

## Lesson 7

### **John the Baptist—He Confirmed the Perfect Sacrifice**

Awake! Hear me! Listen!

Wrath, retribution, judgment will come upon all who have turned away from God. Repent! Repent! Turn your hearts to God!

The people had heard these warnings from several of the prophets. Yet another one came, preaching on the bank of the river, saying these same words again. Here was another prophet warning the people to repent, accept God's plan for their lives, and serve Him with sincerity.

This was not a refined man, walking in the presence of kings, as Isaiah did. This was a rough man of the desert, clothed in skins, speaking in common terms.

Why did the people go out in crowds from the cities and farms to stand by the river and listen? Probably few of them could explain the strong urge they felt when this man called them to repentance. They did not understand that this was a special time in history. They had a way of acting religious and self assured. Yet, in their hearts they felt a longing and a hunger. They listened for news of a promised Messiah, the Anointed One, the Redeemer to come. What would this strange prophet say—this one called *John the Baptist*? Why should they hear him?

In this lesson you will study . .

Why Should We Hear From John the Baptist?

What Message Did He Bring Us?

How Can We Be Sure It Is True?

This lesson will help .0....

Describe the place of John the Baptist **in** the plan of **God**.

Explain the term *Lamb of God*.

Describe how prophecy was fulfilled.

Desire to learn more about Jesus.

## WHY SHOULD WE HEAR FROM JOHN THE BAPTIST?

Isaiah prophesied that God would send someone like a voice calling in the desert to announce the coming of the true Redeemer. John the Baptist was that voice.

This great prophet was born in a miraculous way to aged parents, named Zacharias and Elizabeth. God sent an angel to them to tell them they would have a son. They should call him John, the angel said' and his work would be of great importance to many people. His duty was to prepare the way for God to reveal Himself. That is, he was to prepare the hearts of the people to receive God's revelation.

John was born, just as the angel had declared. As he grew up, his parents taught him to be a

serious, faithful, and obedient servant of God. Early in his life he knew that God would use him in a special way. He accepted the call to arise and warn the people. Until the time came for him to begin his ministry, he lived quietly in the desert. He ate simple country food, spent his time in prayer and reading God's Word, and remained completely devoted to God in every way.

Then God led him to begin preaching, as we have found, out on the banks of the river. His life was so dedicated to God, and his message was so clear and compelling, that many people were attracted to him. "Come," they said, "Let's listen to him. Let's hear what he has to say. Perhaps this is the Messiah who is to come."

You see, most of the people had come to accept their traditional religion in a routine way. They did not feel free to question the customs. Yet, they were not truly satisfied. It seemed they had a kind of desert place within their own hearts. Knowing their lives were not entirely pleasing to God, they felt a stirring of guilt. The message of John disturbed them.

"Who are you?" some of the leaders asked him. "Are you the Messiah we are expecting? Are you a resurrected prophet?"

"No," John answered in a humble manner, "I am not. I am the voice of one calling in the desert: *Make straight the way for the Lord!* I am not even worthy to untie the thongs of the Messiah's sandals."

## FOR YOU TO DO

1 Circle the letter of each TRUE statement. If a statement is FALSE, write a correction in the space provided at the end.

- a John's birth was predicted by an angel
  - b He was called to arise and warn the people.
  - c His life was simple and pure in every way.
  - d He believed he was the Messiah.
- c People were happy and satisfied with their traditional religion.

In order to understand clearly the work of John the Baptist, we should pause here and do another exercise in memory. Let's think about what we have heard from all the prophets.

We learned from Noah's experiences that the sinful condition of man grieves the heart of God and causes just condemnation to fall upon man. We learned that, just as people could not save themselves from the flood, so are they unable to save themselves from the judgment which is to come. Yet God, in His love and concern, provided a way for His creation to be saved.

We learned from Abraham's experiences that God requires obedience. We gained a greater understanding of the meaning of sacrifice. We found that God Himself provided a noble sacrifice as a substitute for the son of Abraham.

Then we heard how God spoke through the great prophet Moses, explaining His plan to deliver and guide His people. Moses directed that a lamb be killed for each household and blood put on every door. This provided an example of the place of sacrifice in deliverance from bondage. Later, Moses received from God complete instructions for worship and sacrifice. In this way everyone could understand the nature of sin and redemption. Also, through Moses God established the importance of His Word. It is by reading the Word that we can continue to learn all truth.

The prophet David taught us something more about guilt, repentance, and sacrifice. From him we received the special message that God wants more from people than the blood of animals.

“It is not the burnt offering which pleases you, God,” David cried out from a penitent soul. “The sacrifice which you desire is a broken and contrite heart.” So David cast himself upon the mercy of God, admitting his sin and asking forgiveness.

Finally, in our last lesson we found from the messages of Isaiah that no religious act, not even sincere repentance, can cleanse us from sin. Isaiah revealed to us the complete truth. It is this: Sacrifice is necessary, but the blood of animals is not enough. As we have learned in previous lessons, the animal sacrifices were a picture to remind people of the day when God would send the perfect sacrifice, a Redeemer, who would suffer for the sins of all mankind. This would make it possible for everyone to receive forgiveness and

mercy from God. However, Isaiah let us know that it is necessary for people to choose for themselves to repent and accept the sacrifice which God provides. With God there is no force. He desires that man accept Him and His provisions willingly, out of love. Remember Isaiah's great invitation. Perhaps you can quote from it:

Seek the Lord while He may be found . . .

Let the wicked forsake his way . . .

Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon.

God inspired Isaiah to say these words. We can see from this that God wanted the people to recognize their opportunity to receive pardon. Since He promised them that He would send a true Redeemer, He would also make a way for them to recognize the Redeemer when He appeared. That is why He sent John the Baptist to make the way straight, or in other words, clear and plain.

We notice that the words of John were very similar to those of Isaiah. He warned the people to flee from wickedness, to repent, and to turn to God in order to be forgiven. The work of John was to summarize, or bring to a climax, the work and words of all the prophets before him. He would do this by introducing the One who came to fulfill all prophecies. This is why John is called the confirmer. We see, then, how he fits into the plan of God, and why we should listen closely to his words.

## FOR YOU TO DO

**2** We have learned much from each of the prophets. Yet, each one has shown us a special truth. Some of these truths are listed here. In the space beside each letter, write the number of the prophet whose life and words best illustrated that truth.

- 1) Noah    5) David
- 2) Abraham    6) Isaiah
- 3) Joseph    7) John the Baptist
- 4) Moses

.... **a** Sin brings fearful judgment to mankind.

.... **b** God gave His written word to guide us.

.... **c** We must obey God even though we do not understand why He leads us as He does.

.... **d** God promised a perfect Redeemer.

.... **e** God prefers a contrite heart rather than a religious ceremony.

.... **f** The Messiah comes in fulfillment of many prophecies.

**3** Here are three true statements concerning John the Baptist. Circle the letter of the one which describes the special work he did.

a) He warned people that God would send judgment upon all who lived wickedly.

b) He summarized and confirmed the words of the other prophets and introduced the Messiah.

c) He kept himself pure and blameless, living a simple life completely devoted to God.

### WHAT MESSAGE DID HE BRING US?

John spoke of the wrath to come. He preached with intensity, saying, “Don’t depend upon your traditions. Don’t think you are safe because you were born into a certain family or religion!” These were words of *warning*. In order to help people understand the importance of his message he used dramatic language. He described the judgment of God as an ax, cutting down trees.

“Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down,” he warned, “and thrown into the fire.”

Also, he used the illustration of threshing grain: “He will clear his threshing floor, gathering the wheat into his barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

The purpose of these warnings was to bring the people to *repentance*. “The kingdom of heaven is at hand,” he said. “Repent.”

He explained that God wanted to reveal Himself to them in a new and complete way. He pleaded with the people to accept this opportunity to repent and have a true and beautiful relationship with God.

“**A greater one will come greater me,**” declared John the Baptist. This part of his message was in the form of an *announcement*. Remember that people knew the prophecies from Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and others. They were waiting for the fulfillment They were hoping to see the Messiah, the Redeemer. Now what John was saying out there by the river was, “The time has come. You may admire Abraham, and you may call me a prophet, but a greater one is even now in the midst of you!”

It was important to the plan of God for this announcement to be made in order to prepare the people for an event different from any they had ever known. The words of John sounded mysterious indeed. He said, “The One who comes after me was before me. The reason I came was that He might be revealed.” What did this mean? *He comes after me but WAS BEFORE ME.* This is the most important part of the announcement. Could it be that God Himself, who existed before John, would reveal Himself, through the Messiah? For God, and He alone, is able to redeem mankind. Yet, God is Spirit; how shall He be seen visibly by people, that they might truly know Him to be the Redeemer, the Merciful, and Compassionate?

This is what we meant when we said that a special time in history had come. Most of the people did not understand that they were hearing the news all the prophets longed to hear, the announcement that future generations would call the GOOD NEWS for all mankind.

Then came the moment of actual *presentation*. This was the part of John's message for which all the rest had prepared. He looked up from his conversation with the people and saw One named Jesus approaching the river.

4.

A voice from heaven was heard, making it plain that this Jesus was the promised Messiah. He was the Redeemer now appearing in the flesh; visible now before the world as the Perfect Sacrifice.

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant." With these words John presented Jesus, the Messiah, to the people there on the river bank, and to everyone in the world who would hear the GOOD NEWS. John then explained that God had told him to confirm this One as the promised revelation, the Redeemer. He was the true Lamb of God. "I have seen and I testify," John declared.

Many of those who heard the words of John felt the truth in their hearts. Some began to follow Jesus, the Messiah, and ask Him to teach them. They called to their friends in words of gladness: "We have found the Messiah!"

### **FOR YOU TO DO**

4 Here are four quotations from the preaching of John the Baptist. On the line under each, write the name of the part of his message which the quotation illustrates.

**a** “The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent and be baptized.”

**b** “Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down.”

**C** “The man who comes after me was before me.

**d** “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

**5** What truths can you learn for yourself from the messages of John the Baptist? Read this list and circle the letters of those that seem important to you personally.

a) God wants His servants to be humble and obedient

b) Religious traditions do not pardon sin.

c) God revealed Himself through the Messiah.

d) The GOOD NEWS is for everyone, including me and my family.

HOW CAN WE BE SURE IT IS TRUE?

Evidences From . Prophecy

“Look, the Lamb of God!” What did you think of when you first read these words of John the Baptist? Did you remember the teachings of Moses? Did you remember the words of Isaiah? This was the experience

of many of those who listened to John by the river. 4 They knew the message was true because

the words were not new. Coming from the lips of this unusual person were thoughts and ideas they recognized; words they had heard from all the respected prophets.

There was no doubt in the minds of the people that the One named Jesus presented by John represented the fulfillment of many prophecies. Isaiah had said the Messiah would be born of a virgin and would be called IMMANUEL, which means "God among us." Both David and Isaiah had described many details of His life and person.

Most important, however, was the fact that in Jesus, the Messiah, all the symbolism of the sacrificial lamb was made clear. As Isaiah had foretold, a light of understanding came bursting over the earth. God *revealed in human flesh* for man to see would become the perfect lamb whose blood could truly pay the penalty for sinful mankind. One Holy Lamb would be the final sacrifice. We will discuss this more fully in our next lesson.

### Evidences From the Work of Jesus, the Messiah

We have found in our studies that the lives of great prophets are not easy and comfortable. All of them have had to suffer in order to accomplish what God sent them to do. John the Baptist was put into prison because he told the truth! Even though people went in crowds to hear him and many repented, the leaders rejected him. Even though almost everyone realized, that his ministry fulfilled

prophecy, they could not save him from the jealous and angry rulers.

As John sat alone in the prison he became discouraged. He was a humble and righteous man. He was obedient and successful in doing the work God had called him to do. Still, he was a human being and had feelings similar to those we all have. He began to doubt. He began to say, "I wonder if it is all true, what I have believed about Jesus, the Messiah." He said to his followers who visited him in prison, "Go and ask Jesus this question: *Are you the One who was to come or should we expect someone else?*"

When Jesus, the Messiah, heard the question His heart was touched with love and concern. He knew the question came from real desire to know the truth. He was quick to supply the best answer.

He said to the messengers, "Go report to John what you have seen and heard as you have followed me. Tell him the blind receive sight, the lame walk, leprosy is cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised. Most important, the GOOD NEWS is preached."

We see, then, that prophecy was fulfilled not only in the *words* of John the Baptist, but in the *work* of Jesus, the Messiah. We see, too, that Jesus did not scold John for doubting. He did not argue in grand lectures. He simply let the truth speak for itself. Many of our own questions can be answered in the same way. If we open our hearts and minds,

read the Scriptures, and listen to the testimonies of others, we can expect God to guide us into truth.

We learn something else from the experience of John the Baptist: It is natural for men to doubt. It is natural for all of us to ask questions. The matter of religion is serious! It is so important to each person! Our souls long for truth. We need to be sure. God understood how John felt, and He understands us, too. He did not rebuke John for asking questions; but He provided answers. In compassion, He assured John of the truth. When we express sincere questions, He will do the same for us.

The followers of John continued to report to him concerning the work of Jesus, the Messiah. It was plain that every detail of prophecy was being fulfilled. It was clear that Jesus, the Messiah, did miracles through the power of the Spirit within Him, and that God's merciful plan of redemption was being visibly manifested through the person of Jesus, the Messiah. All doubt was gone.

The ministry of John the Baptist came to a sad end as he was killed in the prison. But he had done the work for which he had been born. He had completed in a perfect way the task God had given him.

He had prepared the way for the revelation of God's mystery as we shall see in our next lesson.

He had introduced the Messiah.

He had confirmed all other prophets in one victorious cry: Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

### **FOR YOU TO DO**

**6** Fill in the blanks to complete the sentences.

**a** Evidence to support the truth of John's message is found in the words of the

and in the works of

**b** The followers of John were told to report that

**7** Here is a prayer for you. It is formed from prayers of David. Read it thoughtfully once. Then you may wish to read it again as a true prayer from your own heart to God.

O God, you are great and compassionate.

The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

Direct my footsteps according to your word, let no sin rule over me.

Make your face to shine upon your servant, and teach me your decrees.

Give me understanding that I may live.

Amen.

### **CHECK YOUR ANSWERS**

**7** Read the prayer thoughtfully.

**1 a** True.

**b** True.

**c** True.

**d** False. Your answer. It should be similar to: He said he was not the Messiah. He was the voice in the desert; He came to confirm the Messiah.

**e** False. Your answer. It should be similar to: People were not satisfied. People felt guilty and hungry in their hearts.

**6 a** prophets, Jesus.

**b** the blind receive sight, the lame walk, leprosy is cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the GOOD NEWS is preached.

**2 a** 1) Noah

**b** 4) Moses

**c** 2) Abraham

**d** 6) Isaiah

**e** 5) David

**f** 7) John the Baptist

**5** Your own answers.

**3 b)** He summarized and confirmed the words of the other prophets and introduced the Messiah.

**4 a** Repentance.

- b** Warning.
- c** Announcement.
- d** Presentation.

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### **LESSON TEST**

As you prepare to take the lesson test, please locate the *STUDENT REPORT ANSWER SHEET* in the back of your study guide for Lesson 7. Be sure to record your answers for multiple choice and true-false items in the spaces provided for them.

#### **GENERAL QUESTIONS**

If your answer to each of the following questions is

YES, blacken space A. NO, blacken space B.

- 1** Have you carefully read Lesson 7?
- 2** Have you completed all the *For You to Do* sections in this lesson?
- 3** Have you checked the answers you gave in the *For You to Do* sections with those at the end of the lesson?
- 4** Have you reviewed the lesson objectives to see if you are able to do what they suggest?
- 5** Have you reviewed the material before taking this lesson test?

#### **MULTIPLE CHOICE**

**6** In the plan of God, John the Baptist had the task of

a) summarizing the work and words of the prophets.

b) challenging his people to build a strong political kingdom.

c) initiating an entirely new revelation of God.

**7** John played an important part in God's plan as he summed up the message of the prophets; however, his most important message consisted of

a) his people's unresponsiveness.

b) his announcement concerning his successor.

c) a promise to the faithful among his people.

**8** The term *Lamb of God* carries in it the idea that God has provided a permanent solution for the problem of sin through

a) the establishment of a better sacrificial system.

b) a system of law that provides means of covering the effects of sin.

c) His own sacrifice which pays fully the penalty for man's sin.

**9** A message we see in all the prophets is that

a) God provides salvation for those who accept it.

b) man can avoid sin's penalty by paying a price.

c) one can be protected from sinning by performing ritual sacrifices.

**10** The prophets shared one common goal that each of us can share also: they earnestly desired to

a) be free from all association with their sinful people.

b) be perfected in their current sinful surroundings.

c) know more about the coming One and His salvation.

### TRUE OR FALSE

**11** Isaiah prophesied that God would send someone to announce the coming Redeemer, and that someone was John the Baptist.

**12** John's ministry aroused the attention of few people, because his preaching was so much like that of other leaders.

**13** John the Baptist explained that God had told him to confirm Jesus as the promised revelation, the Redeemer.

**14** Jesus rebuked John severely for doubting and set about to prove from Scripture that He was the Messiah.

### FILL IN

**15** John's duty was to prepare the way for God to reveal **16** John's announcement concerning the arrival of the "coming One" was intended to let waiting people know that the prophecies were

being **17** John presented Jesus to the people as the of, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy that One would come to bear man's sins and griefs

and bring about his **18** It is significant that the *Lamb of God*, the suffering

Servant of Isaiah's prophecy, was born to giving His life as a ransom for the sins of man.

**19** Jesus responded to John's inquiry about His identity by letting the speak for itself.

**20** When John introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God, he confirmed the words of all other who had spoken before him.