

IN-DEPTH SUMMARY

John the Baptist

The in-depth summary of each bible study is much different from the small group bible study laid out before the leader and the students. The small group studies are intended to be interactive, provide a learning atmosphere for students, and open discussions allowing for interpretations of what the gospels' witnessed. The in-depth summary is designed to help the leader with expansive information, much more than what is in the text notes found at the bottom of every bible page. An exhaustive search was completed on each verse to help the Leader answer questions that may come up during the study.

The Gap Years from the Old Testament to the New Testament

From the end of the Old Testament until the birth of both Jesus and John the Baptist, there is very little written in the bible. The last known prophet in the Old Testament was Malachi, and his ministry ended somewhere from 440-420 B.C. Two timelines can be used to link the old testament to the new testament. The first is the lineage from Zerubbabel to Jesus in (Matthew 1:13-16). "Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ." Zerubbabel is mentioned in several Old Testament books, such as Ezra, Nehemiah, Zecharia, and Haggai. The second lineage is the Intertestamental Period identifying major key dates outside of the bible.

The Intertestamental Period:

Alexander the Great reigns in Greece: 336 B.C. – 323 B.C.

Judea ruled by the Greek Empire: 330 B.C. – 308 B.C.

Judea ruled by Egypt: 308 B.C. – 195 B.C.

Judea ruled by Syria: 195 B.C. – 130 B.C.

Maccabean Revolt: 164 B.C. – 63 B.C.

Judea ruled by the Roman Empire: 65 B.C. – 70 A.D.

Julius Caesar rules Roman Empire: 46 B.C. – 44 B.C.

Herod the Great reigns as King of the Jews: 37 B.C. – 4 B.C.

Jesus is born: 6-4 B.C.

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Who was John the Baptist?

Great care was preserved in the gospel's writings about John the Baptist. John the Baptist ended nearly four hundred years of prophetic silence. It is clearly stated in (Luke 3:2), John the Baptist was the son of Zacharias. In Luke (1:57-58), Elizabeth, Zacharias' wife, John the Baptist birth. In Luke (1:36), it is stated, Elizabeth was the relative or cousin in some bibles to Mary, Jesus' Mother. Further in Luke (1:39-45), when Mary visits Elizabeth in Zacharia's house in Judah, the baby, John, leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. The angel of the Lord predicted this event in (Luke 1:15) "He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." This closely shows that Jesus and John the Baptist were about the same age as they were both in the wombs at the same time. Zacharias prophesied in Luke (1:76-79), his son, John the Baptist, will be called the prophet of the Highest. He will go before the face of the Lord and prepare His ways. He will provide knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins through the tender mercy of our God. It is stated in (Luke 2:80) John the Baptist grew up in the deserts and became strong in spirit until the manifestation to Israel.

John the Baptist's Lifestyle (Matthew 3:4; Mark, 1:5)

John the Baptist did not self-indulge in luxurious clothing or ate lavishly. He lived a simple life. His food, clothing, and lifestyle were common among prophets. The camel's hair John the Baptist wore was long and shaggy and made into a coarse cheap cloth. Not the elegant cloth called camlet which is made from the fine hair of the camel. Rarely the clothing of one's garments is mentioned. This is similar to clothing that the prophet Elijah wore. Both set themselves apart from everyone else. His leather belt or girdle, as some have called it, probably came from sheep or goatskin. His meat was locust. Locusts are a common flying insect 2-3 inches in length. They were one of the plagues of Egypt. Locust would swarm and devour almost all living green plants within hours. They were commonly salted, dried, and cooked in various ways. Honey was commonly found in the rocks and the hollows of trees in the wilderness. Palestine was frequently called "the land of milk and honey."

The Timeline is Stated (Luke 3:1-2)

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“Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, (2) while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.” There are several chronological indicators that Luke identifies to provide the reader the specific time period. We need to understand there was not a calendar year like we have today. They used major events and lengths of the ruler’s reign in which the event happened to calculate time.

Tiberius Caesar was born November 16, 42 B.C., and shared a joint emperor rule with his father-in-law, Caesar Augustus, in 12 A.D for two years. He began his sole reign as Roman emperor from August 19, 14 A.D. to March 16, 37 A.D. Luke calculates from the time both emperors were reigning, so that would put the timeline at 27 A.D. Tiberius would have been about 69 years old at this time.

Pontius Pilate, born in 26 B.C., was the fifth Roman governor of Judea. He is the same person who presided over the trial of Jesus and later ordered his crucifixion. Pontius was governor of Judea from 26 A.D to upon his death in 36 A.D. Pontius would have been 53 years old at this time. Herod Antipas being tetrarch of Galilee, was the 6th son of Herod the Great. He was born before 20 B.C. and died after 39 A.D. He was the first ruler of Galilee and Perea, who bore the title tetrarch “ruler of a quarter.” He was known for several accounts throughout the New Testament, including his role that led to John the Baptist’s execution. Philip, the Tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, was the 7th son of Herod the Great. He was born in 26 B.C and would have been 53 at this time. Lysanias, the tetrarch of Abilene, was the ruler of a small region on Mount Hermon’s slopes. Annas and Caiaphas were high priest regions on the western slopes of Mount Hermon.

Annas and Caiaphas were high priests among the Sadducees. They are mentioned several times in John, Luke, Matthew, and Acts. Annas was also the father-in-law of Caiaphas. Annas also had five other sons who succeeded him as a high priest.

John the Baptist Preaching the Good News (Matthew 3:1-2; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3)

There are two separate verses in Matthew and two separate verses in Mark that talk about John preaching and baptizing in the wilderness. We believe there were at least two separate events. It is very possible John did this on a more frequent basis. We say this because Luke 3:3 it states John went into all the region around

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Jordan. This promotes the fact he would have had to go to many different areas. The first verse states John “went” or “came” preaching in the wilderness, a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. This verbiage promotes the John voluntarily went out preaching the coming of the Lord.

Jews Send Priests and Levites to Question John the Baptist (John 1:19-22)

This section of John the Baptist’s Ministry is uniquely added in and reveals more about John the Baptist. It is not corroborated with any of the other gospels. His Ministry was growing, and he was heard from Galilee to Jerusalem. For the Jews have not heard from a prophet in over 400 years. They wanted to know if he was proclaiming himself to be the Messiah. The priest and Levites left Jerusalem to ask John the Baptist to see who he was proclaiming to be. They asked, “Who are you?” Before they could presume who they thought he was, John the Baptist informed them he is not Christ. It was at this moment he could have taken advantage of an opportunity stating that he was. But he knew his true purpose. He was the forerunner of Christ. They then asked him if he was Elijah? Many people of the time believed that Elijah would someday return from heaven. John said he was not Elijah. They then asked John, who are you so they could give the ones who sent them an answer? This is where John claims he is the one prophesized by Isaiah 40:3, as the one crying in the wilderness. Make the way straight for the Lord.

Prophecy is Fulfilled (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:4-5; John 1:23)

Matthew, Luke, and John specifically refer to Isaiah, and Mark referred to “the prophets” from (Isaiah 40:3) “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” The voice of one crying out in the wilderness is John the Baptist. John was preaching and baptizing in the wilderness. He was God’s messenger who preceded His arrival. When kings would travel, they would have a messenger or forerunner to make the King’s path would travel to be flat, straight, and free of obstacles. Valleys would be filled, hills would be lowered, and rough roads would be smooths for easy travel. Isaiah states prepare the way of the Lord by making his paths straight. This means the path should be direct, without obstacles. Luke provides more details and states every valley shall be filled and every mountain

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and hill lowered, and crooked places made straight and smooth. Metaphorically, it also means we need to remove our opinions and behaviors that impede Jesus' reception.

The Jews Go Out to Hear From John the Baptist (Matthew 3:5-6; Mark 1:5)

As John the Baptist's popularity grew, so did the crowds. The verbiage changed here in both Matthew and Mark. They both state the people in Jerusalem, Judea, and the area around the river Jordon **WENT** out to see him. John baptized them in the river Jordon, confessing their sins.

Those Sent Ask, "Why Then Do You Baptize?" (John 1:24-25)

In John 1:24, it states, "those who were sent were from the Pharisees." This infers some men were sent ahead of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which will be discussed in "Brood of Vipers." There was not an exact timeline when this took place, but it fits the narrative of John the Baptists' preceding sight when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism. The important question is in John 1:25 when he is asked, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah nor the Prophet?" The question is being asked because John had changed the custom of the times. John baptized everyone willing to repent their sins. The Pharisees sent these men to ask John by what authority did he have to change the custom. John already answered the question he was not the Christ; he was not Elijah nor a Prophet.

Brood of Vipers! (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7)

The original King James text refers to the Pharisees and Sadducees as "generation of vipers." However, over time, it has changed a "brood of vipers." Vipers are venomous serpents from 2 to 5 feet in length. Its venom is poisonous and deadly. Someone who has bitten swells up almost immediately and, if not treated quickly, will die a painful and agonizing death. The term "generation" used is not explained as if this is just the current generation or several of Pharisees and Sadducees. John the Baptist is specifically calling out the Pharisees and Sadducees as "vipers." He was pointing out their deceitful and wicked ways. What is important here is John the Baptist is using "vipers" as a metaphor telling the people how dangerous they have become. And to end the verse, he states,

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“who warned you to flee from the wrath to come.” John is astonished that these sinners and hypocrites have not fled from the coming wrath.

The Ax laid to the Root of the Trees (Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8)

John the Baptist continues. Read closely to what is written. The ax is laid at the root of a tree has the intention of cutting down the tree. However, here it is inferred that the tree is to be tested. The blow to the root of a tree can be devastating to the life of the tree. It will shake the very foundation and lifeblood of the tree. If the tree does not bear fruit, the ax will continue, cutting down the tree and throwing it into the fire. This is a beautiful metaphor. Remember, John talks to the multitudes and the Pharisees and Sadducees, telling them to bear fruits worthy of repentance. And being a descendant of Abraham does not give them the privilege of a birthright to enter the kingdom of God. When the time comes, everyone will be tested by their lives like the tree's roots are tested, not by their profession. Their lives must show good fruit, or they will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

John Baptizes with Water; The Holy Spirit Will Baptize with Fire. (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26-27)

All four gospels refer to John the Baptist not being worthy enough and that there is One who comes after him whose sandals he is not worthy to carry. And most importantly, John states, “I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” John expresses great humility to be a servant of Him. John also mentions “whose straps he is not worthy to loosen.” To loosen sandals was the business of the lowest servants. John reinforces his own unworthiness in comparison. John's baptism with water was for repentance and the forgiveness of their sins. God's baptism of a man with the Holy Spirit is sending His influence to convert, purify and guide the soul. The Holy Ghost is the third part of the Trinity. The Holy Ghost's part is to comfort, uplift, renew the soul. Being baptized by fire has had various interpretations. Some have identified that John refers to future afflictions and persecutions that men would try under the Gospel. Some have concluded the word “fire” means the judgment or wrath of God. Some have interpreted this as He would baptize the followers of His Word with the Holy Ghost, but the rest of the world, the wicked, He would baptize with the judgment

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and wrath of fire. Others have supposed that the fire is the refinement and the purifying that comes afterward to make the heart and soul malleable and worthy of God's work. It is difficult to confirm the precise meaning farther than that of John the Baptist's ministry. One thing is for certain, your tree will be put to the test, and if it is revealed your tree does not bear good fruit, it will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

The Winnowing Fan is in His Hand (Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17)

Separating with wheat from the chaff was practiced in the East by throwing the grain into the air, and the chaff was blown away by the wind because it was lighter than the wheat. The term "fan" was the act of cleaning the grain by this practice. The floor is represented as the Jewish people. The wheat is the righteous or people of God to be stored in the barn. The chaff is the wicked which the fire consumes. The unquenchable fire is the fire that is meant for the eternal suffering of the wicked.

John the Baptist Provides Examples (Luke 3:10-14)

In the previous verses, John told the people they should bring forth appropriate fruits worthy of repentance. By showing their repentance was authentic, they should lead a life by demonstrating as such. The people asked John the Baptist's ministry, "What shall we do?" He provides some examples of what the people should do—the example of the two tunics (similarly to having two coats). Be benevolent when providing aid to the poor. This will demonstrate your repentance is authentic. Give with not just material items, but your skills, talent, or expertise with heart. He displays another example of providing them with "meat." This would mean provisions of any kind. The tax collectors then ask the same question, "What shall we do?" John states they are to collect only what is required, no more. Notice he does not condemn their profession, nor does he criticize the government for which the tax is being collected. Just for them to perform their job and duties with integrity. Finally, the soldiers ask the same question, "What shall we do?" John tells them not to use their profession to intimidate or falsely accuse or incarcerate someone. The word in most bibles is intimidate or extort money. The original word in Greek is "Do not oppress

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anyone.” The King James version is “Do violence to no man.” Notice how this has changed over the years.

John the Baptist Saw The Lamb of God (John 1:28-31)

John was baptizing beyond the river Jordan in Bethabara, which some referred to as the town of Bethany, as it was near Jerusalem. John is the only one who mentions John the Baptist first saw Jesus coming toward him. John makes a very bold and memorable statement. John the Baptist announces, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” In the old testament, the Israelites sacrificed Lambs and were eaten at the Passover to commemorate their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. The Messiah/Jesus was often referred to as “The Lamb.” Jesus was innocent. He was the sacrifice for the sins, not just for Israel but the whole world. John the Baptist also mentions, “I did not know Him” John the Baptist was not acquainted with Jesus. Although they were related as cousins, they did not come together in family gatherings. John the Baptist was in Judea with his parents, Zacharias and mother Elizabeth. Jesus was in Nazareth working for his father, Joseph, and Mother Mary, learning the trades skills as a carpenter.

John, the Baptist, Baptizes Jesus (Matthew 3:13-15)

Jesus had lived in Galilee for nearly 30 years. Before Jesus would begin His ministry, He needed to get baptized. Here is the question. If Jesus had no sin, why would He need to be baptized? This question has long troubled theologians for many years. Baptisms were for sinners. There are several conclusions why Jesus needed to be baptized. (1) Jesus was about to start his great ministry work. This sets the timeline apart from pre-baptism and post-baptism. (2) Jesus did so because he is both God and human. He went through baptism and even death as a human. (3) The baptism by John the Baptist was another step Jesus could identify with his sinful people. (4) Jesus did this to demonstrate how to be baptized and how to baptize others. The closeness one will have with the Holy Spirit when one commits themselves to be baptized. As Jesus approaches John the Baptist, in John 3:14, John feels unworthy as a sinner to administer the baptism to the Messiah. He reaches out to Jesus, imploring Jesus to baptize him. Then in John 3:15, Jesus states, “**it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.**”

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Jesus is conveying to John that it is appropriate to be baptized. Jesus needed to be set apart from his forerunner and yet still demonstrate a connection with him. Jesus also demonstrates His acceptance of John the Baptist for administering the baptism. John the Baptist then allowed the baptism to take place. In the King James version, it states he “suffered.” This is more impactful. This illustrates John the Baptist was in intense pain delivering the baptism. To be the one and only person who will ever baptize the Messiah had to have been a deep and humbling emotional experience.

The Holy Spirit Descends on Jesus like a Dove (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:9-10; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-33)

There are a few magnificent events that take place in these few passages. Both Matthew and Luke clearly state Jesus came up immediately from the water. This proves that if He came up from the water, he would have been below the water. To be below the water, one would have to be submerged or immersed in water. Then “the heavens were opened unto him.” Many scholars have interpreted this to be the clouds’ appearance when it lightens with the rays of the sun. Then the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove. Albert Barnes, a theologian, said it best in his notes he published in 1832 “This was the third person of the Trinity, descending upon him in the form of a dove. The dove among the Jews was a symbol of purity of heart, harmlessness, and gentleness.”

This is my Beloved Son, Whom I am Well Pleased (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22)

The voice that came from heaven is unquestionably the voice of God. It was probably heard by all who were present. God uses the term “beloved Son” instead of just son to state the closeness and nearness and a relationship God has with his son Jesus. The statement “I am well pleased” is an immense delight with his Son.

Herod Shuts John the Baptist in Prison (Luke 3:18-20)

This event and these verses are not in chronological order in Luke 3:1-22. It would not be possible for John the Baptist to be in Prison and have the ability to baptize Jesus at the same time. It states John the Baptist rebuked Herod, the tetrarch concerning Herodias. Herod, the tetrarch, was the son of Herod the

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Great. Herodias was the granddaughter of Herod the Great. She was also married to Herod, the tetrarch's brother, Herod Philip. This would mean Herod Philip married his niece Herodias. The relationship of Herod the tetrarch to Herodias was, she was his sister-in-law, married to his brother Herod Philip, as well as his niece. When Herod the tetrarch stopped by his brother's house one day, he fell in love with his brother's wife, Herodias. Herod, the tetrarch, put his wife away, and Herodias left her husband, Herod Philip, to live with Herod, the tetrarch. In John the Baptist's eyes, Herod, the tetrarch, and Herodias were committing adultery and incest as their relations were close together. This probably angered Herod, the tetrarch being exposed to this sin. Herod, the tetrarch, was probably afraid of the multitudes of Jews who considered John the Baptist was a Prophet, and if sentenced to death or just executing him, the Jews would revolt. Placing John the Baptist in prison, removing him from public interaction and Herod the tetrarch could continue his relationship with Herodias.

We hope this in-depth summary of the John the Baptist's Ministry was detailed enough for your search of what you are looking for.