

August 20, 2023

God's Good News Story

John the Baptist

The Last of the Prophets the Forerunner of Jesus

God's Good News Story makes a major shift today as we leave behind the Old Testament and the age of the Prophets & Kings and after nearly 430 years comes onto the stage of the New Testament and the New Covenant focus on Jesus.

His Prophetic Foretelling

His Birth

His Calling

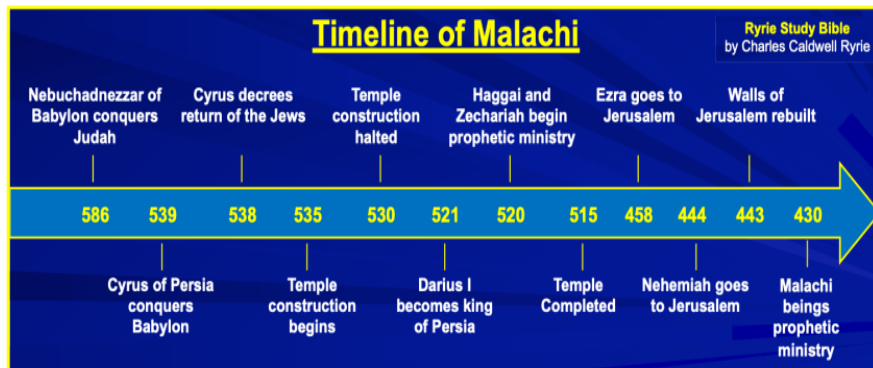
His Message

His Mission

His Death

His Impact

John the Baptist is a bridge or segue star in **God's Good News Story**! Let's take a quick look at the timeline. Let's fill in the gaps first from our last message:



Who is Malachi?

- ❖ His name means "**My Messenger**". He is not mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament.
- ❖ He was the last of the writing prophets but wrote nothing about himself. We have no biblical information about his ancestry, call, or personal life.
- ❖ Jewish tradition identifies him as a member of the **Great Synagogue** that collected and preserved the Scriptures.
- ❖ Looking solely at internal evidence, the date of the prophecy points to the late fifth century B.C., most likely during **Nehemiah's** return to **Persia c. 433-424 B.C.**
- ❖ **Malachi** was the last prophet Judah heard until **John the Baptist** came and the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 was fulfilled.
- ❖ Contemporaries: Possibly **Nehemiah** and **Ezra**.
- ❖ **Scriptural Context:** [Nehemiah 10-13](#).

<https://www.anapprovedworkman.org/previous-series/majoring-in-the-minors-a-study-of-the-minor-prophets/malachi-return-to-me/>

Six Periods of Rulers over Palestine

Persian rule 535-333 BC – Jews allowed to return to Palestine, but many stayed in Babylon, and travelled to other lands. Aramaic commonly spoken.

Greek rule 333-323 BC – brought Greek culture and Greek language.

Egyptian rule (Greek descent – Ptolemies) 323-204 BC – some Jews deported to Egypt. Septuagint translated and compiled.

Syrian rule (Greek descent – Seleucids) 204-165 BC – became an oppressive ruler of Palestine. Temple desecrated.

Jewish independent rule (Maccabees / Hasmoneans) 165-63 BC – revolted against Seleucids. Established a Jewish homeland and king again.

Roman rule 63 BC - c.650 AD – almost every person mentioned in NT (4BC to 68AD) came under Roman rule. Allowed Jews a degree of self government.

"When the time had fully come, God sent His Son ..." (Galatians 4:4)

<https://www.deityandhumanity.com/15-intertestamental--early-nt.html>

The following is adapted from Debbie McDaniel - <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/women/6-powerful-truths-from-the-life-of-john-the-baptist-that-offer-hope-for-today.html>

“Prophets of old, Isaiah and Malachi both spoke of his coming. For 400 years there had been silence between the Old and New Testaments, and then John came to prepare the way of the Lord. Malachi ends with these powerful words closing both the book and Old Testament with the hope of what was still to come, **“See I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers...” (Malachi 4:5-6).**

Many years before then, Isaiah had spoken these words about John, who, like himself, would also be a prophet preaching repentance, encouraging people to live for God alone. **“A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3)**”. In Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:2,3 and Luke 3:4-6, we find this verse quoted referring to John The Baptist.

So, let’s look into the life of this great prophet and forerunner of Jesus. John, or Yochanan (יְחִיָּאָה), in Hebrew, Ἰωάννης in Greek, carries the general meaning of ‘Yahweh is Gracious/Merciful’

John was the son of a Levitical Priest named Zachariah some versions (KJV) translate it as Zacharias, same man. His mother was Elizabeth, a descendent of Aaron (Moses’ brother) and the thus part of the priestly lineage. John had a rich bloodline. He was also a cousin of Jesus. His mother Elizabeth and Mary, the mother of Jesus were cousins.

The Gospel of Luke tells us the story of his unique and miraculous conception, birth and calling. In Chapter 1, we find that Herod was the ruler of Judea and Zachariah was a priest who was part of the Priestly Division of Abijah. In 1 Chronicles 24 we read where King David gave instructions on setting up a system of 24 divisions in order to have a systematic and organized system of worship. David’s son Solomon put this plan into action around the month of September @951BC. Jewish scholars believe that the entire 24 divisions would cycle every 168 days, so each division was on a set one week schedule. So nearly 1000 years later this system was still in operation, even though the cycle was not consistently in action because of disobedience and the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. But the idea and the system were always put back in place in times of obedience.

So, it was the time for the Division of Abijah to supply a Priest for the offerings. It was Zachariah who was the fortunate and appointed one to burn incense for the offering. While in the temple an ‘Angel of the Lord’ appeared to him... listen to **Luke 1:11-19**... ¹¹ ***Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.*** ¹² ***When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.*** ¹³ ***But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.*** ¹⁴ ***He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,*** ¹⁵ ***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. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ 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.” ¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.” ¹⁹ The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰ And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.”

After this traumatic event, Zachariah stepped out and the people could tell that something amazing had happened. Just as the angel had said, Zacariah was unable to speak. Then according to the angels message his wife Elizabeth became miraculously pregnant (the scriptures say that Elizabeth had been **‘barren and both were advanced in years’**). It is reminiscent of Abraham and Sarah.

Six months into her pregnancy, God sent an angel to visit another Judea woman by the name of Mary. During this encounter the angel tells Mary that your relative Elizabeth is in her sixth month of a miraculous pregnancy. The angel says this to assure Mary the God’s Word will never fail. Soon after, Mary leaves her hometown and travels to see Elizabeth. As soon as Mary walks in the door the scripture says that the baby inside of Elizabeth **‘leaped for joy’**. We read (Luke 1:7) that Elizabeth was **‘filled with the Holy Spirit’**. This small but important detail shows us that Jesus was ‘filled with

the Spirit of God’ from inception and this ‘Presence’ was recognizable by other who has the Spirit as well. When the time for birth came, they gathered with all the family and religious leaders for the naming ceremony. The leaders assumed they would name the child after Zachariah, but Elizabeth spoke up and said, No, his name is John. Then confused, they looked to Zechariah and he wrote on a tablet... **“His name is John”**, then immediately and miraculously he was able to speak. Everyone was filled with awe and said **“what is this child going to be?”** Then Zechariah breaks out into a song of worship under the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke 1:68-79.

We know of nothing else about John for the next nearly 30 years other than **Luke 1:80** which states... ***And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.***

Zip forward about 30 years to around 29AD, (15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, see Luke 3:1). We find John in the countryside by the Jordan river **“preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin” (Luke 3:4)**. At this point Luke interjects the prophetic passage from **Isaiah 40:3-5** (nearly 700 years previous) **Luke 3:4-6...⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.⁶ And all people will see God’s salvation.”**

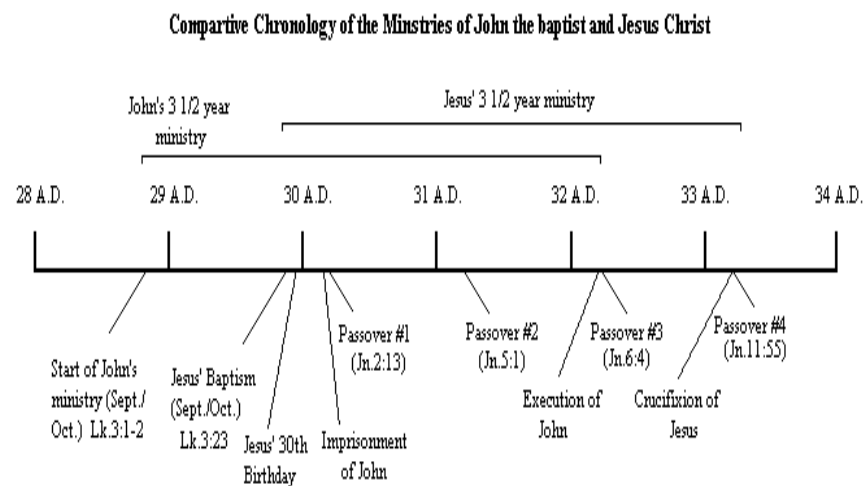
John then began a powerful and dynamic ministry of preaching of repentance and baptism for forgiveness. He dresses in camel hair and eats locust and honey...yummy lol. He also declares that he is just a voice, or forerunner declaring that the true Messiah, the Hope of the Ages is coming – get ready and repent! Then something unusual happens...one day while John was baptizing and preaching repentance, Jesus and some of His disciples came up to the river. Now, John and Jesus were cousins, but the scripture gives no indication that they had ever met (except in the womb before birth). But, when John saw Jesus the Holy Spirit gave him clarity of just Who Jesus was...John (the Baptist) states “**Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world**” (John 1:29).

Jesus then asks John (the Baptist) to baptize him. John asserts he is unworthy to baptize Jesus and that Jesus should baptize him. But, Jesus states it is necessary to fulfill all righteousness. So John the Baptist baptizes Jesus under the waters of the Jordan River. When Jesus emerges from the watery depths, the heaven’s open and the Spirit of God came down in the visible form of a dove and rested on Jesus. Then a mighty voice from heaven thundered. “**This is my beloved Son, in Whom I AM well pleased**”,

What an amazing event this was. This voice gave affirmation that Jesus was truly the Lamb of God and the Son of God, the Messiah that they had waited on for so long. The term “Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world:...is a key focus in our year long theme... “**The Scarlet Thread of Redemption**”.

John the Baptist is affirming that Jesus is the Lamb who will provide the blood sacrifice to atone for our sins. John continues his preaching repentance and baptizing but also adds the “Lamb of God” and Messiah message pointing people to Jesus. We have no record of John performing any miracles, but this key role was that of preparing people to accept Jesus as their Lord and Messiah.

This chart gives an outline of the connection of John & Jesus’ ministry”



<https://ichthys.com/mail-Gospel-QuestionsIII.htm>

Unfortunately, John the Baptist made some enemies in high places with his preaching on repentance. John had confronted Herod about his sin in taking Herodias to be his wife as she had been the wife of his brother. Herodias was furious and one day when there was a big banquet, Herodias daughter, (commonly believed to be named Salome) danced for Herod and pleased him and

so he made a big boast and said ask for anything and it will be granted. She asked her mother who took advantage of the situation to satisfy her revenge and asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Reluctantly, Herod had John beheaded and thus the brief (around 1 year ministry) but impactful ministry of John the Baptist came to an end.

Let's conclude with some key lessons to learn and truths from this great prophet and servant.

“In the story of John the Baptist, we are reminded to trust God's plan and prepare the way for others to encounter Jesus. In our relationships, we can make a huge impact by sharing our story of spiritual transformation. John the Baptist experienced joy, discouragement, triumph, and failure. Knowing John the Baptist walked this earth leaving a powerful legacy while experiencing difficult circumstances is encouraging. As we strive to follow John's footsteps and lead others to Jesus, let us remember his life-changing words, **“He must increase, but I must decrease.”** (John 3:30) When we believe how much God cares and loves us, decreasing for His sake becomes easier”. <https://butterflyliving.org/the-story-of-john-the-baptist/>

Truths from the Life & Ministry of John the Baptist

Adapted from Debbie McDaniel <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/women/6-powerful-truths-from-the-life-of-john-the-baptist-that-offer-hope-for-today.html>.

1. John's days were destined by the Lord. He was born with a specific purpose and timing in history.

“God knew exactly when John needed to be born, though it didn't make sense to his parents at the time, Elizabeth and Zechariah. Elizabeth had been barren for many years; she was old when she became pregnant with John. Yet God's timing was not late or early; it was right on time. He knew that John needed to be the forerunner of Christ at this specific time in history”. God set John apart and prepared him for his ministry. John was obedient and followed the call and will of God”. McDaniel

Truth – *God has each of us here in this time for a reason. His timing is perfect and as Mordecai said to Esther you have been appointed ‘for such a time as this’*

2. John didn't let anything get in his way but kept his heart set on Christ.

John continued on in his mission. He lived in the desert, took the Nazarite vows and lived his days with specific purpose.

<https://lifehopeandtruth.com/god/who-is-jesus/life-example-of-john-the-baptist/>

- “He wouldn’t drink alcohol—he would abstain from many of the normal physical pleasures of life (Matthew 11:18). Perhaps this was so he would have no distractions from his mission.
- His ministry would help orient the minds of his countrymen to God.
- He would prepare the people to hear and receive the words of the Christ, who would come after him.
- He would be a fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy in Malachi 3:1 and 4:5.

“As a Nazarite his clothing and diet were simple; he wasn’t loaded down with the cares and desires of this world. Though his life may seem extreme and most of us may not easily relate to a diet of locusts and honey, the heart of it is this: He chose obedience to God’s call. He said “yes” to God’s mission. Even when it probably was not easy. He lived with focused determination and purpose. He knew and understood God’s call, and he pursued it with his whole heart and life”. McDaniel

Truth – *God gives us the power to keep our heart and minds set on Christ, even in desert days.*

3. John the Baptist modeled servant leadership – He was a strong and humble leader. He knew his role was to point others to Jesus.

He didn’t live for the opinions of others but lived with compassion to see others brought to repentance towards

Christ. Many people followed John, came to hear him preach, but he didn’t let that make him become proud and self-focused. He preached repentance of sins, pointing others to the Savior that he knew he needed too. Deep humility and obedience characterized his life and ministry. ***“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire”*** ([Matthew 3:11](#)).

John the Baptist made this great statement that we all should seek to follow...John 3:30... *“He (Jesus Christ) must become greater, I must become less”*

Truth – *Our mission in this life is to point others to Christ. Humility and obedience to God, not concern for popular opinion are vital to accomplish this.*

4. John the Baptist was brave, and was willing to speak truth, even if it meant his own death.

“John was not afraid of the religious or political leaders of his day. He saw beyond their exterior into the deeper heart. He spoke the truth with clarity and passion, he didn’t live to people-please, simply to preach the need for forgiveness of sin. He called out the Pharisees and Sadducees, for what they truly were. He knew their hearts and lives were far away from God. He spoke the hard truth to Herod, one of the four rulers over Palestine. When Herod had taken Herodias, his brother Philip’s

wife, to become his own, John had said to him, *“It is not lawful for you to have her.”* ([Matthew 14:4](#)). It had bothered Herod so much that he had John imprisoned, he wanted to kill him but was afraid of the people because so many considered him to be a great prophet. But on his birthday celebration, in response to a promise he had given to the daughter of Herodias, John’s life was tragically ended. *“Prompted by her mother, she said, ‘Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist’”* ([Matthew 14:8](#))

Yet even in this heartless, cruel plot, John’s death was not in vain. For to live for Christ, to speak truth, to point others to Him, is never in vain. His mission was completed, God’s call was with him even until death. He had lived to point others to our Savior, Jesus Christ, who we need beyond anything else in this life. There were times in his imprisonment that even John, this great man of God, had doubted if God was there. He wondered if Jesus was really the Messiah, the One who had come to set us free. If so, why was he left there in prison, why was Jesus not setting him free? That life event was perhaps the greatest of what John had lived for. He paved the way for the One who truly sets free. Even when things don’t make sense, even in the midst of suffering, tragedy, great loss, and even in death, Christ indeed is our Lord and King.

For He came to set the captives free. Days later, Jesus too would suffer at the hands of men, and conquer death once and for all”. McDaniel

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” ([John 8:36](#))

Truth – *No matter what battles we face in this world, there is always true and unending freedom through Christ. He alone is our Hope and Deliverer.*

Key Take Away – God has a plan and purpose for your life. Obey Him and point people to Jesus Christ in everything you do, no matter the cost.