

WHAT JOHN' S MISSION INVOLVED
And/Or
The Significance of the Coming of the Holy Spirit
Mt.3:1-12
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I. INTRODUCTION

1. No doubt there has been and continues to be much misunderstanding about the mission of John the Baptist; that is, as to what it involved, how extensive it was, or how broad the scope of his preaching had to be in order for him to fulfill his mission.
2. Remember what Lk.16:16 tells us about the shift in emphasis at the coming of John; that is, from the law and the prophets to the preaching of the kingdom of God.
3. When fully understood, his preaching in fulfilling his mission reveals to us the significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost in Ac.2 signaling the actual coming of the kingdom or rule of Jesus Christ which was preached by both John and Jesus.
4. Perhaps there is no subject in religious circles in which there is more misunderstanding than there is on the Holy Spirit, even as to what the coming of the Holy Spirit as declared by John in Mt.3:11 fully signified.
5. In Mt.3:1,2 John says, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Then he declared in Vv.7-12 that the coming of the Holy Spirit signified that the kingdom or rule of heaven had come, which is evident when compared with Ac.2, where the apostles were "baptized with the Holy Spirit," and where Jesus Christ is said to have been raised up from the dead "to sit on David's throne," and/or on his throne, and "that God hath made that same Jesus...both Lord and Christ."
6. More on this significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit later. But first consider: --

II. DISCUSSION

A. JOHN, HIS MISSION AND HIS WORK.

1. John was the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth who were descendants of Aaron, the first High Priest under the Law of Moses, and the brother of Moses, the lawgiver, Lk.1:5,13.

2. His parents “were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,” Lk.1:6.
3. Due to his parents being “well stricken in years” and his mother being “barren,” John’s conception was by a miracle and miraculously announced in advance, Lk.1:7-14.
4. John would be under the Nazarite vow of Num.6; would “be filled with the Holy Spirit;” and would turn many of the erring children of Israel to the Lord their God, “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord,” Lk.1:15-20.
5. John was the harbinger spoken of in Isa.40:3-5 and cited in Lk.3:1-6; Mt.3:1-3.
6. John was God’s messenger of whom Mal.3:1 prophesied and of whom Matthew wrote in Mt.11:7-11.
 - a. According to Mal.4:1 God would not leave them (referring to fleshly Israel) either root or branch, which is the message preached by John in Mt.3:7-12. Cf. Mt.23:36-24:34.
 - b. Certainly the branches (unbelieving Jews) were cut off, Rom.11:19-22.
 - c. The metaphor of Mal.4:5, wherein the Lord through Malachi promised to send “Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord,” is explained by Jesus in Mt.11:10-14 and 17:10-13 to be referring to John the Baptist.
 - (1) Metaphor: “a figure of speech by which one word is employed for another of which it is the image; a method of speech, or description, which likens one object to another by referring to it as if it were the other.”
 - d. John further explains it by denying that he was Elijah the prophet in the literal sense (he was not Elijah reincarnated), Jno.1:19-23.
 - e. However, the angel of the Lord announced to Zacharias that the preaching of his son John would be “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” Lk.1:11-17.
 - (1) That is, in the disposition; the energy, the force, and the zeal of; in his ascetic dress and life (2Kgs.1:8); and in his message of repentance, 1Kgs.18:21-40).

B. WHAT JOHN’S MISSION INVOLVED OR WHAT JOHN HAD TO PREACH IN ORDER TO FULFILL HIS MISSION.

(That is, how extensive was the content of his preaching in fulfilling his mission?)

1. First note the following two ideas:
 - a. Apparently the teaching of John the Baptist and the implication of it are not fully realized by many and even understood by less, especially the Jews both then and now; as well as the Millennialists.
 - b. What John taught in order to fulfill his mission, and our understanding of it, is of the utmost importance in that it established prior to the coming of Christ and Pentecost some of the vital characteristics of the kingdom of heaven; his preaching established an important sign of the coming of the kingdom of heaven and therefore marks the time of its coming and of the beginning and nature of the reign of Jesus Christ.

2. John was a prophet of God with a mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; Yea, "More than a prophet," according to Jesus' own testimony, Mt.11:7-11.
 - a. To fulfill his mission and to prepare the lost sheep of the house of Israel for the coming of the Lord, John preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," while announcing "the kingdom of heaven," or the reign of Jesus Christ, "is at hand," Lk.3:3; Ac.19:4; Mt.3:1,2.
 - b. His preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins to the lost sheep of the house of Israel required their:
 - (1) Repentance, Mt.3:1,2,7,8.
 - (2) Confession of their sins, Mt.3:6; Mk.1:5.
 - (3) Baptism in water, Mt.3:11.
 - (4) Belief on Christ Jesus (Ac.19:4) when he was finally and fully manifested and declared to be the Christ, the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead. Cf. Ac.2:22-36; 20:20,21; Rom.1:1-4.

3. John was the harbinger of Christ spoken of in Isa.40:3-5 so identified in Lk.3:2-6 and Mt.3:1-3, who was:
 - a. Sent from God according to Jno.1:6.
 - b. Sent from God to bear witness to the Light, the true Light, which lights men, through whom all might believe, Jno.1:7-9.

4. When John preached that the wayward Jews, the lost sheep of the house of Israel, must repent.

- a. Are we to think he didn't tell them about the divine requirement of repentance – why it was necessary; what constituted it; what it was and what it was not? Not just saying, "I'm sorry!"
 - b. Note what Jesus taught the impenitent Jews in Jno.8:31-44.
 - c. Note also what Paul taught them in Rom.2:17-24; Cf. 31-33; 10:19-21; 11:22a.
 - d. Are we to think John did not appeal to them in like manner?
 - e. Did they not hear this from John as he fulfilled his mission as the harbinger of the Messiah?
5. When John preached that the kingdom for which they had long awaited, the kingdom of O.T. prophecy, was "at hand," Mt.3:1,2 (Cf. Dan.2:44; Isa.9:6,7).
- a. Are we to think he didn't tell them about the nature of that kingdom and the sign of its coming?
6. John was to prepare the way of the Lord (Mt.3:3; Lk.3:4).
- a. Do we think all he said to them was, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord..." or did he fully explain to them how to prepare for the Lord's way? Cf. Mt.3:5-10.
 - b. Would he not have explained to them what the Lord's way was, the nature of it, etc., etc.?
7. John, in order to have "...[A] people prepared for the Lord"... "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," did fulfill his mission to bear witness to Jesus being the true Light and the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, Jno.1:7-9,19-36.
- a. Although the Jews understood the concept of the Lamb of God and although they through the years had looked and longed for the coming of the Messiah, how much and what all does John have to teach them to show them this Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Lamb of God – that he really is Messiah?
 - b. Did he simply say, "This Jesus is the messiah?"
 - c. Would he not have to have shown them in detail how this Jesus of Nazareth is the one spoken of by all of their O.T. prophets? How he is the one and the only one who could possibly be the one of O.T. prophecy? How he fulfilled all O.T. prophecy concerning the coming Messiah?

8. That John did his work well as the harbinger of Christ in bearing witness to and identifying Jesus as the Messiah is evident by what happened in Mt.4:12,17-22.
 - a. Here it is revealed that “when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison” (v.12)...
 - b. “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” V.17.
 - c. Then according to Vv.18,19, Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw and called Peter and Andrew his brother, saying unto them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”
 - d. According to V.20, “they straightway left their nets, and followed him.”
 - e. According to Vv.21,22, Jesus then saw and called James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, “and they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.”
 - f. Question: Do you think these men would so readily drop their life’s work at once to follow Jesus unless they had a good understanding of who he was? What he was to do?
 - (1) Are we to think John had no part in preparing them for this?
 - (2) Cf. Mt.3:1-6; Ac.19:4.
9. John even taught on marriage, divorce and remarriage, Mk.6:14-18.
10. John even marked the time the kingdom would come by indicating the sign of it. Mt.3:11; Cf. V.9. See Mal.3:1-3, with emp. on Vv.2,3.
 - a. This points to Jesus’ promise to his apostles in Lk.24:44-49; Ac.1:4-8; Cf. Jno.20:19-23.
 - b. This promise was fulfilled on Pentecost, the birthday of the church, the time the kingdom came, the beginning of the reign of Jesus Christ in heaven at the right hand of God, on the throne of David, Ac.2; Cf. Ac.11:15-18; 10:44,45.

III. CONCLUSION

1. As a result of this study we are reminded of and perhaps made a littler more aware of:
 - a. The importance of the mission of John the Baptist, of the things it involved, of what he preached in order to fulfill his mission to turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord as the harbinger of Jesus Christ.

- b. The fact that the Jews of John's day were without excuse for their failure to recognize and accept Jesus as the Messiah when he came in the flesh; and without excuse for their failure to understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom of heaven and his reign.
 - c. The significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit which John prophesied in Mt.3:11; that is, when Jesus would "baptize with the Holy Spirit," which actually took place on Pentecost when his apostles received "the promise of my Father" which Jesus said he would send upon them (Lk.24:49), when they were "baptized with the Holy Spirit" as promised (Ac.1:5; 2:1-4), which was when they were "endued with power from on high" as promised in Lk.24:49, which was the power they received after the Holy Spirit came upon them (Ac.1:8), and which was when "the kingdom of God came with power" during the life time of some of those living when Jesus made the promise (Mk.9:1).
2. That is how near "at hand" the kingdom of heaven was when John preached it. Remember Lk.16:16.
 3. Pentecost as signified by John was when the kingdom of God came; the 2nd coming of Christ will be when he shall deliver it up to the Father, 1Cor.15:21-26.
 4. In the meantime he reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords, as the Savior of sinners, and as High Priest in God's scheme of human redemption.