

PANORAMA OF PROPHECY

A LIFE-CHANGING BIBLE STUDY!

THE KING'S AMBASSADOR

Matthew 3:1-12

THE STORY ...

Jesus said, "Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." Matthew 11:11. What do we know about this solitary man whom Jesus called the greatest of the prophets?

When John began preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, people came from miles around to hear this powerful, fearless, and humble messenger. In glaring contrast to the religious leaders of the day, his life was marked with holiness and simplicity. While the priests wore luxurious clothing, John wore a modest garment of camel hair with a leather belt. While they were feasting, John was fasting or eating locusts (carob pods) and wild honey. He refused to drink any wine or strong drink, that he might be filled with the Spirit of God (Luke 1:15). Rather than ornate synagogues, John chose the rivers and rocky valleys as his

cathedral for preaching. Soon people were asking, "Could this man be Elijah?"

John did dress like the Old Testament prophet, but he was not Elijah reincarnated. The angel Gabriel had explained to John's parents before his birth that he would go "in the spirit and power of Elijah ... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke 1:17.

The key to John's ministry was that he would have the same power of the Holy Spirit as did Elijah to cause a revival among God's people. His special work was to preach repentance for sin and prepare people for Jesus' first coming.

The Bible says there will be an entire army of Elijahs and John the Baptists in the last days to do a similar work in preparing the world for Jesus' second coming. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD." Malachi 4:5. (See also Joel 2:28-31.)

THE STUDY

Fill in the blanks after reading each Bible text.

1. What was one secret of John's Spirit-filled life?

Luke 3:16 John answered, ... "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am _____ to loose."

John 3:30 He must increase, but I must _____.

NOTE: The Spirit-filled life of John the Baptist was marked by unusual humility. There was a direct connection between John's powerful ministry and the complete surrender he had made to the Lord. It was John's highest joy to point others to Jesus rather than to himself. All he did was designed to bring glory to God's name.

2. Did John the Baptist read the Scriptures?

John 1:23 He said: "I am 'the _____ of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD," as the _____ Isaiah said."

NOTE: Yes! John quoted from the Old Testament as evidence that he had a solid grasp of the Scriptures. The Bible also tells us that John taught his disciples to fast and to pray often (Matthew 9:14). This is another testimony of his deep love for the Lord. In the same way, through our personal devotions and Bible study, we can come to know and love God and to receive of His Spirit.

3. Was John the Baptist willing to witness for Jesus?

John 1:29 The next day _____ saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "_____! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

NOTE: By nature, John was a solitary soul (Luke 1:80). Yet he was willing to risk ridicule and even to lay his life on the line in order to point people to Jesus as Savior of the world. In the same way, those who truly love the Lord today will be willing to set aside fear and convenience to witness for Jesus.

4. Was the straight preaching of John popular among the political and religious leaders?

Luke 7:30 The Pharisees and lawyers _____ the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

Luke 3:19, 20 But Herod the tetrarch, being _____ by him ... for all the evils which Herod had done, ... shut John up in _____.

NOTE: John boldly spoke out against the popular sins of the day that were indulged even by the religious leaders. God's last-day message of repentance and holiness will also be unpopular among most of the respected political and church leaders, but it will be biblical.

5. Does the Bible discourage the wearing of jewelry and fancy clothing?

1 Timothy 2:9 In like manner also, that the women [and, of course, men] adorn themselves in _____ apparel, ... not with braided hair or _____ or pearls or costly clothing.

1 Peter 3:3, 4 Do _____ let your adornment be merely _____—arranging the hair, _____ gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

Isaiah 3:18-21 In that day the Lord will take away the finery: the jingling _____ ... the pendants, the _____, and the veils; the headdresses, the leg ornaments, and the headbands; the perfume boxes, the _____, and the _____; nose jewels.

NOTE: Yes! John the Baptist wore simple, modest clothing—a good pattern for Christians to follow. The popular, sexually suggestive fads and fashions of today encourage a great deal of temptation and debt. God does not intend for us to dress in burlap; however, unduly expensive, flamboyant, or ostentatious clothing should not be part of a Christian's wardrobe. Although the wearing of jewelry is widely accepted in the world, it has a negative image in the Scriptures. You may not recognize all of the items mentioned in Isaiah 3:18-23, but people in other parts of the world do. Many of these pagan ornaments are now appearing in Western culture, as well.

6. Was there a connection between John's Spirit-filled life and his simple diet?

Luke 1:15 For he ... shall drink neither _____ nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the _____.

NOTE: Christians should completely abstain from all fermented beverages in order to keep their minds clear and to hear God's Spirit (Proverbs 23:31, 32; Habakkuk 2:15; 1 Peter 5:8).

7. Why is God concerned about what we eat and drink?

Judges 13:7 Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat _____, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

1 Corinthians 6:19 Do you not know that your _____ is the _____ of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?

NOTE: There is a direct connection between what we eat or drink and our mental clarity, ability to resist temptation, and capacity to distinguish between right and wrong. Everything a Christian does—including what he eats and drinks—should be done to God's glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).

8. What does the Bible say about worldly behavior?

James 4:4 Whoever therefore wants to be a _____ of the world makes himself an _____ of God.

2 Corinthians 6:17 Come out from among them and be _____, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.

1 John 2:15 If anyone loves the _____, the love of the Father is _____ in him.

Romans 12:2 *Do not be conformed to this _____, but be transformed by the _____ of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

NOTE: The Lord has called His people today to live exemplary lives as they help others prepare for Jesus' second coming.

9. What should a Christian choose to think about?

Philippians 4:8 *Whatever things are _____, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are _____, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any _____ and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.*

Psalms 101:3 *I will set _____ wicked before my _____.*

NOTE: John the Baptist commanded the people to abstain from all violence (Luke 3:14). For us, this would include watching violence as a form of entertainment. Jesus taught that sins of sex and violence originate in the thoughts and attitudes (Matthew 5:22, 28). Therefore, a Christian should avoid any TV programs, videos, or reading material that would encourage impure thoughts.

10. What type of music will a true Christian enjoy?

Psalms 40:3 *He has put a _____ in my mouth—praise to our God.*

1 Samuel 16:23 *And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a _____ and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become _____ and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.*

NOTE: It is obvious that a great majority of the popular music in the world does not help us spiritually. Instead, it destroys our desire for heavenly things and often strengthens the lower nature. However, music can be a tremendous power for good. When King Saul was tormented by an evil spirit, the soothing music from David's harp refreshed him and drove away the evil influence.

11. Is dancing good recreation for a Christian?

1 John 2:6 *He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to _____ just as He _____.*

Titus 2:12 *Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and _____ lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and _____ in the present age.*

NOTE: Most of the popular contemporary dancing is associated with worldly music and has a very strong sexual emphasis. In almost any situation we should ask, "What would Jesus do?" I think we all agree that our Savior would not abandon His reason to swing body and limb to the beat of some syncopated rhythm.

12. Will a Christian play the lottery or gamble?

1 Timothy 6:10 *For the _____ of _____ is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many _____.*

2 Thessalonians 3:10 *We commanded you this: If anyone will not _____, neither shall he eat.*

Proverbs 28:20 *But he who _____ to be _____ will not go unpunished.*

NOTE: Gambling can be just as addictive as many drugs. Some have squandered entire family savings at casinos or on state lottery tickets. Most "get rich quick" schemes are associated with undue risk, unfair prices, and questionable ethics.

13. What should be the aim of God's people today?

1 John 3:22 *We _____ His commandments and do those things that are _____ in His sight.*

Ecclesiastes 12:13 *Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's _____.*

NOTE: A person cannot live any way he wishes and finally be saved in God's kingdom. This is one reason Jesus came to earth—to give us an example of holy living (1 Peter 2:21).

14. What makes it easy to obey God in the matters of lifestyle discussed in this lesson?

John 14:15 *If you _____ Me, keep My commandments.*

1 John 5:3 *For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His _____ are not _____.*

Psalms 40:8 *I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your _____ is within my _____.*

15. Why is the Christian life such a high calling?

1 Peter 2:9 *But you are a _____ generation, a royal priesthood, a _____ nation, His own special people, that you may _____ the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

NOTE: As ambassadors for Jesus, Christians do indeed have a high calling! John the Baptist helped prepare people for Jesus' first coming, and God has called His people today to live holy lives as they help others prepare for Jesus' second coming.

YOUR RESPONSE

Are you willing to be a unique "voice in the wilderness" and witness through a godly lifestyle to prepare others for Jesus' second coming?

ANSWER: _____

SUPPLEMENT

This section provides additional information for further study.

Ambassadors for Christ

When a person becomes a Christian, he or she is enlisted as an ambassador from a better kingdom. The Bible says, "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ." 2 Corinthians 5:20.

The dictionary defines an ambassador as "a diplomatic official of the highest rank appointed and accredited as representative in residence by one government or sovereign to another, usually for a limited length of time."

Ambassadors are just as important in the spiritual realm as they are in the political realm. Citizens of the kingdom of heaven are not like the citizens of this world. We have been sent into the world to demonstrate who Jesus is and what He is like. Through the Holy Spirit, we become His representatives—to reflect His image in everything from the way we talk and work to the way we eat and dress. In other words, when we become part of God's spiritual kingdom, we should be living demonstrations of the government we represent. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, the Scriptures say that "we all ... are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

We, the Church, are the hands and feet, the eyes and mouth, and yes, even the ears of Jesus in the world today. We are the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 5:29, 30; Colossians 1:18). Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus told us, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." John 20:21.

Every facet of our lives should be a reflection of the life and person of Jesus. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16.