



The DAILY JESUS NEWS #024
Jesus' 30 Years of Preparation for Ministry

John the Immerser Begins his Ministry
JN 1.6-9; LK 3.1-6 (Parallel Texts: MT 3.1-3; MK 1.2-4)

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JN 1.6-9. 6 A man sent from God appeared; his name was John. 7 This man came in order to witness—to testify concerning the Light, so that everyone might believe (in the Light) through his ministry.

8 John himself was not the Light; he came specifically to bear witness to the Light. 9 The true Light (Jesus), who continually shines upon all people—HE was soon to appear before the world as Messiah.

LK 3.1-6 (Parallel Texts: MT 3.1-3; M 1.2-3). 1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea, and Traconitis and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene—2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the voice of God came to John, son of Zechariah in the wilderness of Judea.

3 ^{MT}In those days, John the Immerser came. ^LHe went into all of the regions around the Jordan ^{MT}in the Desert of Judea, ^Lpreaching an immersion of repentance based on having received the forgiveness of sins, ^{MT}saying, "I command you to continue repenting, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near—permanently!"

4 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, ^Las it stands written in the book of the words of Isaiah:

"A voice crying out in the wilderness,
'You must all prepare the way for the Lord,
you must all make straight paths for his feet.

5 Every valley will be filled in,
every mountain and hill will be made low.
The crooked roads will become straight,
the rough ways smooth.

6 And all people will see God's salvation for themselves. (Isaiah 40.3-5)

And...

^MLook! I am sending my messenger just before you, who will prepare your way. (Mal. 3.1)

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus*.

CONTEXT DIGEST	
Location	The Jordan River, Near Aenon
Time	April, 29 AD--the Year Before Jesus Began His Ministry
Stage of Jesus' Life	Stage II: His 30 Years of Preparation for Ministry
Chapter 5	John the Immerser Prepares the People for Jesus' Ministry
Section #024	John the Immerser Begins his Ministry

Over 18 DJN Readings (#005-#023) we have traced the way Matthew and Luke narrated the preparation of Jesus' humanity through his family background, conception, birth, infancy, youth, and adulthood. Today we come to the first of three readings describing the final aspect of preparation for his ministry; the white-hot fervor of John the Immerser's preaching ministry. These three DJN readings (#024 to #026) give us a good overview of John's ministry, and the way it prepared the people for Jesus to begin his own work.

John was the first prophet to appear in Israel in 400 years. His ministry shook the nation to its foundations. He preached for approximately nine months before Jesus inaugurated his public Messianic ministry. John introduced Jesus to Israel as the Messiah, and immersed him. In addition, Jesus conducted the first 6 months of his own ministry simultaneously with John's preaching, and our Lord chose to locate his own outreach close by John. They cooperated seamlessly together.

John public ministry was brief--he only preached for about 15 months before he was thrown into jail by Herod Antipas--but he had a profound impact in that short time. The Book of Acts shows us that some 30 years after he was martyred, John still had disciples as far away as Ephesus (Acts 19.1-6). As a Nazarite, John's whole life was dedicated to God. He packed a lifetime's worth of effectiveness and eternal impact into just fifteen months of preaching. He was a very great man, according to Jesus. We will see in future readings that John's deep, intense humility was the basis of his greatness.

Today's reading highlights two important characteristics of John's ministry. First, the apostle John made the Immerser's role as a witness to the Messiah plain in his text (JN 1.6-9) John was "sent from God," he was not God in human flesh like Jesus. He was a witness whose goal was to lead others to faith in the Messiah--the true Light--not to faith in himself. So the apostle underscored Jesus' pre-eminence and John's subordination by stating emphatically: *"John himself was not the Light. He came specifically to bear witness to the Light."*

While it was John's desire only to point people to Jesus, and away from himself, his impact was so great that many people continued to emphasize his ministry, long after he had died. We noted an instance of this earlier in Acts 19. There were even people who began to believe and proclaim that John, not Jesus, was the Messiah.

The Apostle John wrote his gospel last among the four gospels--roughly 30 years after the others--around 90 AD. Apparently the "John the Baptist Cult" was still active at the end of the 1st century, for John went out of his way to clarify the role and relationship between Jesus and John the Immerser in a way the other three gospels do not do. It was necessary to do so in the circumstances. So, John was a prophetic witness concerning Jesus; he was not the Messiah.

Second, John was “the Immerser” (Baptist, or Baptizer). I have chosen to consistently translate the Greek word for “dip into, or immerse” that is often rendered “baptize” into its English meaning of “immerse” in the DJN text. This is because the Greek word simply means “immerse.” One can see that in every instance of immersion recorded in the New Testament, the person who received it actually went under the water, and then came out--bodily. In the same way, I refer to John as “the Immerser” rather than the typical “Baptist.”

In the history of the Church, the Greek word “immerse” began to be associated with later (2nd century) methods of carrying out the rite of “baptism,” including pouring, sprinkling, and immersing. “Baptism” became a new word describing the rite, rather than a verb meaning “immerse.”

Much confusion has resulted from the practice of transliterating the Greek verb that means immerse with a later word for a religious rite--“baptism.” The entire matter is quickly cleared up by translating the Greek word with its plain meaning, just as we translate all the other words from the original Greek text.

John’s practice of commanding immersion in water as an indication of repentance was a radical thing that shocked the religious community to the core. No prophet had ever required such a thing before. What did this mean?

New adult converts to Judaism were required to undergo circumcision as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant, and immersion in water. The Temple in Jerusalem had an immersion pool, where converts would go down steps into water and totally immerse themselves, then ascend another set of stairs on the other side of the tank. This signified the complete washing away of the old, pre-covenant life, and the beginning of a new life in covenant relationship with God. Immersion was a sign of conversion to Judaism, and faith in YHWH.

By requiring immersion of Jews, the Immerser was saying that they needed to start their spiritual lives all over again, just like a new convert. Their Jewish tradition, without faith in the coming Messiah, was mere paganism in God’s eyes. Therefore repentance--a complete change of their minds that led to change in behavior--had to be as all-encompassing as the repentance of a pagan convert to Judaism.

John’s insistence on immersion was therefore humiliating--a slap in the face to the Jewish nation. In addition, John was not a priest, though his father was, and he required immersion of ALL his fellow Jews. This had never been done before, much less by someone who was not associated with the Temple, and the High Priest. It was scandalous, and controversial.

The text tells us that immersion was preached by John as a sign of repentance because the Messiah was near--ready to take up his reign in the hearts of his people. The KING was near, therefore his reign--his Kingdom--was at the door. This meant that all people need to repent of their sinful ways, and prepare themselves to believe in and follow the Messiah and their LORD. Immersion was outward evidence of inner repentance and preparation to receive the Messiah.

John also preached the wonderful promise of God’s mercy and grace through the Messiah. Complete forgiveness of sin was given to those who repented. Immersion was testimony that the repentant believer in the coming Messiah had received forgiveness of their sins.

John’s fearless proclamation of immersion as a sign of repentance, faith in the Messiah, and forgiveness in his name prepared the people for Jesus to begin his ministry, just as Isaiah, Malachi, and Zechariah had prophesied. Especially Zechariah’s prophecy was rich in accurate details about John’s ministry.

APPLICATION:

The most prepared life in history (Jesus), was preceded and prepared by the most carefully prepared prophet in history. No other prophet in Scripture was predicted and promised like John the Immerser. So, Jesus' life and ministry was doubly prepared.

God has also planned and prepared good works for each one of us to do too--all included in the perfect preparation of Jesus Himself!

"For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do." Eph. 2.10 (NIV)

We have seen that prayer, the Scriptures, and fellowship were key tools God used in preparing the way for Jesus.

How are you using these three God-given tools in doing the good works that He has prepared for you to do each day?

What adjustments do you need to make in order to be more effective in serving Him?