

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: January 25, 2009

The New Testament Baptist

by Dan Trygg

“John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. ⁶ John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he was preaching, and saying, ‘After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. ⁸ I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’”

Mark 1:4-8

There really had been no prophet in Israel since Malachi, some 400 years earlier. Suddenly, this strange man appeared in the desert, dressed in a way that was reminiscent of Elijah, the most famous of OT prophets

(II Kg. 1:8). He was an extremely dedicated and holy man, from a holy family in Israel. Those who may have tried to check into his background would have been impressed. He was from the family of Aaron, the priestly line. His birth had been nearly miraculous, being born to very elderly parents. His father had even claimed to have seen a vision of an angel in the temple, announcing his birth and assigning his name. **The angel had also instructed his parents to never allow him to drink wine or liquor. His parents would undoubtedly have understood this command from the angel to mean that he was to be raised as a Nazirite, one separated to God as holy** (Num. 6:1-8). It also would have meant that he was never to cut his hair, and was to take special care not to be defiled by unclean things. **Other men had been set apart in a similar way in OT history.** For example, an angel had appeared to Samson's parents, with similar instructions for them (Judg. 13:1-14). Samuel's mother, Hannah, who had been barren, made a vow to the Lord promising that if He would give her a child, she would dedicate him to serve God all the days of his life as a Nazarite

(I Sam.1:11). Having received such instructions, **John's parents took great care to raise their son, John, according to the instructions Zechariah had received from the angel.** Instead of growing up in the environs of Jerusalem, where the temple was, **he was reared in the desolate, wilderness areas of Judea,** where he lived until he was impelled to make his appearance to the pilgrims crossing the Jordan to travel to and from Jerusalem. In obedience to the Law, he himself would have gone up to Jerusalem three times a year, but he was careful to keep his focus on God, and not be distracted or lured by the pleasures of the flesh, the temptations of the big city, or the party spirit of the various religious groups of His day, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, etc. **He remained largely untouched by the religious and political dynamics, or the materialism, that seemed to affect so many of the priests.**

Unlike Samson of old, **John embraced his calling to consecrate himself to God, choosing an even more austere diet and manner of life than was required by the angel,** surviving on a diet of locusts and wild honey. Although less desirable than meat, locusts were readily available, and easily caught, and the wild honey was also plentiful, being found in holes, cracks and clefts of the rock. By limiting himself to this diet, **John was able to minimize his dealings with other people, and keep his lifestyle simple and uncomplicated, so that he could free up more time to seek God.** We know **he was a man of prayer, and that he employed regular times of fasting** in his search to hear and discern God's voice, because he taught his disciples to do the same (Mk. 2:18; Lk. 11:1). The “camel hair” clothing of John was probably *not* made of woven camel hair, which was very expensive. It was more likely to have been a camel's skin that had been tanned on the inside, but still had the hair on the outside. This would be relatively inexpensive, and readily available. Arab Bedouins today still can be seen wearing such animal skins today. In John's case, **his extensive efforts to simplify his life to have time to seek God and live a life of consecration led to a relationship of intimacy with God.** God spoke to him, not only telling him what to do, but also indicating to him that that he was to prepare the way for another person, one who was much greater than him, and giving signs to him to watch for so that he might recognize him when he came (Lk. 3:2; Jn. 1:6,29-34). **The level of John's spiritual life was greater than any person who had ever lived up to that time,** according to Jesus' own estimation (Matt. 11:11).

He seemed to have no other agenda than to obey God, and he was passionately calling out to the crowds to prepare the way for the Lord's coming, proclaiming a baptism of repentance unto a forgiveness of sins. This might seem to be kind of a strange answer to the sin problem to us, but **baptism was a very meaningful word picture to Jews of that time.** For example, **whenever someone had been ritually unclean, one of the things that was typically required for their cleansing was a baptism** (bath) in water (e.g., Lev. 14:1-9; 15:1-18; 16:23-28; 17:15; 22:4-6). There were sects of Judaism who became almost fanatical about this, taking ritual baths several times a day, in an attempt to stay spiritually pure. Also, according to the Targum of Jonathan, a first century commentary on Ex. 12:44, **when people wanted to become converts to Judaism, they were expected to undergo not only circumcision but also water baptism** as a bath of ritual cleansing and initiation into the family of Israel. After the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., when sacrifices could no longer be offered on behalf of a new convert, baptism was still retained as an initiation into Judaism. **As such, it was seen not only as a purifying**

bath, but also a symbol of death and rebirth to a new identity and a new life. For John to preach to NT Jews that they were to repent and be baptized was like saying they had to, ...or were *able* to..., start over. To those who were very aware that they had not been living lives that were honoring to God, this was an opportunity to get a fresh start, and multitudes welcomed John's message. Those who thought they were more righteous than others, resisted John's message. It meant that they had to let go of their self-righteousness and cast themselves on the mercy of God, which in effect made them like everyone else.

In order to more clearly understand what John was doing, it is important to understand that **the Greek words, *baptō*, or *baptizō*, meant to immerse, dip, plunge or whelm. These words were non-religious, and were commonly used in any context to describe those actions.** In the Septuagint Greek translation of the Hebrew OT, *baptō* was used to describe how the Israelites were to take hyssop and *dip* it in the blood of the Passover lamb and then strike the doorposts and lintel of the house with it (Ex. 12:22). It describes the priest *dipping* his finger in the blood of a sacrificial animal (Lev. 4:6,17; 9:9; 14:16). It described the process of cleansing articles in a dead person's house, saying "it shall be *put in (dipped in) the water*" (11:22). It was used for *dipping* objects into the blood of a sacrificial bird, as part of a cleansing ritual (Lev. 14:6,51). Hyssop was *dipped* in water before sprinkling objects and people for cleansing (Num. 19:18). It was used to bless Asher by saying, "let him *dip* his foot in oil" (Dt. 33:24). It described the immersion of the priest's feet, as they stepped into the Jordan carrying the ark (Josh. 3:15). In Ruth 2:14, it describes *dipping* food in a sauce. Jonathan *dipped* the end of his staff into a honeycomb (I Sam. 14:27). Naaman the Syrian *dipped* himself in the Jordan seven times in II Kg. 5:14. Hazeael the Syrian *dipped* a cloth in water (II Kg. 8:15). In Psa. 68:23 it describes God defeating His enemies by saying, "You shall *dip* your foot in blood". Isaiah used the word to describe how horror *overwhelmed* him (Isa. 21:4). In the NT, forms of *baptizō* are used for the washing of hands and dishes by *immersing* them in water (Mk. 7:4; Lk. 11:38); the *dipping* of one's finger in water (Lk. 16:24); the *dipping* of food in a sauce (Jn. 13:26); and the *dipping* of a robe in blood (Rev. 19:13). The only other uses in the NT are of the baptisms (*dipping* or *immersion*) of people. The point of this word study is to demonstrate that **when someone was baptized in NT times, they were immersed or dipped in the water. There were other words available to describe sprinkling. They are never used in reference to this act.** In spite of the practices that have arisen in church history since the days of the NT, any other method than *dipping* was nonsensical. **You would not use the word, *baptize*, to describe sprinkling.** That would be to say you *dipped* someone, when you really only sprinkled a little water on them. What? Why not *say* that you sprinkled them, if that is what you meant? Why use the word, *dip*, if that is not what you intended to say?

So, what was John's message? The main thrust was that the Lord was coming, and the people needed to get their lives ready for His coming. Based upon Biblical history, if they were in sin when He came, then either He would judge them, or He would pass by them quickly. Basically, if they did not align their lives to welcome Him, He would come to clean house, and they would experience His wrath and discipline. John had been sent to get them ready for His coming. **If He found that they were welcoming of Him, and had adjusted their lives to His standards and preferences, because they valued and honored Him, then He would abide with them and bring spiritual insight and blessing. If they disrespected Him by not setting aside time and not choosing to live by His standards, then He would reject them and remove His blessings.** This principle was stated succinctly by God in I Sam. 2:30, "Those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed." In other words, if we take time for God, and go out of our way to live lives that *show* He is important to us, then He will draw near to us, fellowship with us and pour out His blessings on us. John came with the message, "The King is coming, get yourselves ready!"

The other part of John's message was the invitation to start fresh with God by partaking of a "baptism of repentance toward a forgiveness of sin". We talked about the baptism part. That was like a washing off of the uncleanness and impurity, and symbolized a death to the old life and birth to a new identity and a life devoted to God. The part we often have a misunderstanding about is the "of repentance" portion of John's message and ministry. **"Repentance" has come to mean to us that we "feel sorry about" something. This is not the main thrust of the original word. The word is "metanoia", and it means to "change your perception" about something.** In other words, if you realize that you have been living foolishly, sinfully, and the reality of accountability to God suddenly breaks in on you and you want to change the direction of your life, then you are coming around to repentance. If you realize you have been making bad choices in life, and purpose to live for God, instead of *yourself*, then you are coming to a crisis of belief leading to repentance. **What was it that John gave as an outward way of making a transaction with God? John preached "repentance's baptism".** The baptism was to be a response to, expression of, and appeal for this change of heart (cf. I Pet. 3:21). Note the careful wording, "a baptism of repentance (i.e., 'repentance's baptism') for (lit., 'unto' or 'toward') a forgiveness of sins". **The baptism did not guarantee forgiveness, or cause it. It wasn't a ritual that made forgiveness happen, magically. It was an expression of hope and faith. It was a step of commitment toward God.** The key was the change of perception that motivated the heart to cry out to and draw near to God. John said, **"God is waiting for you to seek Him. He will not turn you away. Confess your sins. Leave the past behind and start fresh with God."**