

# John The Baptist

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now we began last Lord's Day evening with a brief look at what we might call special births. In this little mini-series we'll be looking at, we looked at the birth of Isaac and how both Abraham and Sarah had been long waiting the promise and the fulfilment of the promise of their son Isaac, who came in the fullness of time and in God's perfect providence.

But we look now this evening at another in this mini-series, and that is the coming of John the Baptist, the birth of John the Baptist. And to get something of the context here, we look first at his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, as the evangelist Luke does as well here, because he takes care to set the scene and to give the context in which the announcement of John's birth is made.

We see in these verses 5 to 10 here, what seems like just sort of background narrative is in fact quite significant here. We have here in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias of the course of Abijah.

Now the course of Abijah was one of 24 courses of the divisions of the sons of Aaron. Every priest, every son of Aaron, every descendant of Aaron was a priest by birth.

That meant that as the generations progressed, the numbers obviously multiplied. And we have, for example, in 1 Chronicles, the divisions of the sons of Aaron, the priests, and in chapter 24, we read of the course of Abijah and verse 10.

[ 1 : 36 ] The seventh goes to Hakoz, the eighth to Abijah. Abijah, Abijah, same name. And so it runs on all 24 courses of them, different names, different titles, and so on.

But obviously there's an awful lot of them. If there's 24 courses and 12 months in a year, then obviously it follows that each of these separate courses will serve for approximately two weeks. And if they're serving for two weeks, then no doubt the division of labor in the temple, the sacrifices, the burning of incense, the offering up of other people's sacrifices, ordinary worshipers who bring their beasts for sacrifice, and the work of the temple would be divided up probably into two lots of one week each.

And all the work of the temple would be apportioned by the drawing of lots. So Zacharias is of the course of Abijah, and we'll come back to the business of the priests and their tasks and duties and so on in due course.

Now, a priest was restricted, if you can call it that, in who he could marry. He was to marry only a virgin daughter of Israel, one of the 12 tribes, and there was thought to be a special merit if you married one of the daughters or descendants of Aaron himself, which of course is what Zacharias had done.

[ 3 : 02 ] Leviticus and Ezekiel are both very specific about who a priest cannot marry. Ezekiel 44, for example, verse 22. Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her that is put away, but they shall take maidens of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow that had a priest before.

So they're quite specific. Couldn't just marry anyone you like. But here is Zacharias having married one of the daughters of Aaron, in the sense of the descendants of Aaron, hundreds of years, obviously, after Aaron has actually lived and died.

But she's named Elizabeth, which is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Elisheba. Elisheba was in fact the name of the wife of Aaron. If you want to look up the reference, Exodus chapter 6, verse 23, and the name Elisheba means covenant of my God, or my God is covenant.

So Elizabeth is simply the Greek form of that Elisheba. So it's an Aaronic name even. So she is of the daughters of Aaron. Their credentials are of the highest order.

And we are told here that they walked with, on all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. We have this establishing of their character and of their integrity and their faithfulness to the Lord.

[ 4 : 26 ] And that is also not without significance. But here in verse 7, we also read of the personal tragedy that there is in their lives. They had no child.

Because Elizabeth was barren and they both were now well-stricken in years. Now in our culture, in a married couple or without children, then we assume it might be from their choices.

It might be, you know, personal difficulties or whatever. It's just the Lord's will. We can't order for these things. But it's unhappy perhaps. Most people might have liked to have children, but not everybody does.

But in that culture and time, it was a burden like no other. Some of the rabbis taught that childlessness, that people who could be excommunicated, as it were, from the Lord's immediate presence included a Jew who had no wife or a Jew who had a wife but no child.

Now notice, of course, that's the rabbis saying that. That's a Jewish teacher. It's not the word of God. Nowhere does the word of God imply that childlessness or singleness of life somehow excludes you from the presence of the Lord.

[ 5 : 36 ] Nowhere does it say that. But that was sort of oozing into the culture, this idea that childlessness was like something that would keep you out from the Lord's presence.

And Zacharias and Elizabeth, like everybody in that culture and time, would have been conscious of these things. And even without such kind of burdens hanging over them, there would be the personal tragedy, the personal ache of this lack of this aspect in their marriage, which they would be feeling very deeply and very keenly.

It would be something with Zacharias as a priest, of course. He would want to have his lying perpetuated. People were very much concerned with their posterity, with carrying on the name and the tribe and their own input and their own place in Israel.

So it was a big deal. And for some, again, the rabbis, not the word of God, some regarded childlessness as a valid reason for divorce.

And this would almost certainly be one reason why Elkanah, in 1 Samuel chapter 1, the father of Samuel, he didn't divorce Hannah, his wife, but he did take a second wife, which was not encouraged, of course, amongst the Lord's people.

[ 6 : 52 ] But he took his second wife, Peninnah, and she, of course, gave him children, which only made things worse for poor Hannah. But in the course of events, as we know, she brought her burden to the Lord, he gave her the birth of Samuel, and then five other children in the frowns of time.

But here we have this situation with Zacharias and Elizabeth. We have the burden, we have that any burden, any sorrow that is ongoing in one's life will become, in due course, like a weight upon the heart.

Whether it is this particular issue, as it would have been for Zacharias and Elizabeth, or there might be some other tragedy that one bears around, one carries around in one's heart, some sort of ongoing kind of cloud over one's life, it becomes, it can become like a weight upon the heart, almost like a physical ache that is always there and never goes away.

Every day of their lives, they would be living with this tragedy. For them, certainly, a tragedy. They had no child because Elizabeth was married, but they both were now well stricken in years.

Now, we have to bear in mind that well stricken in years, in that culture and context, might not mean quite the same as it does for us. We know that Abraham and Sarah, for example, Abraham, by the time Isaac was conceived, he was 99, and he was 100 by the time Isaac was born, and Sarah was 90 by the time he was born.

[ 8 : 29 ] And as we read so delicately put in Genesis 18, it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. We don't read that it had ceased to be with Elizabeth after the manner of women.

So clearly she's not as old as Sarah was. And when Zacharias and Elizabeth do have their child, it's not considered to be, you know, a biologically impossible miracle.

It's just, oh, I passed it, great. They've had a child at last. Isn't that wonderful? But nobody thinks, well, how is this actually possible? Because it seems to be the biological way with both of this couple, you know.

So nobody's suggesting that. So they're probably not quite as old as Abraham and Sarah or what we would consider to be ancient in our culture.

But for that time and that culture, they were considered well stricken in years. I am an old man, Zacharias says to Gabriel, and my wife well stricken in years.

[ 9 : 33 ] So they don't have this missing piece to them in their marriage. And anyone who then is in this situation is going to have this burden, this ache in their heart all the time.

So going back then to the priesthood, and we said, however, as the descendants of Aaron, who were priests by birth, as the generations multiplied logically, mathematically, the number of priests must multiply as one generation follows another.

And if there are 24 courses of the priests, then, you know, it's like there'll be thousands of priests throughout the Holy Land. Way too many.

Far, far too many. For everybody to do one sort of job in the temple during the week that they had, or the fortnight at the most, that they had for their course to do their jobs in the temple.

Far too many. So the way that they chose who would do what jobs would be, they would draw lots. And so this is the sense in which we have here of when it says, according to the customer of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

[ 10 : 51 ] Now we read that in our culture and context, we think, oh yeah, of course, he was a priest, he'd go into the temple, he'd burn incense, you know, that's what priests do, and others would be making sacrifices, and people praying outside, you know, what do you expect?

Of course that's what you do. Except that with there being thousands of priests, and way too many for all the jobs, with people drawing lots, and how often does your course come round?

How many times are you back to the temple? What is the likelihood of your name being drawn out of the lot? To burn incense, which would be the symbol of prayer for the Lord's people, which would be done before the morning sacrifice, because remember, they would have a lamb slaughtered and offered up as a whole burnt offering in the morning, and again in the evening, and they would have somebody go in to the court of the priest, to the altar of incense, to burn incense there, before the morning sacrifice, and after the evening sacrifice.

So it was a great honour. You were the one who had drawn the closest to the Lord at that point.

Beyond the court of the priests, and the altar of incense, there was the holy place, and then the holy of holies.

But nobody went in there except the high priest, and that was only once a year, on the day of atonement. So at this moment, Zacharias is as far into the symbolic presence of God, the Holy One of Israel, as anyone in the entire nation.

[ 12 : 25 ] And there he goes, at the altar of incense, as far through as anyone could go at that point, offering up the incense, as we said, the symbol of prayer, sweet-smelling incense.

Revelation, for example, chapter 8, verses 3 and 4, another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints, upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. This is the sense of it, that the sweet incense, the sort of resinous gum, will be ground down into powder, and burnt on the altar of incense, would send up a fragrant cloud, a strong aroma of the cloud, which as it went up, was taken as being symbolically, carrying the prayers of the Lord's people, up toward heaven, up to God.

So here he is, at this moment, which might be, with all the thousands of priests there are, and even the hundreds at least, that there would be in his course of a bideon. Here he is, his name has been drawn, perhaps his name has been drawn, at last.

Perhaps, perhaps, this is the only time, it ever happens, in his entire priestly career. At any rate, this would be, the highlight, of his priestly career.

[ 13 : 56 ] You'd have to, there's no equivalent, in our sort of, church situation. Maybe if you were to go back, to the days when the, when the church was strong, throughout the land, maybe to be, moderator of the general assembly, in the days when actually counted, for something, might be something, or if you're an Anglican, to be like the Archbishop of Canterbury, or something, or the, the Archbishop of Armagh, in Ireland, or something, something like that.

You'd be really, in a privileged, ultimate position, you are there, at the pinnacle, of, ecclesiastical achievement here. And here is, Zacharias, as fine with the Lord, as anybody in this nation, burning incense, as a priest, should his name, has been drawn at last.

This is, his ultimate, fulfilment, as a priest, and possibly, quite probably, we might even say, this is the only time, it happens for him.

It is at the pinnacle, of his priestly career. He comes in, and he offers up the incense, and there, as he does so, we read, that an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side, of the altar of incense, appeared unto him, we know, to be Gabriel, as he identifies himself, a little later on.

This is the same angel, that would appear to Mary, in due course, to announce the conception, of our Lord. When Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him, but the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth, shall bear thee a son, thou shalt call his name John.

[ 15 : 32 ] Well, you know, his prayer is, Zacharias isn't saying anything, you know, he's not, he's not doing anything, so, so how does Gabriel, know what his, what his prayer is?

Well, we, we have to remember, and we have to, to recognise, that this would be, something that would be, a permanent, prayer of the heart.

This, ongoing weight, upon the heart, of Zacharias, and Elizabeth, is something, that would be, a daily, silent burden of prayer, a longing, a yearning, a pleading with the Lord, and at last, now Gabriel announces, your prayer is heard, from this highlight, of his priestly life, he takes, the burden, and the pain, with him, into the court, of the priests, he takes it with him, to the altar of incense, and as the cloud, of incense, goes up to heaven, his own personal prayers, go with it, and his own burden, goes with it, so we find, that Gabriel is able, to say, that prayer is heard, it's alright, your answer, at last, every prayer, spoken, and unspoken, this is the, the burden, of his heart, for all this time, so we see that, the devout, faithfulness, of Zacharias, and Elizabeth, they, their credentials, are, without blot, without stain, they are fulfilled, all the, all the commandments, of the Lord, they walk, before the commandments, of the Lord, in all the commandments, of the Lord, blameless, doesn't mean sinless, of course, but blameless, they could not be, faulted, and God, has a work, to do, prior to even, the conception, of his son,

Jesus Christ, in the womb, of the Virgin Mary, he is preparing, his messenger, for that, but before he prepares, his messenger, he chooses, he knows, exactly, who the parents, are going to be, and he has chosen them, with good reason, he knows, of their integrity, he knows, of their, faultlessness, in that sense, they want, like, like God said, about Abraham, if we go back, to Genesis 18, the Lord says, shall I hide, from Abraham, the thing which I do, seeing that Abraham, shall surely become, a great and mighty nation, and all the nations, of the earth, shall be blessed in him, for I know him, that he will command, his children, and his household, after him, and they shall keep, the way of the Lord, to do justice, and judgment, that the Lord, may bring upon Abraham, that which he hath spoken of, and I know Abraham, God is saying, I know, what he will do, I know how, how he will behave, and how he will bring up, the child, that I will give him, so we have here, the Lord, choosing specifically, and we have him, knowing exactly, what he intends, to do, but we also have, if we can say this, doubt, here we have,

Zacharias, at the altar of incense, you know, almost the holy place itself, an angel of the Lord, appears to him, right in front of him, and says, this is going to happen, and he doubts, and I think, what else do you need, you know, you've got the angel Gabriel, stands there in front of you, in the temple, telling you this is going to happen, what else does it take, you know, an angelic visitation, isn't enough, what do you want, to convince you, but why, why is he doubt, even in this, awe-inspiring presence, of the angel Gabriel, he fears, to hope, and I would suggest, to you that, rather than this, being a sort of blot, on Zacharias, his copy book, we would have to, recognize, the corrosive, effect, of hope, deferred, how it eats, away, at the very soul, when you long, for something, pray for something, yearn for something, don't understand, why the Lord, withholds it from you, and what have you done, to provoke him, well we read, that they walk, before the Lord, in all his commandments, blameless, and yet, they would no doubt, slash their hearts, and think, we must be doing, something wrong, we must be offending, against the Lord, somehow, how can it be, that the Lord, is punishing us, in this way, after all these years, and so, when the angel Gabriel, says, your fears are hurt, it's okay, your wife's going to have, a baby boy, and you're all going to join, she'd say, well how will I know, that this, is going to be the case, there is this doubt, we read in Proverbs, chapter 13, and verse 12, hope deferred, maketh the heart, sick, hope deferred, maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree, of life, when desire cometh, it is a tree, of life, now a tree, of course, has many stages, it goes through, it is initially, a seed under the soil, nobody sees it, then it is a little shoot, and then a little sapling, a little twig, spreading out, it's very

vulnerable, very fragile, but it grows, and it thickens, and it expands, and it begins, to put forth leaves, and then the boughs, and the branch extent, gets taller, gets stronger, and in due course, it will bring forth, blossom, and by then eventually, if it's a fruit bearing tree, there will either be fruit, or nuts, or whatever it is, that's on it, an oak tree for example, or the acorns, and all these things on it, but only as it becomes, strong, and powerful, and fruitful, but all this fruitfulness, is yet ahead of it, the planting, the growing of the tree, just goes on, and on, it gets bigger, it gets taller, it gets thicker, it gets more fruitful, it becomes more, and more, fulfilled, as there's so much more, yet to come, you see a little sapling, coming out the ground, like, oh yeah, there's a tree, that's it in its fullest extent, if that's it in its fullest extent, that's a tragedy, because that tree, is intended, to grow, develop, expand, thicken, become a powerful, tree in the ground, to become shade, for the birds of the air, to become fruitful, and provide food, whether for the creatures, of the field, or for man, there is so much more, intended there, than simply, let's plant a seed, in the ground, there, that's it done, okay, isn't that nice, now what do we have here, with the announcement, of John the Baptist, is, the appointment, of a let's plant, the seed in the ground, isn't that great, we've done it, look, you're going to have a baby, look, your prayers are fulfilled, and answered, isn't that nice, isn't that happy, that's good, and it is great, and that is the fulfillment, that is the promise, the Lord is giving, but he has so much, more to do, yet, in and through,

[ 22 : 22 ] John the Baptist, this tree, has yet to grow, this sapling, has yet to thicken, and strengthen it, spread its branches, that has yet, to bring forth, a fruitfulness, there is a big plan, in place, for this baby, and his age, appearance, are simply, those, who are to be, the stewards, of this blessing, of this, message, and messenger, you see, that the hope, deferred, has made, the heart, the heart, of Zacharias, sick, it has caused, him to doubt, even the angel, of the Lord, but the Lord, has promised, a bruised meat, shall he not break, and the smoking flax, shall he not quench, he's not going, to snuff out, the hope, and the faith, of his people, but rather, he is going, to nurture it, and bring it forward, yes, there is doubt, in Zacharias's mind, but his doubt, born of the sickness, of hope, deferred, he says, whereby, shall I know this, for I am an old man, and my wife, well, stuck in and used, verse 18, so there is, the doubt, but if, as Proverbs, tells us, you know, when desire, come of it, says a tree of life, if it's a tree of life, then it means, that there is, so much more, to come, so much more, to be fulfilled, so much more, to bring forth, but for now, yes,

Zacharias, doubts, but, even that, doubt, when he asks for a sign, how will I know this, the angel says, okay, you'll get a sign, you won't be able to speak, because you're doubting me, but even that, you know, notice how, sometimes, in the past, in the Old Testament, and so on, the Lord's people, they'll ask a sign, and they'll say, well, if the Lord, wants me to do this, then grant that, this would happen, and you think of, Gideon, and the fleeces, that he sets out, or sometimes, the Lord sends his prophets, and his messengers, to say, because you've done this, this is going to happen, or because you've done this, that's going to happen, Gabriel just isn't entering, into an argument here, he says, look, I'm Gabriel, I stand in the presence, of the Lord, you're not believing me, so this is what's going to happen, you won't be able to speak, this is it, your last words here, are going to be the words, of that, how will I know, this is going to happen, you won't be able to speak, now, that's your sign, that's, you want some sign, from the Lord, you've got it, you won't be able to speak, he's not arguing with it, he's not entering, into a debate, he's not trying to negotiate, he has just said, look,

I'm Gabriel, I've given you the message, that's it, and here's your sign, you're struck down, you're silent, there is the sign, and you could say, there is the rebuke, as well, but the very rebuke, itself, brings hope, if we can say that, because, you know, people waited for Zachary, they marveled, that he tied so long, in the temple, verse 21, and when he came out, he could not speak unto them, and they perceived, that he had seen a vision, in the temple, for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless, notice how, of course, people have this tendency, to assume, that if somebody can't speak, that they're also deaf, as well, because, you know, when they said, they want to find out, what the name of a child, should be, instead of just speaking to him, they made signs to him, you know, assuming he's deaf, he's not deaf, he can hear perfectly well, just that he can't speak, so, he makes signs to them, he, perhaps, holds up his hands, for the benediction, which is one thing, the priest was meant to do, when he came out, from the burning of incense, was to hold up, to bless the people, to give them their benediction, so he signaled to them, signs to them, but he can't speak, he remained speechless, came to pass, as soon as the days, of his administration, were accomplished, he departed, to his own house, and after those days, his wife Elizabeth, conceived,

and hid herself, five months, saying, thus hath the Lord, dealt with me, in the days, when he looked at me, to take away, my reproach, amongst men, now, all of verse 24, probably means is, that she didn't tell anyone, it's highly unlikely, she went away, and hid, because life goes on, even for an elderly couple, there will be chores, there will be, work to do, every day, there will be grain, that needs drowning, there will be fires, to clean out, there will be work to do, there will be food to get, there will be tasks, and duties, around the house, if you're not a priest, in the temple, all the days, of the year, then you cannot, feed off the sacrifices, there, and things people bring, so the priests, would have, you know, a small piece of ground, they'd have to work, and a little equivalent, of a cloth, you might say, then they'd have to, work the land, they'd have to produce, their food, they'd have to work, for a living, just like everybody else, so there's work to do, you can't just run away, and hide, for five months, almost certainly, what this means is, she hid, the fact, that she was now, expecting, she would know, within herself, and when she was able, to communicate this, to her husband, he wouldn't have been, in doubt, by then, he would have known, how it was, and what it was, that had been promised, but she doesn't, tell anyone, she keeps it, fitting, and of course, that wouldn't be, too difficult to do, because you know, if people, who have known, Elizabeth and Zacharias, all the days, of their lives, and their neighbours, and friends, we're done, the last thing, they're going to be, looking for, is, oh yes, I think Elizabeth's, expecting, they're more likely, in the way of gossip, saying, Elizabeth's putting on, a bit of weight, have you noticed that, James, she needs to watch herself, oh my goodness, she's wearing, baggy her clothes, these days, or whatever, she would keep it, hidden, it's not a case, if she locked herself, in a cupboard, and wouldn't come out, for five months, but rather, she kept, the fact, hidden, and the fact, only comes out, when later on, in Luke chapter one, we read, Mary comes to see her, and the babe, left in her womb, and she declares it, openly, to Mary, what is this, that the mother of my Lord, should come unto me, and she acknowledges, the babe left, in her womb, so we've got the sign, and we've got the rebuke, but the very sign itself, Zacharias being silent, is a proof to him, a reminder to him, that something happened, there in the temple, something happened, which would be, life changing, and not only that, but everybody, who was there, in the temple at the time, would have seen it, everybody would have known, everybody in their home village, when he went back, oh no, something happened,

Zacharias, he can't speak anymore, he's mute, so it is a sign, it is that, which although, it's an affliction, in one sense, it is a reminder, to him, each day, of the angelic encounter, even if he could forget it, he's not allowed, to forget it, because his very fact, of being dumb, of being mute, means he is forcibly, reminded of it, every day, and to everybody, around the bunch, in his home village, his neighbours, his relatives, there is the knowledge, something happened, to Zacharias, when he was up in the temple, we don't know, what it was, we don't know, exactly what befell him, we don't know, he can't tell us, he can't talk to us, but something, obviously happened, and that is a sign, to everyone, of the distinctiveness, of what took place, something happened, and everybody, knows it, so we have, this background, we have this context, we have this, hope deferred, this long suffering, ache within, for this elderly couple, which now at last, is being lifted, with the joy of knowing, that she was expecting, their first child, and of course, as we read on, the chapter, verse 57, the day comes,

[ 30 : 28 ] Elizabeth full time, came, and she should be delivered, and she brought forth, a son, and her neighbors, and her cousins, heard, how the Lord, had showed great mercy, upon her, and they rejoiced, with her, and it came to pass, that on the eighth day, they came to circumcise, the child, they called him, Zacharias, after the name of his father, and his mother answered, and said, not so, he shall be called John, Now, if Zacharias is able to write, on a writing tablet, just now, then the likelihood is, that he was able to do it, before, so somehow, even without words, he has been able, to communicate, to his wife, that the son, which will be born to them, is to be named John, now, John, of course, is, again, a translation, of Hebrew, named Jehohanan, which, means, either Jehovah's, gracious gift, or given that graciousness, and grace, mean, gift, free gift, you could say, it's, Jehovah is gracious, or Jehovah's, gracious gift, either way, it is that, which the Lord gives, that which Jehovah, gives,

Jehohanan, shortened, in the great John, is how we have it now, so Jehovah's, great gift, and there is joy and delight, in the birth itself, of course, it is the fulfillment, for them, it is the taking away, of their shame, for them, it is the completing, of their family circle, but God has chosen them, with care, just as Abraham, would be one, who would teach, and bring up, his children, in the ways of

the Lord, we must think, that when John, the son of Zacharias, is in the wilderness, communing with the Lord, and a Nazarite, from the womb, never drinks wine, never cuts his hair, is filled with the Holy Ghost, from his mother's womb, that also, he will have been, instructed, in the ways of the Lord, by his godly parents, now remember, that John the Baptist, is a priest, by birth, but we never read, of him exercising, a priestly function, he is a prophet, by commission, and by calling, he doesn't have, the third aspect, of being a king, like Jesus does, but he is, a priest, by birth, well and truly, he is not only, a prophet, he is the, ultimate prophet, if we turn, a couple of pages, onto chapter 7, verse 28, we read,

Jesus says, of John the Baptist, I say unto you, among those, that are born of women, there is not, a greater prophet, than John the Baptist, but he that is least, in the kingdom of God, and who is already in glory, is greater than he, not a greater prophet, that makes John, the ultimate prophet, it makes him, the last of the prophets, with a capital P, although the gift of prophecy, was still given, in the New Testament church, but the prophets, with a capital P, he is the ultimate one, now remember, what Gabriel said, to Zacharias, that he shall go, before him, he shall turn, many of the children, of Israel, shall turn to the Lord, their God, he shall go, before them, in the spirit, and power, of Elias, Elijah, 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, exactly as, Malachi, the prophet prophesies, at the end of Malachi, the very last verses, in the Old Testament, behold, I will send you, Elijah the prophet, before the coming, of the great, and dreadful day, of the Lord, and he shall turn, the hearts, of the fathers, to the children, and the heart, of the children, to their fathers, lest I come, and smite the earth, with a curse, and of John, Jesus has said, greatest of the prophets, but also, we read what he says, in Matthew's account, of the gospel, chapter 11, verse 10, this is he, of whom it is written, behold, I send my messenger, before thy face, which shall prepare, thy way, before thee, again Malachi, verily I see unto you, among them, that are born of women, that have not risen, a greater, than John the Baptist, notwithstanding, he that is least, in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he, and at verse 14, and if you will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come, so in other words, this is Elijah, this is the spirit, and power of Elijah, this is the ultimate prophet, the ultimate messenger, the ultimate witness, and remember, that when people said, of Jesus, when they speculated, as to who he was, and Jesus said to his disciples, whom do men say that I am, the first answer, the very first answer, they always came back with, was John the Baptist, they all think you're John the Baptist, because there's something, of the power, something, of the godliness, something, of the aura, and the witness, of that ultimate prophet, is in you Lord, they all think, you're John the Baptist, some say Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, but the first choice, is always John the Baptist, and there were those, who were disciples of John, who would not necessarily, become disciples of Jesus, and even later on, in the New Testament, we get Paul, coming across disciples,

I think it's in Ephesus, where, he comes across them, and says, have you received the Holy Spirit, since you were baptized, and he said, we haven't even heard, that there is a Holy Spirit, and he said, well what were you baptized, into then, and they said, to the baptism of John, so the influence, of John the Baptist, has gone right around, the Jewish world, and the godliness, and humility, and the reality, of him, has made such, an impression, upon the Jewish world, that it is indelible, and it cannot be eradicated, and it makes sense, only in its, fulfillment, only in the sense, of why has he become, this great prophet, and you know, nobody does, John looks like a prophet, he's a wee bit wild, he's a wee bit scary, he's full of the power, uncompromising testimony, of the Lord, he says to the Pharisees, the brood of vipers, make yourselves, you know, confess your sins, and make yourselves, penitent hearts, before the Lord, and be a people, prepared, for the Lord, that's John's purpose, to prepare people, for the Lord, but that, preparatory ministry, has, makes sense, only in its, fulfillment, it's all very well, saying prepare ye, the way of the Lord, but unless the Lord, actually comes, then people say, okay, well this, the way he prepares, you know, nothing's happening, why isn't he here yet,

[ 37 : 11 ] John, is the one, who prepares the way, and it is only, when John's ministry, is brought to an end, when he is cast, into prison, that we read then, of Jesus coming, and beginning, his own ministry, yes, he's already been baptized, yes, he's already, done his time, in the wilderness, but then we read, of him beginning, his own ministry, and his own right, when the preparation, is complete, you see, the birth of this baby, it's a big deal, and it's great news, for his parents, and it's a, great joy, that it brings to them, but that's, only, the beginning, that's not, even the half of it, God has so much, more, to do, through this, little child, conceived, in Elizabeth's womb, and likewise,

with each one, of us, we think, well, come on, I'm not John the Baptist, I'm not Jesus, I'm not Isaac, I'm not any of these things, no, but the Lord, has planted, the seed of his grace, in the heart, of each, one, whom he calls, to be his own, and it is great, when we are converted, it is fantastic, it may be the, the pinnacle of our lives, up until that moment, and so often, of course, testimonies lead up, to this point of conversion, but the reason, the Lord converts people, is because, he has more, for them to do, it is because, the seed planted, beneath the soil, is not meant, to simply stay there, and is shaken, out of mind, the hope, defied, that has made, the heart sick, is meant, to become, when desired, is granted, the tree of life, it is meant, to grow, it is meant, to develop, it is meant, to shoot forth, its branches, and boughs, it is meant, to bring forth, fruit, if you are, the Lord's, then he has, a plan, and purpose, for you, which may, yet, have to be fulfilled, or may be, in the process, of being fulfilled, or maybe, has not yet, begun, but you, can be sure, he intends it, and if you, are not yet, the Lord's, then you, are sitting, as it were, with this seed, this acorn, equivalent, in your hand, thinking, what will I do, with this acorn, what will I do, with this seed, in my hand, well,

I can plant it, in the ground, or I could just, roast it, and eat it, or I could, I could throw it away, and I could do nothing, with it, but, if you do nothing, with it, the longer, you keep it, in your hand, or the longer, you don't do anything, with it, the more, growing time, you are, with strength, seek ye the Lord, while he may be found, call ye upon him, while he is near, the Lord, is putting, into your hand, the opportunity, for greater things, in the days ahead, and, if we don't take, those opportunities, then, as near, as we draw, to the Lord, now, into his house, and the Lord, his work, we are like, Zacharias, going deep, into the temple, and burning the incense, but, nothing happens, and his prayer, goes unanswered, and nothing happens, from it, and you may draw, near to the Lord, say, well, I went to church, I listened, to the minister, talking, I looked at the Bible, and he said, look at this verse, look at that, I did it, and nothing happened, the Lord, has placed, the seed, into your hand, he has placed, into your hand, that which may be, planted, in the soil, of your heart, or that, which may be, discarded, but what you can, be certain of, is that joyous, and wonderful, as conversion, and work, and grace, may be, in and of itself, just as many rejoiced, at the birth, of John the Baptist, that is not, an end, in itself, that has come about, because the Lord, has more, and greater, things to do, the Lord, intends, to make, of John the Baptist, the greatest, of the priestly family, the greatest, of the prophets, the greatest, messenger, the ultimate, herald, of the coming, of his own son, of them, that are born, of women, there is none greater, than John the Baptist, nevertheless, he was the least, in the kingdom of God, is greater than he, if we are in glory, we are greater, than John the Baptist, on earth, if we are in glory, we are in a greater case, than the richest, millionaire, here upon earth, if we are in glory, and the tree, has completed, its growth, and its fruitfulness, it has fulfilled, the purpose, for which it was designed, and for which, the seed was planted, and for which, the ultimate, special birth, took place.