

# The Life of Christ

## The Life and Ministry of John the Baptist

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- Childhood of John the Baptist [Luke 1:80]
  - ✦ As John the Baptist grew up, he developed an inner vitality and strength of spirit.
  - ✦ Living in the desert was not normal for a young person.
  - ✦ However, John understood from an early age that he had a special mission to perform, so he embraced the role of Elijah [v. 17] by living in a desolate area.
  - ✦ His public ministry would be prominent for only a brief period.
- John's ministry begins [Matt 3:1; Mark 1:1-4; Luke 3:1-2; John 1:19-28]
  - ✦ Matt 3:1: John the Baptist came preaching.
    - John was 30+ years old when he began his ministry.
    - In the Bible, there are several men named John, but only one with the distinguished name John the Baptist (Baptizer).
    - John's ministry was conducted in the wilderness of Judea, a rugged and barren land west of the Dead Sea.



- ✦ Mark 1:1-4: John the Baptist came preaching.
  - Verse 1: This verbless verse is the book's title and theme.

- The phrase “gospel of Jesus Christ” means the “good news about Jesus Christ”.
- People who knew the Old Testament book of Isaiah were familiar with the term “gospel” [Isa 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 61:1].
- When Mark used the word “gospel” here, it was a term signifying preaching about Jesus Christ.
- The “gospel” is the declaration of God’s power through Jesus Christ to save all who believe [Rom 1:16].
- This verse directly states that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (the two phrases are in apposition).
- This highlights Jesus as being human, the anticipated Messiah, and fully divine.
- Verses 2-3: Prophecies about John the Baptist.
  - Verse 2 is an amalgamation of Ex 23:20 (LXX) and Mal 3:1a.
  - Under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, Mark wrote “Your way” instead of “the way before Me”.
  - Verse 3 is from Isaiah 40:3 in the LXX.
  - Again, under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, Mark wrote “His paths” instead of “a highway for our God”.
  - These God-breathed rephrases give both of those Old Testament texts a Messianic perspective.
  - The phrase “As is written in Isaiah the prophet:” at the beginning of verse 2 indicates that Mark was focused on the content from Isaiah 40:3 in verse 3.
  - The mention of the wilderness in verse 4 confirms this.
- Verse 4: John the Baptist came in the wilderness preaching.
  - As we saw in Matt 3:1, this is the wilderness of Judea.
  - He came preaching about baptism.
  - Baptism was a not new concept to the Jews – they required proselyte Gentiles to baptize themselves (self-immersion).
  - What was different about this baptism was that it was intended for the Jews, God’s covenant people.
  - This was a baptism “of repentance” which means that a repentance on the part of the Jews was required.
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  - This was a baptism “of repentance” which means that a repentance on the part of the Jews was required.
  - The Greek word translated “repentance” here is μετάνοια (metanoia) which means a change of mind.
  - The Jewish people needed to change their minds regarding their sinful ways and their need for the Messiah to come.
  - The repentance was “for” the forgiveness of sins.
  - The Greek word translated “for” here is εἰς (eis) which means “to” or “toward”, so this should read “leading to the forgiveness of sins”.

- ✧ Luke 3:1-2: John the Baptist received the word of God.
  - Verse 1: John's ministry began in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar.
    - Tiberius Caesar reigned from 14-37 A.D., so that would make this the year 29 A.D.
    - John the Baptist was roughly 33 years old in 29 A.D.
    - Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from 26-36 A.D.
    - The Herod mentioned in this verse is Herod Antipas who ruled over Galilee from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D.
    - His brother Philip ruled to the east of the Jordan from 4 B.C. to 34 A.D.
    - We do not have much historical information about Lysanias.
  - Verse 2: John received the word of God during the priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.
    - Annas served as high priest from 6-15 A.D. when he was deposed by the Roman authorities.
    - His son-in-law Caiaphas served in that role from 18-36 A.D.
    - However, the Jews continued to recognize Annas as the rightful high priest even though Caiaphas was in that position [Acts 4:5-6].
    - While John the Baptist was living in the desert (wilderness), [Luke 1:80] the word of God came to him.
    - We find this language in the O.T. [1 Kgs 12:22; 1 Chr 17:3].
- ✧ John 1:19-28: The testimony of John the Baptist.
  - Verse 19: When the Jews heard about John the Baptist, they sent priests and Levites to investigate him.
  - Verses 20-21: John openly confessed who he was not.
    - Note that his answers grew progressively shorter.
    - He wanted to talk about Jesus Christ, not himself.
  - Verses 22-23: John identified himself as the forerunner.
    - After learning who John was not, the priests and Levites haughtily demanded to know who he was.
    - John then quoted Isa 40:3 from the LXX informing them that he was the prophesied forerunner of the Christ.
  - Verses 24-27: The priests/Levites questioned John's baptism.
    - They had been sent from the Pharisees.
    - The Pharisees were an important group within Judaism.
    - They were very influential and were the only group to survive the Jewish war of 66-70 A.D.
    - Speaking under the authority of the Pharisees, the priests and Levites wanted to know what authority John had.
    - His answer implied that his authority came from Jesus – One whom they did not know.
    - John made it clear that his ministry was anticipatory.
    - John expressed his humility, considering himself unworthy to do even the lowliest service for Him.
  - Verse 28: The specific location of this Bethany is unknown.

○ John and his message [Mt 3:2-12; Mk 1:5-8; Lk 3:3-14]

✱ Matt 3:2-12: John, the herald of the Christ.

- Verse 2: The command: repent. The reason: the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
  - The kingdom of heaven being at hand refers to the kingdom of heaven coming to the earth.
  - This kingdom on earth would be established by the person of the Messiah.
  - Many O.T. Scriptures teach of a coming kingdom, so the Jewish people understood the meaning of John's message.
  - Notice that no one who heard John's message ever asked him what he meant.
  - What they did not understand was the need to repent.
  - The Jewish people arrogantly assumed that they would automatically be granted entrance into the kingdom, but John's message made it clear that repentance was needed.
- Verse 3: John, the forerunner.
  - As we saw in Mark 1:3 and John 1:23, John quoted Isa 40:3 from the LXX.
  - This was to inform them that he was the prophesied forerunner of the Christ.
- Verse 4: John's clothes and diet.
  - His garment was of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and his diet was locusts and wild honey.
  - His clothes were reminiscent of Elijah [2 Kgs 1:8].
  - His diet was that of a man of little means [Lev 11:21-22].
- Verses 5-6: John's preaching got a very positive response.
  - Multitudes were coming from Jerusalem, all Judea and the district around the Jordan.
  - They were confessing their sins (a clear sign of repentance) and were being baptized by John in the Jordan river.
  - John's baptism was a religious rite signifying repentance and confession of sin in anticipation of the coming Messiah.
  - Christian baptism is a rite for the Church age believer in recognition of his identification with the death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah who has come – Jesus Christ.
- Verses 7-10: The Pharisees/Sadducees came to be baptized.
  - John recognized that they had rejected his message.
  - John informed them that they needed to repent, just as he had commanded.
  - They did not think they needed to repent, being the descendants of Abraham.
  - John informed them that God could raise up children of Abraham from the stones (and even those "filthy" Gentiles).
  - Unless the Pharisees and Sadducees repented (bearing the fruit of repentance), God had no need of them.
  - This is reminiscent of Elijah's message in 1 Kgs 18:17-40.
- Verses 11-12: The coming Messiah.
  - John was humble, recognizing that his ministry was only temporary in nature.
  - The coming Messiah would be mightier and would have a greater baptism, one they would have understood from the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29.
  - The coming Messiah will judge and cleanse (with fire) all those who would enter into His kingdom [Mal 3:2-3].

- ✧ Mark 1:5-8: John, the herald of the Christ.
  - Verse 5: John's preaching got a very positive response.
    - Many were coming from Jerusalem and all the country of Judea (no mention of the district around the Jordan).
    - They were being baptized by John in the Jordan river and confessing their sins (a clear sign of repentance).
  - Verse 6: John's clothes and diet.
    - His garment was of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and his diet was locusts and wild honey.
    - His clothes were reminiscent of Elijah [2 Kgs 1:8].
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  - Verses 7-8: The coming Messiah.
    - John was humble, recognizing that his ministry was only temporary in nature.
    - The coming Messiah would be mightier and would have a greater baptism, one they would have understood from the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29.
- ✧ Luke 3:3-14: John, the herald of the Christ.
  - Verse 3: John the Baptist came in the wilderness preaching.
    - He came into the district around the Jordan - the wilderness of Judea.
    - He came preaching about baptism.
    - This was a baptism "of repentance" which means that a repentance on the part of the Jews was required.
    - Repentance is a change of mind, and this repentance was "for" the forgiveness of sins.
    - The Greek word translated "for" here is εἰς (eis) which means "to" or "toward", so this should read "leading to the forgiveness of sins".
  - Verses 4-6: Prophecies about John the Baptist.
    - This is a quotation from Isaiah 40:3-5 in the LXX.
    - Isaiah was writing of God's preparing the way for the return of the exiles from Babylon to Judah.
    - However, all three of the Synoptic Gospel writers apply Isaiah's words to John the Baptist.
    - When a king would travel in the desert, the way would be cleared and smoothed to make the trip easier.
    - Here, the leveling of the land is symbolic for the way of the Messiah being made smooth because the Lord used John to prepare the hearts of many people to receive Him.
  - Verses 7-9: Crowds came to be baptized by John.
    - John recognized that they had rejected his message.
    - These were the Pharisees/Sadducees [Matt 3:7].
    - John informed them that they needed to repent, just as he had commanded, but they did not think they needed to repent, being the descendants of Abraham.
    - John informed them that God could raise up children of Abraham from the stones (and even those "filthy" Gentiles).
    - Unless the Pharisees and Sadducees truly repented and displayed evidence thereof (bearing fruits in keeping with repentance), God had no need of them.

- Verses 10-14: Others in the crowd questioned John.
  - The tax collectors, soldiers and some others asked John, “What shall we do?”.
  - John’s response was to be generous in their abundance, honest in their dealings, and content with their lot in life.
  - Each of these is in accordance with repentance.
  - People would often wear two tunics – a shirt-like garment – so they would typically have one to share.
  - Tax collectors at the time were notorious for collecting more than was required and pocketing the excess, so they were the perfect example of those who needed to be honest.
  - Soldiers at the time were known for using force to extort money while blaming others, so they were the perfect example of those who needed to be content (and gentle).
  - All these folks would have food that they could share.
  - These things would naturally flow from a repentant heart.
- John’s description of Jesus [Luke 3:15-18]
  - ✦ Verse 15: People wondered if John the Baptist was the Christ.
    - Gabriel had explained John’s role to Zacharias [Luke 1:17].
    - Zacharias later proclaimed John’s role [Luke 1:76].
    - However, the people that came out to John did not know about these things (or did not keep them in mind) and suspected that John might be the Messiah.
  - ✦ Verses 16-17: The coming Messiah.
    - John was humble, recognizing that his ministry was only temporary in nature.
    - The coming Messiah would be mightier and would have a greater baptism.
    - The coming Messiah will judge and cleanse (with fire) all those who would enter into His kingdom [Mal 3:2-3].
  - ✦ Verse 18: John preached the gospel.
    - Exhortations – such as those which John had spoken to the tax collectors, soldiers and others – were an important part of John’s ministry.
    - John preached the gospel about Jesus throughout his ministry which lasted roughly three years.
- John’s imprisonment and death [Mt 14:4-12; Lk 3:19-20]
  - ✦ Luke 3:19-20: John the Baptist’s imprisonment.
    - John reprimanded Herod for marrying his brother’s wife [Mark 6:17].
    - John also called out Herod for wicked things he had done, including building Tiberius on the site of the tombs.
    - Herod’s response was to throw John in prison.