

The Ministry of John the Baptist

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Why did John preach repentance and baptism? Does baptism save? Join Pastor Steve as he examines Mark 1:5-8 detailing the ministry of John the Baptist.

INTRODUCTION

- 400 years of silence
- Then all of a sudden a prophet appears
- This was not just any prophet
- According to [Matthew 11:11](#), “among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”
- Today we are looking at the ministry of John the Baptist as Mark presents him in [Mark 1:4-8](#).
- Please take God’s Word and turn to Mark chapter 1

Mark 1:4–8 NASB95

⁴ John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

⁵ And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

⁶ John was clothed with camel’s hair and *wore* a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey.

⁷ And he was preaching, and saying, “After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals.

⁸ “I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

- As we listened to those verses as I read them, we see that we are now introduced to the subjects of baptism, confession and repentance
- I want to begin by stating firmly that baptism doesn’t save you
- There are many who believe it does

- This is affirmed by churches like the Church of Christ, The Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox, Lutherans, Methodists, and Nazarenes just to name a few
- But the Bible teaches that we are saved “by grace...through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” ([Eph.2:8-9](#)).
- When the Bible talks about being baptized, it is always spoken as the result of salvation not a condition
- [Acts 2:41](#), “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”
- [Acts 8:12](#), “But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.”
- [Acts 8:13](#), “Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.”
- [Acts 8:36-38](#), “36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” 37 And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.”
- Since we have these verses that clearly indicate baptism is a result of salvation not the condition, we can conclude that any verse or verses that sound like you have to be baptized to be saved is interpreted accurately
- If what we just read is true then the overall interpretation is baptism does not save
- The same is true of [Mark 16:16](#), “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”
- But even here the last part of the verse indicates salvation apart from baptism
- It doesn’t say “But he who has disbelieved and has not been baptized shall be condemned”
- The lost are condemned for unbelief, not for not being baptized (MacArthur)
- Consider one of the thieves on the cross
- He believed in Christ but could not be baptized
- Was he not saved then?
- Was what Jesus said to him not true?
- [Luke 23:39-43](#), records his conversation with the other thief and with Jesus
- It says, “39 One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” 40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of

condemnation? 41 “And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” 43 And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.””

- It says nothing about baptism because baptism doesn't save

· As we have been studying Mark's gospel, we have already looked at...

I. The Title of Mark (v.1)

- Mark says it is “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”
- It's about Jesus

· To demonstrate that he begins with...

II. The Prophecy of Isaiah (vv.2-3)

- That mentions John the Baptist as the forerunner
- Mark says in verses 2-3: 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way; 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.’ ””

· Now in verses 4-8 we meet...

III. The Forerunner of Christ (vv.4-8)

A. His Revealing (v.4a)

- Mark says, “John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness”

B. His Preaching (v.4b)

- Mark says John was “...preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”
- Kent Hughes says, “When he stood before the people in the wasteland, lean, gaunt, solitary, he preached with fire. We can be sure that, like the prophets of old, he wept. He wept like Jesus and Paul and Whitefield and Moody. Everything together—his character, his message, and his passion—reached the multitudes.

› Verse 5 highlights his ministry of...

C. His Baptism (v.5)

Mark says, “And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”

> Mark says...

1. Everyone was coming to John

- Notice again Verse 5, which says, “all the country of Judea” and “all the people of Jerusalem”
- [Matthew 3:5](#) adds, “and all the district around the Jordan”
- [Matthew 4:25](#), “Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.”
- The twofold “all” is rhetorical, stressing the deep and widespread interest aroused by John’s ministry (Hiebert)
- After centuries of silence, the prophetic voice of John created a tremendous stirring among the Jews, resulting in a massive outpouring to attend his preaching (Hiebert)
- It is estimated that as many as three hundred thousand people came out to be baptized by John (Cooper, Rodney L. *Mark*. p 8)
- So verse 5 says they were “going out to him”
- The verb “going out” (exeporeueto, imperf.), because it’s in the imperfect tense, suggests that they “kept going out” to him as a “continuous procession of people” (UBSH Mk)
- There was “a steady stream of men and women going out to him” (PA)
- Because of the mention of Jerusalem going out to him “indicates that John’s ministry drew attention” (James Edwards)
- Jerusalem was at least “twenty miles from the Jordan River” (Gaebelein)

> Mark continues by saying...

2. Everyone was being baptized by John

- Verse 5 says, “all” from Judea and Jerusalem”
- Unfortunately it doesn’t mean here “everyone”
- This is literary exaggeration, indicating that the covenant people are going out to John in a great crowd, no doubt as entire families (R.C. Sproul)
- In the parallel of this account found in [Matthew 3](#), two other groups of people were present: the Pharisees and Sadducees

- [Matthew 3:7-8](#), “7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance”
- So people from “Jerusalem...and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan” ([Mat.3:5](#)) were being baptized by John

› Now we need to ask...

a) What is baptism?

› There are various views but we need to start with a definition...

- The Greek word for “to baptize” is *baptizo*
- The ancients used this Greek word in a variety of ways
- For example, the word has the meaning “to dip, to immerse, to bathe, to drown, to sink, to perish, and to go under”
- One significant usage of the word is a reference to a ship “sinking”
- The Greeks used baptizo to describe the dying of a garment, where the entire garment was plunged in and taken out (PA)
- Because of disagreements about the method of baptism, the translators of the King James Version did not give us the meaning of the verb *baptizo* but transliterated it, or converted each Greek word to an English word in order to avoid controversy.
- Therefore, they used the transliterated word “baptize” rather than its meaning “to dip” or “to immerse.” (<https://www.neverthirsty.org/bible-studies/topical-bible-studies/is-baptism-required-for-salvation>)

› As I said there are many views of baptism...

› One view is...

b) Sprinkling

- There are two passages that make this view impossible:
- [Mark 1:5](#), “And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”
- [John 3:23](#), “John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized—”
- Both verses talk about John baptizing where there was much water

- If baptizo means to sprinkle, you don't need this amount of water
- You need “much water” to immerse someone down into the water
- Catholics practiced immersion up to the 12th century
- One Catholic scholar wrote, “Catholics admit that immersion brings out more fully the meaning of the Sacrament ([Rom. vi, 3, 4](#); [Col. ii.12](#); [Tit. iii. 5](#); [Eph. v. 27](#) [sic — 26]), and that for twelve centuries it was the common practice” (The Question Box, San Francisco: Catholic Truth Society, 1929, p. 240).
- Another Catholic scholar, J.J. Ignatius Dollinger, wrote that in the early church baptism was “by immersion of the whole person, which is the only meaning of the New Testament word. A mere pouring or sprinkling was never thought of” (The First Age of Christianity and of the Church (London, 1887, Vol. II, p. 183).
- There is no biblical support of the practice of sprinkling no where in Scripture
- Some try to use [Ezekiel 36:25](#) but water in this verse is used as a figure of speech for cleansing just as heart is used this way in verse 26
- This was a symbol borrowed from the cleansing rituals of the law of Moses that pointed to the forgiveness that Israel could enjoy from the filthiness of their idol worship
- [Ezekiel 36:25](#), “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.”

› Second baptism is also used...

c) Figuratively

- [Romans 6:3-4](#) refers to baptism figuratively in order to explain that believers have died to the old self and have become a new self
- Verse 3 says that believers have been baptized into Christ and into His death: “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?”
- Verse 4 says we are also “raised from the dead”
- [Romans 6:4](#), “Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”
- Immersion is the best understanding for John baptizing where there is much water

- It is the best understanding when it is used figuratively for being baptized into Christ and His death and raised to new life
- So baptism is simply “burial in water”
(<https://christiancourier.com/articles/does-ezekiel-36-25-prophecy-sprinkling>)

› Some say that baptism is part of...

d) Salvation

- (But) baptism does not save anyone
- Peter said in [1 Peter 3:21](#), “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”

› So John the Baptist’s baptism was...

e) Symbolic

- [Mark 1:4](#) says John was “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”
- In other words this was “a baptism resulting from true repentance” (MacArthur)
- John’s ministry was to call Israel to repentance in preparation for the coming of Messiah
- Baptism did not produce repentance, it was the result
- This is why John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and Sadducees in [Matthew 3:7-8](#), “7...“You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance””
- John’s baptism also did not produce the forgiveness of sin
- Forgiveness of sin was the result of true repentance from sin not baptism
- Matthew says in [Matthew 3:6](#), “and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.”
- “As they confessed their sins” marked the reality of their repentance

› There was another baptism for...

f) Gentile proselytes

- This would be the closest parallel to John’s baptism
- This was the onetime washing of Gentile proselytes

- Gentiles that wanted to become a part of God’s chosen people, left their life of paganism and accepted the true faith of the Jewish people
- But you need to understand that his was nothing extraordinary compared to John the Baptist calling all Jews to be baptized
- That was considered radical because it required them to see themselves as outsiders who must acknowledge that they were no more fit for the Messiah’s kingdom than the Gentiles (MacArthur)
- John’s baptism confronted the religious hypocrisy that permeated first-century Judaism (MacArthur)
- So when Mark says “they were being baptized by him in the Jordan river,” he is saying they were fully immersed in the Jordan river as they came confessing their sins therefore giving evidence of true repentance from their sin

› So everyone was coming to John and being baptized by him and...

3. Everyone was confessing their sins

Just a few more thoughts on the word Mark uses here for confessing:

a) Confessing their sins

- The word “confessing” (exomologeō, pres.mid.part.) is used in the Bible for “confess, agree” or “praise”

Lexham Theological Wordbook ἐξομολογέω

This verb is the usual Septuagint translation of the Hebrew יָדָא (yādā, “to give thanks”). In some instances it refers to giving thanks to God, including three main instances in which Jesus thanks the Father (Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21; John 11:41). In other cases it refers to confessing sin (e.g., Matt 3:6)

- When it is used of “agreeing”, it means “to speak or say the same thing”
- They were openly agreeing with God concerning their deeds and therefore publicly acknowledging their sins as they were being baptized
- As one commentator says, “To confess one’s sins, as they were being baptized, is to agree with God about them. John baptized no one who did not confess and repent of his sins” (MacArthur)

› What about...

b) Infant baptism or paedobaptism

- There is no support anywhere in the Bible for baptizing babies

- Babies cannot confess and repent of their sins
- This was a practice of the Roman Catholic church
- They still practice and believe today that baptism removes original sin, so they teach infant baptism or paedobaptism
- This is also a practice in Reformed and presbyterian churches
- We do not believe that here
- These Reformed and presbyterian groups believe that infant baptism is a covenant sign the same as OT circumcision was a covenant sign
- Both doesn't save but gives the infant covenantal participation in the Abrahamic Covenant
- They teach that the Abrahamic Covenant which included infants is still in effect today
- They says, "As the OT taught those entire households were circumcised (females obviously excluded) as were entire households baptized in the NT" (CARM)
- But as I said there is no scriptural support for such a view
- Believer's baptism, as I like to refer to it, is simply that
- It is for believers, those who confess Christ, those who confess their sin, those who repent of their sin
- Babies cannot do any of that!

› Mark also mentions John the Baptist's...

D. His Clothing and Diet (v.6)

"John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey."

1. His Clothing (v.6a)

- The word "clothed" is a perfect participle, indicating that his clothing was "not a uniform...put on for the occasion, but his usual mode of clothing" (Wuest)
- The idea is "having been clothed," with a present connotation, still so clothed (Lenski)
- From the start he wore "camel's hair" (Lenski)
- John's clothing resembled that of an Old Testament prophet

- From [Zech. 13:4](#) we know that “a rough garment” or “a garment of hair” was the usual dress of a prophet and was used even by false prophets in order to deceive
- In [2 Kings 1:8](#) King Ahaziah recognizes Elijah when this prophet is described to him as “an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins.”
- Lenski says, “Since Elijah prefigured the Baptist in the stern preaching of repentance ([Mal. 4:5](#); [Matt. 11:4](#); [Mark 9:11, 12](#); [Luke 1:17](#)), this similarity of dress cannot have been accidental. In this very wilderness Elijah made his last appearance. The very appearance of John was thus a stern sermon.”
- John modeled his clothing after Elijah
- [2 Kings 1:8](#), says Elijah “was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins.”
- John’s clothing was made of “camel’s hair”
- This was a “loose robe woven of camel’s hair” (Hiebert)
- This type of garment was “rough” and “hairy” and “worn by the poor and the ascetic” (Hiebert)
- Mark also says he wore “a leather belt around his waist”
- This was a “piece of untanned leather” that would correspond to his coarse coat
- Some were often made of costly materials and was a sign of personal wealth but not John’s

2. His Diet (v.6b)

- His diet was “locusts and wild honey”
- There were 4 kinds of locust Jews could eat
- [Leviticus 11:22](#), “These of them you may eat: the locust in its kinds, and the devastating locust in its kinds, and the cricket in its kinds, and the grasshopper in its kinds.”
- Locust were prepared in various ways for eating
- People ate them in times of famine
- It was part of a regular diet for the poor
- The “wild honey” was either just that or as some scholars believe a “vegetable product” like “the sweet gum that exuded from the leaves of

certain trees”

- I lean toward bee honey
- This could be honey from bee hives or honey from other places
- [Deuteronomy 32:13](#), “He made him ride on the high places of the earth, And he ate the produce of the field; And He made him suck honey from the rock, And oil from the flinty rock.”
- [1 Samuel 14:25](#), “All the people of the land entered the forest, and there was honey on the ground.”

› Last we hear...

E. His Message (vv.7-8)

Mark says, “7 And he was preaching, and saying, “After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. 8 “I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.””

- Verses 7 and 8 are Mark’s brief record of John’s message

› First we hear...

1. His View of Himself

- As his popularity grew he publicly stated that he was less important than the Messiah
- “He must increase, but I must decrease” ([John 3:30](#))
- That’s in keeping with his role as the forerunner of Christ
- He says in verse 7, “After me One is coming who is mightier than I”
- This statement is the entire purpose behind his preaching
- He was to point his listeners to the One who was coming after him
- That’s what it meant to be the forerunner
- He was the herald who directed everyone’s attention away from himself and toward the coming King

› John says He is so mighty that...

- He could not even take the role of the lowest slave and “stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals”
- John baptized with water but “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”

> What is...

2. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit

- Some say it is praying for the Spirit to come in you as a believer and then evidence itself by speaking in tongues
- (But) the baptism with the Holy Spirit is simply receiving the Holy Spirit at salvation not after
- [1 Corinthians 12:13](#), “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”
- [Romans 8:9](#), “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”
- [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#), “19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”
- [Titus 3:5-6](#), “5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior”
- The apostles had to wait until Pentecost to receive the Holy Spirit which was ten days later (MacArthur) but since then all believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit at salvation
- I mentioned [Ezekiel 36:25](#) earlier
- Let’s look at it again but this time not with sprinkling of water in water baptism but in Spirit baptism
- This is what [Ezekiel 36:24-27](#) taught
- This is also the meaning of [John 3:5-6](#).
- [Ezekiel 36:24-27](#), “24 “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. 25 “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

- [John 3:5-6](#), “5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”
- Being baptized with the Holy Spirit refers to the regenerative work of salvation
- This is not a reference to an ecstatic postconversion experience (MacArthur)
- This is the purification of the new covenant, and the transformation of the new birth (MacArthur)

CONCLUSION

- So now we see the course Mark takes with his gospel
- He begins with his title telling us this gospel is about Jesus Christ
- Then he gives us the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist who was the “voice in the wilderness” calling for repentance for the forgiveness of sin and demonstrating that by water baptism
- But it would be Jesus, the Messiah to come, who would baptize or immerse you with the Holy Spirit
- That was fulfilled after His ascension and it continues to be fulfilled today
- Have you confessed your sin to Christ?
- Have you repented of your sins?
- Have you turned to Jesus for salvation and cleansing?
- Have you been baptized to demonstrate that you have repented and received Christ?
- Fulfill John’s ministry today by turning to Christ
- Let’s pray