



January 23, 2005

Understanding The Baptism Of John - pt 2

During the first century the nation of the Jews were under Roman rule. There had been no prophets since the days of Malachi and in the intervening time numerous opinions, served up by the religious leadership, had incorporated many practices that were not found in the Law. In this atmosphere the people were starving spiritually. The poor were taken advantage of by their religious leaders (**Matt 23**) and were oppressed by those who should have been leading them closer to God. The Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes, or lawyers, had created burdens and obstacles to the true worship of God. Into this world John appeared to prepare the way for the Messiah, who had been long anticipated. *“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, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins..”* (Luke 3.1-3). The message of John was to return to God and to correct their ways before the Lord. *“And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.”* (Luke 3.10-14). As John taught he baptized the people as a demonstration of their repentance. This was new as the Law, as mentioned last week, did not incorporate this practice. This was the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel. Christ stated of John’s teaching, *“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). In this statement we find that the Gospel began with John who prepared the way for Christ by turning the minds of those who would listen back to the Lord. There are some notable differences however between the baptism that John taught and that which followed on the day of Pentecost and afterward, as the kingdom was established. As noted earlier, the baptism of John represented repentance in the hearts of those who believed the things he taught. Those to whom John preached were Jews, the descendants of Abraham and were under the Law of Moses. They were the children of God. Salvation was available for them as they repented and practiced the things that were taught. Since they were still living under the Law, the final sacrifice for sins not yet made by Christ, their repentance focused on the state of the inner man. While this was the heart and intent of the Law, that message had been lost in the interpretations that were being taught as doctrine (**Matt 15.9**). Instead of offering up an animal sacrifice, their submission to God, by means of the baptism of repentance, brought them to offer themselves and their minds to the will of God. This prepared the way for the full revelation of the Gospel when salvation was preached in the name of Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost. It also signified a desire to be pleasing to God. This is demonstrated in the question that was asked “what shall we do?” Their act of submitting to God in this manner is in keeping with the statement of Joel. *“And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”* (Joel 2.13). Turning to the Lord, genuinely, was something that had been lost. Jeremiah states, *“Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting.”* (Jer 15.6). The act of simply offering the animal sacrifices and going through the motions of repentance were not enough. It was God’s desire to have their hearts in the proper frame to receive the Gospel in the name of His Son, and he desired true dedication to Him and His will. Christ acknowledged the validity of this baptism when he desired to be baptized of John and stated, *“Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.”* (Luke 3.12).

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