

John the Baptist

John the Baptist is the name given by the KJV translators to the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth (Lk. 1:5-25). He was a cousin to Jesus (Lk. 1:36). Far more importantly he served as the forerunner to Jesus, the Christ and Messiah (Mk. 1:3). It was prophesied he would be the one to prepare the minds and hearts of the people to accept the long awaited Messiah. Isaiah foretold, "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" (Isa. 40:3). Matthew affirms John is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, for he wrote, "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..." (Mt. 3:3).

Matthew says of John's important message: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'." (Mt. 3:1-2). Jesus also affirmed the significance of John and his preaching: "But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Mt. 11:9-11).

Mike Criswell, in his commentary on Matthew, points out the incredible activities of John's life. "He is a righteous man who warns Israel of her sins (Mt. 3:6); teaches his disciples to pray (Lk. 11:1); fasts often (Mt. 9:14); shuns the comforts of society (Luke 1:80); and manifests a complete self-effacing quality (Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:19)."

"Baptist" is the surname given to John, a description of the activities in which he was involved. Baptist comes from the Greek word *Baptistes* and is defined by **Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament** as, "a baptizer; one who administers the rite of baptism." The term is found fourteen times in the New Testament.

McGarvey states this title was given to John because, "he is the originator under God of this ordinance." Sellers Crain states, "John was called the Baptist, or 'the baptizer', simply because that is what he did: He baptized preaching in the wilderness of Judea" Kyle Pope adds, "John is identified in Scripture as both **the Baptist** (using a noun of agency) and 'the one baptizing' (Mark 6:14 – using a participle with a definite article). Both refer to the action he performed and were never intended to become denominational titles." Thus, the surname given to John describes the action he performed and would be better translated as John the baptizer or John the immerser. Hugo McCord, in his translation of the New

Testament, renders “John the immerser.”¹

John’s life came to an unfortunate end due to the selfish ambitions of Herodias (Mk. 6:17-19). John condemned the illicit relationship between Herod and Herodias, and because of his stand for the right he suffered a martyr’s death. **Smith’s Bible Dictionary** states the following concerning the arrest and death of John:

Herod cast him into prison. (March, A.D. 28.) The place of his confinement was the castle of Machaerus, a fortress on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. It was here that reports reached him of the miracles which our Lord was working in Judea. Nothing but the death of the Baptist would satisfy the resentment of Herodias. A court festival was kept at Machaerus in honor of the king's birthday. After supper the daughter of Herodias came in and danced the king by her grace that he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she should ask. Salome, prompted by her abandoned mother, demanded the head of John the Baptist. Herod gave instructions to an officer of his guard, who went and executed John in the prison, and his head was brought to feast the eyes of the adulteress whose sins he had denounced. His death is supposed to have occurred just before the third passover, in the course of the Lord's ministry. (March, A.D. 29).

Article by: Brad Shockley

¹ Hugo McCord was a preacher in the cups and classes churches of Christ and long-time professor at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, TN. He was a Greek and Hebrew scholar who has translated the New Testament, Genesis, Psalms and Proverbs, and this translation, known as **The Freed-Hardeman Translation of the Everlasting Gospel**, is still published.