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A Nazarite Baby (John the Baptist) and Jesus' Birth

Harold Willmington

Liberty University, hwillmington@liberty.edu

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THE PHYSICAL BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

A NAZARITE BABY (JOHN THE BAPTIST) AND JESUS' BIRTH

JOHN THE BAPTIST FILE

STATISTICS ON HIS LIFE

Father: Zacharias

Mother: Elisabeth

First mention: Matthew 3:1

Final mention: Acts 19:4

Meaning of his name: "Grace of God"

Frequency of his name: Referred to 90 times

Biblical books mentioning him: Five books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts)

Occupation: Prophet and Nazarite evangelist

Place of birth: Hill country of Judea

Place of death: In a dungeon near the Dead Sea

Circumstances of death: He was beheaded by the sword

Age at death: Approximately 35

Important fact about his life: He was the forerunner of Christ; he both introduced and baptized the Messiah

STORY OF HIS LIFE

- John was to function as a Nazarite (Lk. 1:15). There is a difference between a Nazarite and a Nazarene:
 - A. A Nazarite had to do with vocation. This is to say that the Nazarite took upon him a three-fold vow (Num. 6:2-6):
 1. He would abstain from wine.
 2. He would not have his hair cut.
 3. He would not come in contact with a dead body.
 - B. A Nazarene had to do with location. This is to say that if one lived in the city of

Nazareth, he was known as a Nazarene. Thus, while John was a Nazarite, Jesus became a Nazarene (Mt. 2:23). In fact, our Lord did not observe any of the three Nazarite vows.

1. He did partake of the fruit of the vine. He both created it (Jn. 2:1-10) and served it (Mt. 26:26-29).
2. He did cut his hair. Jesus was often looked upon as a Jewish rabbi, and it is known that they did cut their hair (Jn. 3:2).
3. He did come in contact with dead bodies. In fact, our Lord broke up every funeral he ever attended by raising the corpse (Lk. 7:14; 8:54; Jn. 11:43).

C. John would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. This is said also about two other men:

1. Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5)
2. Paul (Gal. 1:15)

- Each of these three men were also set aside by the Holy Spirit for a particular ministry:

A. Jeremiah was to be a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5).

B. John was to prepare the way for the coming Messiah (Lk. 1:15, 16, 76-79).

C. Paul was to serve as a missionary to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15, 16).

- Just how does all this affect believers today? In one sense of the word we too have been set aside at birth.

A. First, like these three men, we are known even while in our mother's womb:

"O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me" (Psa. 139:1-5).

"For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them (Psa. 139:13-16).

B. God has also assigned certain things He desires for us to do:

"Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4). "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

- Gabriel predicted that John would be “great in the sight of the Lord” (Lk. 1:15). Was he? Some thirty-four years later Jesus Himself attested to this, just prior to John’s martyrdom:

“As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he’ ” (Matt. 11:7-11).

- John’s preaching ministry was also predicted by both Isaiah and Malachi:

A. According to Isaiah

‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken’ ” (Isa. 40:3-5).

B. According to Malachi

“Behold, I will send my messenger and he shall prepare the way before me . . . ” (Mal. 3:1a).

- The ministries of John the Baptist and Elijah the prophet can be favorably compared:

A. Both were familiar with the rugged outdoor life:

1. Elijah—*“And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite” (2 Kings 1:8).*
2. John—*“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel . . . And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey” (Luke 1:80; Matt. 3:4).*

B. Both attempted to call the people of Israel back to God:

1. Elijah—*“And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be god, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word” (1 Kings 18:21).*
2. John—*“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:1, 2).*

C. Both condemned sinful kings:

1. Elijah condemned Ahab

“And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word’ ” (1 Kings 17:1).

“Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, ‘Is that you, O troubler of Israel?’ And he answered, ‘I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals” (1 Kings 18:17, 18).

“Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ‘Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. You shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘Have you murdered and also taken possession?’ And you shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.’ And concerning Jezebel the LORD also spoke, saying, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel’” (1 Kings 21:17-19, 23).

2. John condemned King Herod Antipas

“Because John had said to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife’” (Mk. 6:18).

D. Both were hated and hounded by godless women:

1. Elijah’s foe—*“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, ‘So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.’ And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there” (1 Kings 19:1-3).*
2. John’s foe—*“Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not” (Mark 6:19).*

E. Both became discouraged:

1. Elijah—*“But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, it is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers” (1 Kings 19:4).*
2. John—*“Now when John had heard in the prison they works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” (Matt. 11:2, 3).*

F. Both were comforted by Christ Himself:

1. Elijah—*“Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, ‘Arise and eat.’ Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, ‘Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you’” (1 Kings 19:5-7).*

Note: Most Bible students believe the Angel of the Lord title, when found in the Old Testament, is a reference to Jesus Himself, that is, a preincarnate appearance of the Son of God.

2. John—*“And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them’”* (Luke 7:21, 22).

G. Both were often associated with each other:

1. By the Jewish leaders

“Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’” (John 1:19-21).

2. By the crowds

“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets’” (Matt. 16:13, 14).

H. Both were widely acknowledged men of God:

1. Elijah

“Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. So she said to Elijah, ‘What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?’” (1 Kings 17:17, 18).

2. John

“For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly” (Mark 6:20).

REFLECTIONS FROM HIS LIFE

At least Herod allowed my disciples to visit me here in prison today. That’s a lot more than his wife would have done. They came right after returning from their mission for me. Thank God my misgivings were totally unjustified. Their report literally thrilled my soul: *“He’s the one, John. No doubt about it whatsoever. We watched in amazement as He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, mobility to the cripple, and, most incredible of all, life to the dead!”* (Mt. 11:1-6)

I thanked them again and again and bade them a final farewell. We all realized this would be our last meeting. I know it will be just a matter of time until she has my head. I am feared and hated by both the king and queen—for my crime of denouncing their shameful sin. (Mt. 14:5; Mk. 6:18, 19)

It’s so hot and oppressive down here by the Dead Sea. How I miss the cool waters of the Jordan, where I once baptized so many, including the very one my disciples just reported about.

(Mt. 3:13-16)

Chained here in the darkness, I often wonder if I have lived up to the lofty predictions made about me by the angel and by my father. Or, perhaps even more significant, what about those written by Isaiah and Malachi? (Mt. 3:1-3; 11:10; Lk. 1:13-17, 76-79)

God will be my judge, of course. But this one thing I know: Even in the hour of death, He must increase while I must decrease, for He's the one who will take away our sin. (Jn. 1:29; 3:30)

Footsteps outside the dungeon door . . . They're coming for me. Someone said that today is Herod' birthday party. Apparently I've been invited. (Mt. 14:6)