



¹ Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, ² Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. ³ And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵ 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; ⁶ And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. (Luke 3:1-6)

We read of so many wonderful miracles in the Word of God - so much so we often forget the Word itself is a miracle, and we, too, are miraculous creations of the genius of God - in fact every whale, every gnat, every blade of grass, every tree, every sunset, and every sunrise is a miracle of the Lord our Maker. The Word of God gives us to know of this great Maker of Miracles if we will but apply our souls and minds to its study. We must set the Prow of our Souls to the True North of God's Word, sail into the very center of its Sea of Love, and drop anchor there. The very center of Holy Scripture is the 8th verse of Psalms 118: *It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.* Man has been violating that trust from the beginning in his proclivity to trust in his own manmade logic, or that of other charismatic leaders, instead of the Lord God his Maker and Redeemer.

God has forever revealed His great acts of both mercy and judgment in advance to His people either as promises such as of that of a Redeemer, or as warnings such as that of the Babylonian captivity. The prophets of old most often prophesied of events to come, but the prophecy concerning John the Baptist was of another great - even the greatest - prophet. ***Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.*** (Matt 11:11) John would be known as the great Precursor of Christ to prepare the Way in the hearts of the people to receive Him. All great rulers have emissaries who proceed them in state visits to prepare the way and to introduce the

manner of the visit. This fell to the role of John the Baptist for Christ.

Both John the Baptist and Christ were nearly of the same age (John being only about six months older). We can fix the year of the birth of Jesus based on that of John since the historical table of ascent of rulers is given in Luke 3:1-2 above. The two men were related through the descent of their mothers from Aaron and David. Mary and Elizabeth were cousins which means Jesus and John, too, were cousins more removed.

As you will recall, there are two important men in the life of Jesus named John - John the Apostle, and John the Baptist. Scripture tells us that John was an apostle "*whom the Lord loved.*" Is this such a striking coincidence since the name "God has shown graciousness, or favor?" Both men were highly favored of God.

The Prophecy Concerning John the Baptist

The Prophet Isaiah:

³ 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. ⁴ 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: ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. (Isaiah 40:3-5)

Gospel Fulfillment in Matthew

¹ In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, ² And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. ³ For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁴ And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, ⁶ And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." (Matt 3:1-6)

The Prophet Malachi

¹ Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)

We even have a New Testament prophecy of John the Baptist by his father, Zacharias: *⁷⁶ And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; ⁷⁷ To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, ⁷⁸ Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, ⁷⁹ To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. ⁸⁰ And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel. (Luke 1:76-80)*

John was called at least seven hundred years (Isaiah's prophecy) before his birth and, in my view, before the earth's were made in eternity past. In His omniscience and providence, God provided not only for a coming Redeemer, but also for His emissary, John, in the solitude of the Heavenly Councils.

We know the kind of man John was for his character is fully revealed in Scripture. He was a man of iron-will because his will was the assumed will of His Maker. We should all be like John, but that would be a hard figure to measure up to. He was a "voice of one crying in the wilderness, '*The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*' (Matt 3:3) John did not ascribe any success to numbers. He preached in the lonely wilderness. Truth was of greater concern

to John than was numerical success. Should we not be the same preachers and laity?

John was not a flashy dresser, was he? *4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.* (Matt 3:4) May I suggest that such a man as John would be summarily turned away from the First Church of every town, and perhaps set upon by the police. He cared not for fad or fashion, but simplicity was his main fare. I wonder how many modern pulpit wonders would settle for a neat, but simple, suit for their preaching; and something less than the latest model automobile in which to travel? Do not misunderstand me - I know that we do have godly men who forego the luxuries of life in order to preach the Word without compromise. But when we accept largesse in salaries and gifts of the most powerful, does that not render the preaching less courageous due to the need to satisfy the givers?

John preaching was, as ours should be, timely! He at first preached: *Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,*" but that message changed at the Presence of Christ at Jordan Banks! *29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. 30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. 31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. 32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. 33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. 34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.* (John 1:29-34)

John was a humble man. He gathered, even in the wilderness, hundreds and thousands of followers whom he baptized; but the moment that Christ came to be baptized, the pride of John did not coerce him to forego his preeminence as a preacher.

John's Strong and Humble Testimony

26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. 27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. 28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. 29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease. 31 He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. 32 And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. 33 He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. 34 For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. 35 The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. 36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:26-36)

There is much in the above testimony of John that believers in Christ must emulate, but one line alone seals the matter: "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*" This one line describes the process of sanctification of the saints more clearly than volumes of theology that we might read! Dying to self daily, and living to others and to Christ should be singular goal of all Christians.

The old flesh does not die quickly always, but takes much growth and nourishment in the Word - not just in knowing the Word, but in living it as well.

Have we, and ARE we, doing this, friends?