

## GOSPEL OF THE MESSIAH

### Message 3

John 1:6-18

INTRO: Our subject is the four Gospels of the New Testament. These four accounts form the first four books in the New Testament. We are going through them in a chronological fashion so as to get an overall picture of the life of Christ, Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. In our last message we introduced the writer Luke and his account of the life of Christ. We saw from Luke that he had set out to write to Theophilus, a man who seems to have been a catechumen, or one who is instructed in the basics of the life of Christ. Luke wanted him to know the certainty of the things of the life of Christ he had been instructed in.

We then introduced the writer John, of the Gospel of John. John was the beloved disciple of the Lord. He may have been a close relative of Jesus Christ. John may have been from the upper strata of society. He is one of the sons of thunder, the man Zebedee, a successful business man in the fishing industry on Galilee.

Well, as I outline the life of Christ, Luke 1:1-4 and John 1:1-18 form an introduction to the whole life of Christ. We have looked at Luke 1:1-4 and John 1:1-5. John has shown us that Jesus' existence did not begin when He was conceived by Mary. He was in the beginning with God. I have mentioned that I believe He was not the Son of God back then. He became the Son of God at conception and birth, some 2,000 years ago. That birth was so phenomenal, it changed the whole course of human history.

And so, this morning we will begin in John's Gospel, 1:6-18, which was read for us earlier.

#### b. Regarding the Lord's forerunner (1:6-18)

Well, verse 6 says, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John." Now, the John mentioned in verse 6 is not the writer of the Gospel of John. It refers to John the Baptist. The writer John, has introduced the Messiah to us from eternity past in verses 1-5. Now he will introduce the Messiah from the forerunner's perspective. You see, John the Baptist came first, then Jesus came. And there

is a sense in which John's coming had been prophesied. So go with me to the last book in the OT and to the last verses of the last book, Malachi 4:5-6 (read).

When we studied the minor prophets, I told you about those prophecies that have a far and near fulfillment. I believe this prophecy is one of those. John the Baptist is the near fulfillment. When the tribulation begins, then the far fulfillment will come and Elijah will come.

So, to look at John the Baptist in John 1 as the near fulfillment, go to Matthew 17 (read 9-12). Here Jesus is talking about John the Baptist. Not too long from now we will see how John the Baptist was born and became the forerunner of Jesus Christ.

Let me remind you that as I see Luke 1:1-4 and John 1:1-18, they are like the headlines in the news, and the details follow. So let us read 1:6-9 (read). John the Baptist came to bear witness to the Light. We saw in 1:4 that in the One who became the Son of God, was both life and light. He is the light of the world. And John came to bear witness to that light. I have mentioned to you other times that the word 'witness' is the word 'martyria'. We get our word 'martyr' from this word. You see, what generally wants to happen to those who bear witness to the truth is that they get martyred for it. Bearing witness is a dangerous business, therefore most of us are rather shy to do so. John the Baptist lost his life for bearing witness. He bore witness to a man who had a woman he should not have, that too is a costly business. You see, Jesus is the light, but John was the luminary. The moon is a luminary. At night, it bears witness to the sun.

Now the Gospel writer makes it clear to us in verse 8 that John the Baptist was not 'that' Light. He was sent to bear witness to the true Light. So we note in verse 9, that the One

John bore witness to, which is the One who was in the beginning with God and created all things, was the true light, and verse 9 says that the true Light is that Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world.

Now, what is meant by this Light that lights every man who comes into the world? It is my personal view that this speaks of the conscience. The NT word for conscience is *suneideisis*. It means a 'with knowledge' or a 'co-knowledge.' It is a knowledge alongside our knowledge. It is a knowledge that is there without our having to learn those things.

Verse 10 then says, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." Now the question here is this: When John says, "He was in the world..." when is he referring to? Is he referring to after Jesus was born, or before He was born?

As I pondered these questions, in studying the context I would say that John is talking about the One who was the Life and the Light from creation onward. This is the One who had been the Rock in the OT, the One who went with them. I Corinthians 10:1-4 says, "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."

So, the One who became the Son of God was the light that gave light to everyone who ever came into the world. So, from creation onward, He was in the world, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, the children of Abraham, and they did not receive Him. Now that seems to me to be the general outcome of the OT. Jesus came to His own, and His own received Him not. In the OT, one prophet after another came to warn Israel, but in the end,

the Israelites rejected them. So look at verse 11 (read).

If I am correct that this refers to Jesus' presence in the time before His birth, we may not conclude that it was all for naught for verses 12-13 say, "But to as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the sons of God, even to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." This has always been true in both Testaments. In the NT we have this expressed as the new birth.

Well, then at the appointed time, verse 14 tells us that the Word became flesh (read). Here we have reference to the conception and birth of Christ. Remember, we have here only the headlines. The details will come later.

Now, when Jesus became flesh, John bore witness to Him. So look at verse 15 (read). John the Baptist was a humble man. He did not try to take advantage of the place God had given him. He pointed to Christ. That was what God had chosen him to do. He was certain at this point, that Christ was the long promised Messiah. In John 3:30 John the Baptist says, of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Now we note here that John the Baptist too recognized that the One who became Jesus Christ existed before He was born of Mary. John said, "He who come after me is preferred before Me, for He was before me." John is saying that before he, John, came into existence Jesus already existed. Before John was, Jesus already was.

Then John the writer, not the Baptist, says in verse 16, "And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace." It is an amazing thing that when the second Person of the Trinity was conceived and born, in His physical body was contained the fullness of

God. If you wish to check out the evidence of that jot down Colossians 1:16-19 and 2:9.

But John points out what in that fullness we received of for he says, and I will translate the verse slightly differently, "And of His fullness we have all received, even grace upon grace." And every person who is a believer and goes on believing, receives grace upon grace. If it were not so, we would turn and reject the same Lord that bought us. It takes grace upon grace to live the Christian life.

Now the next verse is difficult and I have long sought to grasp its full intent. It says, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Several reputable scholars that I greatly respect point out that from verses like this we get the idea that the OT was a time of law and the NT is a time of grace. They point out that the word 'but' is not in the original. This is indicated in the KJV and the NKJV by the fact that it is in italics. They also note that the word translated 'for' can be translated 'because'. The verse then reads, "Because the law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Lord willing I will deal with the subject of the grace of God in the future.

If I get to those messages I want to do on the grace of God I will cover this and a few more verses related to this subject and so we go on to verse 18 (read). No one has seen God at any time. No one can see God and live. When Moses got close to God on Mount Sinai, his face shone so that he had to put a veil over his face when he was in the presence of the people. The subject of the God of the Bible is a very, very big subject. He is a most awesome and incredible being. And you and I might wonder, "If God were to become human so that we could see Him, how would He live and act? What would He look like?" Well, when you read the four Gospels, you get a picture of what He would live and act like.

You see, our verse says, "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." Here is how I see the verse. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, who came to earth, was crucified, buried, resurrected and ascended to heaven and who is now in the bosom of the Father, back in heaven; He has shown us in His human existence exactly what God is like." You see, in the four Gospels we get a very precise picture of what God is like.

I might add, that we get an accurate picture of what man is like. When you put God in the midst of mankind, and He lives the way God must live, mankind will kill Him. Mankind cannot put up with this kind of light of grace and truth. So He came to His own in the OT and they received Him not. Then He came to His own in the NT, and they received Him not. Not only did they not receive Him, they rejected and killed Him.

And yet verse 12 says, "...as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name." And this One, who is the light and life of the world, became flesh and dwelt among us and four writers left to us His story. These are the headlines, now for the details.

## II. THE PREPARATION OF THE MESSIAH FOR THE WORLD

INTRO: With that, we have covered those sections of the Gospels that introduce to us the Gospel of the Messiah and we need to change gears here in the middle of this message. As I outline the Gospels, we will now go to what I have called "The Preparation Of The Messiah For The World." In this section we will see how God prepared the second Person of the Triune God, whom John calls 'The Word', to become the Son of God. This One we know as the Son of God, who is the long promised Messiah in the OT will become the Savior of the world by giving His life for it. In this section we will cover Matthew chapters 1-3; Mark

1:1-11, and Luke 1:5-3:22. In this section we will see the conception of John the Baptist, the conception of Jesus Christ, the birth of both these men, and we will close this section when Jesus Christ is about 30 years old, and ready to begin His ministry.

#### A. Conception Of John The Baptist (Luke 1:5-25)

So, we begin all that, with the conception of John the Baptist. Now when Luke writes to Theophilus, he does something wonderful for the rest of us. Luke chapter 1 has 80 verses, and none of that material is given by any of the other writers. Luke is going to tell us about how it happened that John the Baptist was born. He starts off in 1:5 like this, "There was in the days of Herod the king of Judea..." He does not start off like this, "Once upon a time..." What we have here is not a fairy tale. It is factual history.

I have recently spoken to you about Herod the king. Rome became the fourth world power shortly after Herod was born. Herod, who was part Jew, was a very shrewd and violent man. He lived until shortly after Jesus was born. I will tell you more about him when we come to those passages related to him. And so our text says, "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea..." Since about 40 B.C. Herod was called, 'The King of the Jews.'

But, before we read Luke 1:5-7, I must give you at least a little history related to the priests of Israel so that you will be able to appreciate what Luke tells us here. You see, he says, "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest..." So, let me take you back to when Israel took the land of Canaan after they came out of Egypt. The land of Canaan was divided up between 11 of the 12 tribes. You will remember that the tribe of Levi did not get any land. This was the priestly tribe. And so, in the lands of the other tribes, 48 cities were set out as belonging to the Levites. The Levites were to see to the spiritual well-being of the nation. And these cities were all set out in a special fashion and were so distributed that no one in Israel lived more than ten miles from a Levitical city.

Now, within those 48 cities were 24 courses of priests. And each course of priests would serve one week in 24. This course was a one week shift. And so, in every 24 weeks, this one course of priests would pack up and go to Jerusalem for one week. Now, this one week shift was divided into six clans and one clan would serve one day and another the next, and so on for six days. But on the seventh day, the Sabbath, all six clans of this one course of priests would serve together. Then when that one week was done, they would go back home for 23 weeks, until the next time their service time came.

Now, when they served for that one week, their days in the temple would begin long before daylight. By daylight, according to Alfred Eedersheim at least 50 priests would have been present to serve. So, early in the morning, before it began to get light, a priest would mount the highest pinnacle of the temple. It was his duty to give the signal when the day officially would begin. When this priest first saw the blush of dawn he gave signal and a priest would give three blasts on the shofar. The sound of this shofar would echo through the hills and even as far as Hebron, and all Israel knew a new day had begun. Then the priests at the huge temple gates would swing them open. Down in the courts, the priests were already busy (Eedersheim 133).

Let me quote from another message I did some years ago: "Now, there was nothing more special to the priest, than to be given the opportunity to serve. And because there were so very many priests, in order for each priest to get a chance to serve, they had special lotteries each day to determine which persons in that particular clan would be serving that day. For the many different services performed by the priests during one day, four separate lotteries were held to see who would have the special places of service. And so, throughout the day, the courts of Jesus' Father's house were filled with priests, waiting to see if they would be given the opportunity to serve.

"And now, while it is still dark outside, all the priests who were eligible for the lotteries would purify themselves at the mikvah, a special pool of



naturally collected water. This was a baptism, an immersion for purification even for a priest who was certain he had not become defiled.

"Now the priest would make his way to the Chamber of the Hewn Stone where the lotteries took place. They would stand in a circle. A number higher than the number of priests present was chosen and each priest would then raise a finger, since the Bible forbids the counting of people (Ex. 30:12). Then the counting began until the agreed on number was reached, and there was your first selected priest for the first lottery.

"The priests were then divided into two separate columns. This was the dawn patrol. Their job was to make sure everything was in order for the daily temple service. They had to make sure nothing was out of place and that the 93 sacred vessels were all in their proper place and ready for the Divine service" end quote.

Well, I won't give you all the details of a day's service, but one of the very special services which was chosen by lottery was the incense offering. It was during the third lottery that the person who would officiate at the altar of incense was chosen. Let me quote once more from the previous message I mentioned:

"Now comes the third lottery. This would determine who would officiate at the incense offering. According to the Jews, this was the most acceptable part of the temple service in the eyes of God. Every priest, I am sure, wished this lot to fall on them. This service was influential in subduing evil. It aided God's mercy and benevolence in the world", end quote.

So, with that bit of background, let us read verses 5-10 (read). We understand then that Zacharias and Elizebeth came from one of those cities of the Levites. This particular city, I understand, was Ein Karem, not far from Jerusalem. You see, Zacharias was a priest. Of the 24 divisions of priests, and he was of the division of Abijah. Let me just slip in here that some try to determine what time of year Jesus

was born from the time that the division of Abijah served. In 2 Chronicles 24 you will find that the division of Abijah was the eighth division. Using this method some conclude that Jesus was born during the feast of Tabernacles, somewhere between our month of mid September to mid October. However, there are a lot of complications and I am not sure that this time can be given with any certainty, though it is an interesting way of trying to determine the time of Christ's birth. If the course of Abijah could be ascertained we could at least come to the month in which Jesus was born.

Let me just make a note from this particular part of the temple service, the burning of incense on the altar of incense. What is pictured by the altar of incense is prayer. And right here we have a picture of the importance of prayer in the house of God. Jesus said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." It was the desire of every priest to be chosen for this service. We too are priests to the Lord, and yet, it seems this is the one service most of us do not want. It is a good number of years ago that we began a prayer hour in the church. It was a very big battle for me to switch from leading a Bible study to leading a prayer meeting. We have battled many a battle to keep the prayer meeting going, but today, we are still going. We did not have prayer meeting over Christmas and then, due to other problems, we missed for two more weeks and my wife and I discovered that when we began again we could truly say, "Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer." If that is something of what the priest felt who was chosen for this special service, then I know what they must have felt like.

Now, back to our subject, I understand that only once in a priest's life, could he ever serve in this very important part of the service. Zacharias was old before he was drawn by lot to serve, but he would never serve at this altar again. And it is at this very special service in his life that a very important event happened to him. Luke is the only Gospel writer to tell us about this. So let us read verses 11-17 (read). Zacharias and Elizabeth would bring into this world the forerunner of the Messiah! Their son will prepare the people for Jesus Christ.

Let me make a few comments on the passage. This service was a very special opportunity for Zacharias to bring his own prayer request to God. No doubt he prayed for the nation of Israel, but he did have a request for himself and his wife. And the indication is that he requested from God a son. We need to note something there. This angel knew what Zachariah had been praying for, for the angel says in verse 13, "Do not be afraid Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son."

Then in verse 15 it says that he will drink neither wine nor strong drink. You will long have forgotten this, but in the "Wine and The Bible" series I did some years ago, my conclusion to the phrase 'wine and strong drink' refer to two different drinks and neither one necessarily means an inebriating drink. Wine, historically referred to juice expressed from grapes. Whether it was intoxicating or not must be determined from the context in which it is used. The Hebrew word behind the phrase 'strong drink' here is the word shawkawr. In my studies I concluded that it refers to juice expressed from any fruit other than grapes.

So when the angel says that John the Baptist will not drink either wine or strong drink, it means that he will be a Nazarite. So, turn to Numbers 6 (read 1-8). Now here is the question: Why was a Nazarite not to drink yayin or shawkawr? Was it because he might get drunk? Well, note in the last part of verse 3 that he was not to eat fresh grapes, or raisins. Raisins are dried grapes. Now, was this because he would be in danger of getting drunk? No! Notice in verse 4 that he could have nothing that came from the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skin. Why? Because he might get drunk? No! You can't get drunk on those either.

My own conclusion is that the reason a Nazarite and the priests on certain occasions had to refrain from anything that came from the vine, or any juices made from fruit, was that the making of grape juice, or any other fruit juice pictured the pouring out of the wrath of God. The reason was not related to alcohol, since that was forbidden altogether. So everything, even the seeds that would produce grapes were to be

abstained from. Go with me to one Scripture to see what grapes and treading grapes are a picture of (Isaiah 63:1-4). The treading of grapes pictures the wrath to come and we will see later that John the Baptist stood just before the time of that wrath to come and was warning people, for he said, "Brood of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come!" (Matt. 3:7).

So we go now to verses 18-21 (read). Notice that angels are personal beings. The angel says, "I am Gabriel." The name Gabriel, I understand, means, 'man of God.' But it is not the regular word for man. It is the word 'geber', and TWOT says it relates to a male at the height of his powers. From other word studies I think the idea behind this name is that of a mighty warrior of God. Gabriel and Michael are the only two angels that are given names in Scripture. But note that Gabriel says, "I stand in the presence of God." Gabriel had a very highly exalted position in heaven. And when God was about to bring the forerunner of the Messiah into the world, it is Gabriel, a highly trusted angel He sends. So note that he says, "I was sent to speak to you and bring you this news." Well, the angel also informs Zacharias that because he struggled with unbelief, he would not be able to speak until his son was born. But you can imagine what this news of a son must have been like for Zachariah. Year after year he and Elizabeth have prayed for a child and year after year nothing has happened. And here, in a moment, standing before an angel of God he is told he will have a son.

Now look at verses 22-25 (read). Note that verse 23 speaks of when the days of his service are over. When the week of the course of Abijah came to a close, John went back home to Elizabeth. And shortly after that the words of the angel began their fulfillment. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah would be born in due time.

CONCL: Well, we have concluded the introduction to the life of Christ and have officially entered the account of the life of Christ. It begins with the coming of John the Baptist as the near fulfillment of the prophecy of the coming of Elijah. John will prepare the world for Jesus Christ, and we have had the account of how that all began.

In the next message we will look at the conception of the Messiah Himself.