

# **Yochanan**

# **Prophet of Fire**

**A Study of the Life and Ministry of John the Baptist**

# **PART I**

## **THE CONCEPTION & BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIZER**



## **THE FINAL WORD FROM YHWH**

Throughout the entire Old Testament period, God had sent prophet after prophet to Israel to proclaim His message. Mostly they were ignored, some were imprisoned, occasionally they were heeded but many of them were treated shamefully by a nation, chosen of God who had lost their way and gone astray. Finally, God sent His prophet Malachi and here is His final word to Israel before a suffocating silence from Heaven lasting 400 years began;

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

In the beginning, God delivered to His people Israel through His prophet Moses a pure, holy system of worship that became known over time as Judaism. It was based upon ten irrefutable commandments and 613 laws recorded in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. During the 400 silent years Judaism fragmented and fractured into cults, schisms and feuding sects. To name a few, there were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and zealots. Israel and Judaism descended into chaos and dysfunctional disarray.

At the beginning of the Old Testament, with the very first word, Moses opens the scriptural record of creation with a stunning promise of a Messiah sent from the Father's house who would bring salvation. In the very last word of the Old Testament, from the pen of the very last Prophet, Malachi comes a further promise of one who would call all of Israel to repentance over what they had done to the pure Judaism handed down to them by Moses directly from God and announce the arrival of the long-promised Messiah.

After 400 long, silent years God sent His Prophet Yochanan (John) to call the nation to repentance ahead of the arrival of the Messiah. The fulfillment of the promise of Genesis 1.1 was about to unfold. The Old Testament began with a promise and ends with one

## **PROPHECIES REGARDING YOCHANAN**

*“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John” (John 1:6).*

One only has to listen to the voice of the Master to know we should consider Yochanan as a Prophet of God;

*“And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet” (Matt 11.7-9)*

Luke also records for us the words of his father Zacharias, who being filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1.67) prophesied;

*"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest" (Luke 1:76).*

There are also Old Testament prophecies concerning Yochanan and his ministry. In fact, with the exception of Jesus, about Whom there were hundreds of Old Testament prophecies, there are more specific Old Testament prophecies about John than there are for any other New Testament character. Let us take a look at just three of these prophecies.

### **The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness**

The Prophet Isaiah predicted the arrival and ministry of Yachanan some 700 years before the Messiah;

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken'" (Isa 40.3-5)*

We know that this is a reference to Yochanan because of the confirming message of Matthew 3.1-3;

*"In those days John the Baptist came preaching . . . For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight'" (Matthew 3.1,3).*

When Yochanan was asked by the Pharisees what he said about himself, he answered;

*"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the LORD as said the Prophet Isaiah" (John 1.23).*

By declaring God's word to the Jews, John fulfilled what his own father also prophesied of him:

*"For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins" (Luke 1.76,77).*

### **The Messenger Announcing to Israel the Messiah's Arrival**

The Prophet Malachi, 430 years before the Messiah, foretold the ministry of Yochanan;

*"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before Me and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming says the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 3.1)*

Jesus Himself testified to the truth of the prophecy of Malachi;

*"Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John . . . For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You'" (Matthew 11.10).*

### **In the Spirit and Power of Elijah**

The Prophet Malachi gave a prophecy some 430 years before the Messiah which has been attributed to referring to Yochanan;

*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD (Malachi 4.5)*

How can it be true that John was Elijah, the great oral prophet of Israel who lived over 800 years before John did? The New Testament gives us a clear explanation for this. Jesus said;

*"For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:13,14).*

So, John was Elijah? Yes, but not literally – he was not Elijah reincarnated as some have asserted in error. Yochanan was not the person of Elijah, but ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah. Luke indeed wrote of Yochanan the following;

*"He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1.17)*

**Yochanan was from God, he was a  
Prophet of God sent to preach the  
message of God**

## THE CONCEPTION OF YOCHANAN

Yochanan's parents were Zechariah and Elisheva (Elizabeth), who was the cousin of Miriam (Mary) the mother of the Christ child. Yochanan was a gift from God for Zechariah and Elisheva and His prophet, filled with the Holy Spirit even within the womb. Zechariah and Elisheva had remained childless and grown elderly, which in rabbinic tradition meant they were over 60 years of age. The conception of Yochanan was another in the long line of miraculous conceptions in what had been barren wombs (Hannah, Sarah, Rebecca, etc).

### The announcement of the angel to Zechariah

Zechariah was a priest of the Course of Abijah and the honour of offering incense in the holy place that year had fallen to him, a once in a lifetime experience for a priest of Israel. There were 14 Courses (orders) of Priests originally set up by King David and the Course of Abijah was one of those fourteen.

#### A Point of Relevant History

In Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron, improperly burned the special incense before the Lord and were smitten dead. This incident led the Rabbi's of Zechariah's day to teach that if any priest burned the incense improperly they would also be struck dead. However, before death came the Angel of Death would appear, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. This teaching is not found in the Torah, but in the Talmud which is the history of the Jewish religion as well as their laws and beliefs. It is the basic tool for learning the ethics behind the customs of their religion

Zechariah's long awaited and longed for day had come and Luke 1.10-12 describes how it went down;

*"And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zechariah saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him"*

Naturally he was troubled and fearful (*Gk: Phobos meaning exceeding fear and terror*) for he had been taught that he was about to be put to death by this angel. The message of the angel, however, was not at all what Zechariah expected. He was

told that Elisheva would conceive, bear a son and call him by the name Yochanan (John). The angel further said the following to Zechariah about this son that was to be born;

- He shall be great in the sight of the Lord
- He shall be a Nazarite from birth
- He shall be controlled by the Holy Spirit
- He shall begin a repentance movement
- He will come in the spirit of Elijah
- He will respond to the call of God to make ready the way of the Messiah

## **THE INTRAUTERINE EXPERIENCE OF YOCHANAN WITH YESHUA**

The angel Gabriel had told Miriam that her cousin Elishiva was 6 months pregnant.

“And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1.36-37)

His point was that since God had produced a child in the barren woman, who was already well past menopause, He could produce a child in the womb of a virgin. Having heard this Miriam went to visit Elishiva, and she went with haste (Luke 1.38-39). This journey from Galilee to an unknown village in the Judean hill country was at least a three-day journey.

The angel who met Zechariah in the holy place as he went to offer incense had said that Yochanan would be controlled by the Spirit from the womb. When Miriam arrived at the home of Elishiva and greeted her, this is how the yet unborn Yochanan reacted;

“And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit”

(Luke 1.41)

Even before he was born the Holy Spirit had inspired Yochanan to begin his God-given work as the forerunner and herald of the King.

## **THE BIRTH OF YOCHANAN**

In due course of time Yochanan, the forerunner of the Messiah was born;

“When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy (Luke 1.57-58)

**The 400 years of silence from Heaven were over and the clock was now ticking on God's program of offering the Kingdom of Heaven to the people of Israel**