



January 16, 2005

### *Understanding The Baptism Of John - pt 1*

Under the Law of Moses there were certain cleansings and washings that were required. Some of these were part of sacrifices that were made. There were also washings that the priests engaged in before they could serve as priests, and during their service in the Tabernacle and later the Temple. God instructed Moses to make a laver of brass (**Exodus 30.18**) and place it between the door of the Tabernacle and the Altar of Burnt Offering. The priests were instructed to wash their hands and feet before entering the Tabernacle or they would die (**Ex 30.19**). Part of the consecration of the priests during the dedication of the Tabernacle involved Moses washing Aaron and his sons with water and placing the priestly garments on them. In a sense this washing differs from New Testament baptism in that the water was applied to the body, or hands and feet, as stated earlier but did not require an immersion. The word baptism on the other hand means to immerse or completely cover with water. While this concept has been changed through interpretation over the years, those who hold to the teachings of the New Testament understand that this was a complete immersion. An example of this can be found in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (**Acts 8.38**). The prophet Malachi had foretold of a messenger, Elijah, who would appear before the Messiah as a forerunner (**Mal 4.5**). This messenger would prepare the hearts of the people for the work that the Messiah would do in establishing the eternal kingdom of God by calling the people back to God through repentance. Christ stated that John was that messenger who had been promised (**Matt 11.13-14**). The appearance of this messenger would signal to the people that the “great and dreadful day of the LORD” was at hand (**Mal 4.5**). That day, or time, was the introduction of the gospel and the establishment of the final judgment of God against sin through his son. John began his work by calling on the people to repent and return to God. John describes the divinely inspired mission of John the baptist when he states, **“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.”** (**Jhn 1.6-8**). The message of John was simple and straightforward. Luke records the visit of the angel to Zacharias during which John’s purpose and mission were further detailed. “For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb. **And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.**” (**Lk 15-17**). The time period between the prophecy of Malachi and the appearance of John was over 400 years. In the absence of prophets and the ability to consult with God as they had in the past, the priests and others had drifted into false doctrines consisting of their own opinions and interpretations that had supplanted the Law. Christ rebuked this during his time stating, **“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”** (**Matt 15.9**). It was necessary then that the proper environment be created for the coming of the Messiah. This was to be accomplished through the work of John who would call the people back to God, or as stated above, to call their hearts back to God. Seeing the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to hear him, John stated, **“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance”**. (**Matt 3.8**). These men were the religious leadership of the day and had become hardened against God although they were the ones who studied and taught the Law. Jeremiah commented on this state which applied to his time and to that of John and Christ. **“The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.”** (**Jer 2.8**). They had developed a love for their own teachings rather than the purity of the Law that God had given them. The teachings of John, and later those of Christ, filled these individuals with such hate for the truth that they were willing to kill John and Christ in the false belief that they could stop God from accomplishing his purpose. In this atmosphere the people were reminded who they needed to serve and why. **TLC**