

# GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

## Lesson One

### IN THE GOSPELS: JOHN THE BAPTIST

#### Burden to Impart:

*John was called by God to turn His people's heart to their coming Savior, the Lord Jesus. God sent John the Baptist to end the Old Testament age and to begin the New. John told God's people that they should not trust in their religion or heritage to save them (Matt. 3:9). They must repent of their sins, be baptized, and believe in Christ.*

**Memory Verse:** "For this is he who was spoken of through Isaiah the prophet, saying, A voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight" (Matthew 3:3).

**Facts to Teach:** [Scripture reading: Matt. 3:1-10; extra, Luke 1:5-17, 57-80]

1. The Bible has two great sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament tells us about what God did before the Lord Jesus came. It tells us how God called out a special people for Himself, for His salvation, and for His purpose. These people were the children of Israel, the Hebrews; or as we say today, the "Jews." The New Testament mainly tells us what God did after the Lord Jesus came to the earth. In the New Testament we see how God once again called out a people for Himself, for His salvation, and for His purpose. God's people in the New Testament are the Christians, the church.
2. The New Testament began at a time when God's people, the Jews, had turned their hearts away from Him. They had become disobedient, sinful, hard-hearted, and rebellious. They had failed God's calling.
3. In order to prepare His people for the coming of their Savior, the Lord Jesus, God sent a special prophet named John the Baptist to them. John would speak God's word to them and tell them of their sins. He would also tell them of their need to repent, be baptized, and believe in Christ. He was bold, frank, and filled with God.
4. John was born of godly parents. His father served God as a priest in the temple. John's coming was so important that it was foretold hundreds of years earlier in the Old Testament (Isa. 40:3-4). John was born by a special miracle of God, for His parents were very old. He was filled with God's Spirit even from his birth.
5. John had a very hard job to do. He had to turn the hearts of God's people back to the Lord (Luke 1:16). That meant that John himself had to be fully turned to the Lord. John loved the Lord with all of his heart and lived absolutely for Him. For this reason he was different. He lived in the wilderness. He ate wild honey and locusts. He seemed like a wild man to some. But to those who listened to him, he was the voice of God crying in the wilderness, "Repent!" Those who repented showed it to all by their baptism (Matt. 3:6).

## **Reference Materials**

**SUBJECT: GOD’S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: In the Gospels—John the Baptist**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:5-25, 57-80; Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:2-8; Isa. 40:3-4

**AIM:** As God’s called ones we, like John the Baptist, must all turn our hearts fully to the Lord and then help others turn to Him.

**MEMORY VERSES:** Matt. 3:3

**BACKGROUND:** The Bible has two great sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament tells us about what God did **before** the Lord Jesus came. It tells us how God called out a special people for Himself and for His plan. These people were the children of Israel, the Hebrews; or as we say today, the “Jews.” The New Testament mainly tells us what God did **after** the Lord Jesus came to the earth. In the New Testament we see how God once again called out a people for Himself and for His plan. God’s people in the New Testament are the Christians, the Church.

The New Testament began at a time when God’s people, the Jews, had turned their hearts away from Him. They had become disobedient, sinful, hard-hearted, and rebellious. In order to prepare them for the coming of the Savior, the Lord Jesus, God sent a special prophet named John the Baptist to them. John would speak God’s word to them and tell them of their sins. He would also tell them of their need to repent, be baptized, and believe in Christ. John’s coming was so important that it was foretold hundreds of years earlier in the Old Testament. Isaiah 40:3-4 refers to a voice—the voice of one who would cry in the wilderness, “Make clear the way of Jehovah; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” This voice refers to John (Mark 1:2-3).

**CONTENT:** In the days of Herod, there was a couple: a priest of the course of Abijah, named Zachariah and his wife, Elizabeth, of the daughters of Aaron. Both were righteous before God, obeying completely all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. They had no child because Elizabeth was barren and they were both advanced in years. One day Zachariah was serving as a priest in the order of his course. According to the custom of the priestly service, the lot had fallen to him to enter into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. All the multitude of the people was praying outside the temple at the time of incense offering. Then an angel of the Lord (Gabriel) appeared, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. Zachariah was troubled and afraid when he saw him. The angel told him not to be afraid because his petition had been heard. His wife, Elizabeth, would bear him a son, and he should call his name John. He would be great in the sight of the Lord, and he would by no means drink wine and liquor (i.e., he would be a Nazarite from birth). He would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. He would turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. He would go before the Lord like Elijah in spirit and power to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the prudence of the righteous, to prepare for the Lord a people made ready (Mal. 4:5-6).

But Zachariah did not believe Gabriel’s words. He said to the angel, “By what shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.” Because of his unbelief he was struck dumb. When the days of his service were over, he went back to his house.

After these days, the words of God spoken through the prophets in the Old Testament and through the angel Gabriel were fulfilled, and Elizabeth gave birth to a son. At his circumcision on the eighth day, Zachariah gave his son the name John, as Gabriel had instructed him. His mouth was opened instantly,

and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak, blessing God. Fear came on the people in the surrounding land and all who heard these things put them in their heart, saying, “What then will this little child be?...” Filled with the Holy Spirit, Zachariah prophesied, blessing the Lord for visiting His people. Concerning his son, John, he said, “You also, little child, shall be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge to His people by the forgiveness of their sins...”

John had a very hard job to do. He had to turn the hearts of God’s people back to the Lord. That meant that John himself had to be fully turned to the Lord. John loved the Lord with all of his heart and lived absolutely for Him. For this reason he was different. He lived in the wilderness. He wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather girdle about his loins. He ate locusts and wild honey for his food. He seemed like a wild man to some. But to those who listened to him, he was the voice of God crying in the wilderness, “Repent!” He was bold, frank and filled with God. Many, many people came out to hear him. Those who repented showed it to all by their baptism. Many were now ready to receive the soon-coming Savior!

### **APPLICATION:**

1. Before the Lord Jesus could come to save His people, He needed someone to prepare the way for Him. Once John prepared the people, Jesus could come. It is the same today—God desires that all men would be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). But He still needs some to prepare the way for Him so that He could come to them.

All of us have some around us who don’t know the Lord, or perhaps are not following the Lord. Maybe one of our parents, or our brother or sister who won’t come to children’s meeting, or maybe one of our cousins or other relatives. How about our best friend in school or in our neighborhood? The Lord desires that they would turn their hearts to Him. We should pray for them and tell them about the Lord Jesus.

2. John loved the Lord and lived for Him. He didn’t care that he was different—in his living, in his clothing, even in his eating. He even didn’t care that others would think he was a wild man, or crazy, or weird. We also should love the Lord and care only for Him. We should never feel ashamed of what we are as Christians and we should never be ashamed of the gospel.

3. We should never doubt God’s word. We must pray with a believing heart. Because of Zachariah’s unbelieving heart, he became dumb until eight days after the birth of his son.

4. We must respond to God’s call and not reason with Him. God’s way is higher than our way. Zachariah never thought God would use an old, barren couple for His purpose. All of us can be useful before God, as long as we are willing and obedient to Him.

Adapted from Bringing Children from Adam to Christ for God’s Economy, Vol. 4: God’s Calling in the New Testament, Lesson #1, and the Church in New York City Children’s Meeting lessons 11/8/81; 10/15/89; 09/25/94; 09/10/00; 9/10/06