

## John the Baptizer

Have you ever heard of John the baptizer? Most probably have, though typically folks refer to him as John the Baptist. However, John was not a “Baptist,” as we think of the term today, though he did baptize or immerse many people in the first century.

John was a powerful prophet and preacher. He was far from ordinary. His preaching demanded repentance (Matt. 3:2). What is repentance? It is the determination of an individual to turn away from sin; to repent is to will or to resolve to sin no more. It is a common misconception that repentance is sorrow for sin. 2 Corinthians 7:10 teaches otherwise – “For godly sorrow **produces** repentance leading to salvation...” Genuine sorrow over sin will produce repentance, but the sorrow itself is not repentance. Also, some mistakenly believe that repentance is the changed actions of a person. It is true that reformation of life grows out of repentance, but such is distinct from it. Repentance is in the heart or mind of an individual; reformation is the actual correction of one’s evil ways. When John the baptizer preached, the motivation factor for people to repent was that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (i.e., God’s kingdom, the church, was near to being established; cf. Matt 16:18, 19; Mark 9:1; Acts 2).

John preached that the people should turn from their sins and be immersed in water to be forgiven (Luke 3:3). The baptism that John administered was authorized by God (John 1:33), but it is no longer valid today (Acts 19:1). Today, there is only one baptism (Eph. 4:5), and that is the baptism commanded by Christ (Matt. 28:19, 20) which is to be done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It too is for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). John’s baptism looked forward to Christ (Matt. 3:11) and was designed to bring the Jews back to the old covenant. The baptism commanded by Christ looks backward to His death (Romans 6:3-6) and is designed to bring all to the new covenant. John’s baptism did not require faith in Christ, whereas the baptism Jesus commanded does require it (Mark 16:16).

John the baptizer had been written about centuries earlier by the prophet Isaiah – “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight’” (Matt. 3:3). The prophecy could relate to no one but John, for no other prophet ever made the wilderness his scene of preaching. It is clear that John, as God’s messenger (Mark 1:2) had a very specific work to do; that is, to pre-prepare the people for Jesus. John did exactly that.

Donald