB; “obeyeth not” in ASV
 - 2. “At issue is how to properly translate the single Greek word *apeitheo* that is found in John 3:36. This term can be translated as either ‘unbelief’ or ‘disobedience.’ To illustrate, the KJV translates the same word, *apeitheo*, as ‘disobedience’ in other places, such as 1 Peter 3:1 (‘obey not’); and Romans 2:8 (‘do not obey’).” (Ankerberg and Burroughs, *Taking a Stand for the Bible*)
 - 3. “In all instances, it is an OBEDIENT FAITH that is meant, and never is some special quality of faith apart from obedience intended. Salvation by ‘faith alone’ is an erroneous tenet of human creeds, but it is not the teaching of God's word. He who does not obey the Son, in the practical sense, is an unbeliever; and all faith, of whatever degree, is dead without obedience.” (Coffman, *John*)
 - 4. Everyone has a choice to make – believe or do not believe/obey (John 3:36); narrow or wide gate (Matthew 7:13-14); light or darkness (John 12:46; 2 Corinthians 6:14); righteous or lawless (2 Corinthians 6:14); transformed by the renewing of your mind or conformed to this world (Romans 12:2)
 - 5. We will be judged by the choices we make (John 12:48; 2 Corinthians 5:10)

I. Herod is reminded of John

- A. Christ was often compared to great men (Mark 6:15; Luke 9:8; cf. Matthew 16:13-14), but we must remember that He is greater than any man (Matthew 16:15-16; John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
- B. Christ's power reminded Herod of John (Matthew 14:2; Mark 6:14; Luke 9:7-9)
- C. "While John had done no miracles during his ministry (Jn. 10:41), so powerful must have been the effect of his life and work that the tetrarch has no difficulty believing that so mighty a prophet should be risen and now working miracles too." (Fowler, *Matthew*)

II. Herod's unlawful marriage

- A. John boldly proclaimed to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife" (Matthew 14:4; Mark 9:18)
 - 1. Herod Antipas and Philip (not the tetrarch) were half-brothers
 - 2. Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus, another half-brother of Herod Antipas and Philip
 - 3. Salome was Herodias' daughter with Philip (not the tetrarch); she later married Philip (the tetrarch), who was also a half-brother of her father Philip (not the tetrarch) and Herod Antipas
 - 4. Herodias left Philip and married Herod Antipas
 - 5. "The Jews fiercely resented Herod's incestuous marriage with Herodias for three reasons: First, he was already married; second, she was his niece; and third, she was his brother's wife. The Jewish law expressly forbade a man's marrying his brother's wife, even after the brother's death, much less while he was still alive; the one exception being that when a man died without an heir, his brother was commanded to marry the deceased's widow and produce an heir to his estate (Leviticus 18:16; Deuteronomy 25:5-10)." (Coffman, *Matthew*)
 - 6. See also Leviticus 20:21
 - 7. "The forsaken wife of Antipas was a daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia, who resented the insult to his family and throne, and marched upon Herod Antipas shortly after this murder of John the Baptist, and routed him with great slaughter." (Boles, *Matthew*)
- B. Too many abandon the truth due to family situations; others compromise depending on their audience
 - 1. It is interesting that John did not fear the consequences of speaking truth to the powerful Herod, but Herod feared the opinion of the common people in determining John's punishment
 - 2. "John boldly rebuked vice even in the great. As our Lord said, when speaking of him, John was no *reed shaken with the wind*; he was a prophet and *more than a prophet*, and spoke with a prophet's fearlessness. Luke tells us that

John also reproved all the evils which Herod had done (Luke 3:19).” (Johnson and DeWelt, *Mark*)

3. While we may present the truth in different ways to different people, we cannot compromise the gospel message itself (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Ephesians 4:15)

III. Herod’s and Herodias’ opinions of John

- A. “Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man” (Mark 6:20)
 1. He even listened to John’s message “gladly”
 2. “Herod was awed by John’s virtue. He feared and esteemed him, and did many things to please the Precursor, but not the one thing against which John’s rebukes were chiefly directed. Herod would not put away Herodias.” (Johnson and DeWelt, *Mark*)
- B. Yet, despite this respect, “he wanted to put him to death” (Matthew 14:5)
 1. “The purpose was already in his heart, and, had it not been for fear of the people, he would already have martyred John.” (Coffman, *Matthew*)
 2. Cf. Matthew 5:21-22
 3. Perhaps this was a “heat of the moment” thought when Herod first heard the message, only to cool off after considering the truthfulness of the statement
- C. Herodias “wanted to kill him” but was prevented by Herod
 1. Whereas Herod protected John and listened to his preaching, Herodias’ opinion did not change over the course of time
 2. “She is under stress not only because of John’s publicly denouncing her as an adulteress. She is also menaced, because if she must return to her first husband, or at any rate, leave Herod, to whom she has attached her ambitions, these very ambitions must be immediately relinquished and her personal struggle for supremacy must begin all over at a time when she sees herself beginning to arrive at her goals.” (Fowler, *Matthew*)
 3. She took hold of the opportunity to exact her revenge on the occasion of Herod’s birthday
 4. “Convenient day for Herodias to execute her malicious designs. Wine, dissipation, licentiousness were all favorable to this.” (Dorris, *Mark*)
 5. While we may not immediately jump to thoughts of murder, do we not at times resent those who expose sin in our lives? May we consistently examine ourselves that we do not make enemies of men whose only desire is to speak truth (cf. Galatians 4:16)

IV. Herod’s birthday

- A. The dance (Matthew 14:6; Mark 6:22)
 1. “History reveals the corruption that was exhibited in eastern courts; dancers exhibited themselves in immodest attire and aped all of the emotions of sensual carnality.” (Boles, *Matthew*)
 2. What should we do when we are confronted with the temptation of lust? (Matthew 5:28-29; 2 Timothy 2:22)

3. We must also take care that we are not the cause of temptation for our brothers or sisters (Romans 14:13)
- B. The promise (Matthew 14:7; Mark 6:22-23)
 1. The rich often enjoy showing off their wealth
 2. "This was the type of boastful, extravagant oath, characteristic of tyrants and despots of that era." (Coffman, *Mark*)
 3. "A wild and reckless promise that could have been made only by one who had lost his wits by drunkenness. A drinking man is not a safe business man....But how many in our day give away the whole kingdom of their souls, with health and hope, prosperity, peace, and goodness—yea, the whole kingdom of heaven—for the paltry price of a glass of wine; the pleasure of the table; the acquisition of a little money." (Dorris, *Mark*)
 4. Consider the warning in 1 John 2:15-17
- C. The request (Matthew 14:8; Mark 6:24-25)
 1. "When it is considered that Salome might have requested any things which could have been of great value to herself, and that her mother by this suggestion actually robbed her daughter of whatever benefit Herod might have bestowed upon her, all for the sake of venting her vicious hatred against John, the blindness and stupidity of evil are evident." (Coffman, *Mark*)
 2. Did Herod have any option but to honor this request? (cf. Leviticus 5:4-5)
- D. The murder (Matthew 14:9-12; Mark 6:26-29)
 1. "Herod's conscience was dead to real crimes like adultery, incest and murder, but supersensitive to the point of scrupulousness about a broken oath! What moral blindness to uphold a dubious point of honor at the expense of elementary justice!" (Fowler, *Matthew*)
 2. "John died as a martyr for the truth and exchanged his dungeon for a world where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest—a world in whose light his rejoicing soul could discover the ways of God." (Boles, *Matthew*)
 3. The greatest testimony of the life of John comes from the Savior Himself: "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matthew 11:11)

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

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