

LAYING THE AXE TO THE ROOT (JOHN'S BAPTISM)

Reading: Luke 3:1-19

1. IS THE STUDY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AND HIS BAPTISM IMPORTANT?

Yes. In the Gospel of Mark the coming of John the Baptist is considered to be “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ...” (Mark 1:1). Until this time the Old Covenant prophets had interpreted, confirmed, and applied the law in a moral dimension. John, by the commandment of God, introduce a new message: “The Kingdom is ready, are you?”

A. John fulfilled Isaiah's promise of a voice to prepare the Messiah's way.

John's message announced the coming of a King. Preparation must be made in individual hearts and in society if they are to receive their Messiah.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: (Isaiah 40:3-4).

After 400 years of silence people needed to be awakened through the preaching and baptism of John, the forerunner.

B. John brought the Old Covenant dispensation to an end.

The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. (Luke 16:16).

2. WHAT WAS THE PRIMARY MESSAGE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST?

John preached the same gospel Jesus preached - the Gospel of the Kingdom.

...Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matthew 3:2)

A. People were to repent of reliance upon religious traditions (dead works).

God who was found in connection with the Law, the Priesthood, and the Temple was doing away with the system of Judaism because the entire Law would be fulfilled in Jesus Himself.

B. This baptism was a public confession of sin and repentance.

By stepping into that river you were announcing that Judaism with its forms was good for condemnation, but could not fulfill righteousness.

John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. (Mark 1:4-5).

C. John was pointing toward the Lamb of God.

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29).

John's ministry was transitional. It was to break up the strength of religious tradition that had developed over 400 years and prepare people to hear a fresh message from God.

3. WHAT WAS THE BENEFIT OF JOHN'S MINISTRY?

Since those who went on to follow Jesus had to be re-baptized into His name - what was the good of John's baptism? Those who allowed the axe to be laid to the root in John's baptism were open to the message of Jesus. They were not blinded by religious tradition or bound by fear. They were already aware of their personal need. They would welcome a Saviour.

A. They were familiar with the meaning of water baptism.

When they were told to be baptized in the name of the Messiah after the Holy Spirit proved His resurrection and ascension on the day of Pentecost, they obeyed.

B. They knew to expect the gift of the Holy Spirit.

John was always making reference to the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. The unique ministry of the Messiah was to pour out the promise of the Father upon those who believed.

4. DID JOHN USE ANY NAME OR NAMES IN HIS BAPTISMAL FORMULA?

No. He simply said, "I baptize you in water unto repentance, but there is one coming after me who will baptize you with Holy Ghost and fire!"

His baptism pointed those in Israel toward their true hope, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Study Application:

Briefly describe the nature and purpose of John's baptism.

In what ways did John point people toward the Messiah?

Memorize this scripture:

The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. (Luke 16:16)