

## Introduction

When I was born, my parents gave me a name, William Joseph Murchison, Jr. I was named after my father. When I was four, my mother was in her kitchen in Houston, Texas, and the Lord spoke to her, telling her that I was going to be a pastor. When I was in my early twenties, the Lord spoke to me, and gave me a life verse: Ezra 7:10. Ezra set his heart on studying the law of the Lord, practicing it, and teaching His laws and statutes in Israel. Feeding the flock is one of the primary jobs of a pastor, so that verse lined up with what the Lord told my mother many years earlier. I did not know how to study, or how to teach, so I was not prepared or equipped to carry out that ministry. Furthermore, I did not have the maturity of character to be a pastor. I went through a desert experience, where God put me through some difficult things. During that time, He developed my character, and brought gifted men into my life to equip me for the calling on my life. I am grateful for the many men that poured into my life, training me in word ministry, leadership, small group leadership, evangelism, counseling, and other areas. They helped prepare me for the calling on my life. I am now in my fortieth year of pastoral ministry.

(Ezr 7:10) “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

In our text today, Zacharias’ wife, Elizabeth, gives birth, to a son. At his circumcision on the eighth day, they were going to name him after his father, but they did what Gabriel had instructed them, and named him John. Then, Zacharias, who has been mute for nine months, was filled with the Spirit, and began to speak again. He prophesied over the calling of John, telling him that he was to be the forerunner to the Messiah, and prepare the way for Him. Our text ends with John going out into the desert, where he would live until his appearance in Israel. It was his time of preparation for the calling on his life. We will look at John’s identity, His calling, and His preparation. Let’s read our text, Luke 1:57-80.

## Birth of John the Baptist

1. John’s identity
2. John’s calling
3. John’s preparation

(Lk 1:57–66) “Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. {58} Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her. {59} And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. {60} But his mother answered and said, “No indeed; but he shall be called John.” {61} And they said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.” {62} And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called. {63} And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, “His name is John.” And they were all astonished. {64} And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God. {65} Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. {66} All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, “What then will this child turn out to be?” For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.”

(Lk 1:67-79) “And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: {68} “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, {69} and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant— {70} as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old— {71}

salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; {72} to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, {73} the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, {74} to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, {75} in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. {76} “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; {77} to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, {78} because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, {79} to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

(Lk 1:80) “And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”

### 1. **John’s identity** (Lk 1:57-66)

The time came for Elizabeth to give birth. She was six months pregnant when Mary came and visited her, and Mary had stayed three months, so it was time for her to give birth. As Gabriel had prophesied, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her, and they were rejoicing with her. Elizabeth had been rejoicing because she and Zacharias had asked the Lord for a child, and God had heard their petition, and given them a child. I believe that it was not a current prayer that was answered; I believe that they had prayed that when they were younger, but the answer came in God’s timing, not their timing. When she had found out that she was pregnant, she had said, “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men.” They saw children as gifts and a blessing from God, and so they rejoiced at God mercy and favor on her life.

(Lk 1:57–58) “Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. {58} Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.”

(Lk 1:25) “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked *with favor* upon *me*, to take away my disgrace among men.”

On the eighth day, they went to circumcise their baby. When God made a covenant with Abraham, He told him to circumcise every male on the eighth day, and that this was the sign of the covenant. Any male that was not circumcised was cut off from his people for breaking the covenant. In keeping the Law, it was very important for Zacharias and Elizabeth to circumcise their son.

(Lk 1:59a) “And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child...”

(Ge 17:10–14) “This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. {11} And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. {12} And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations... {14} But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

It was common for a new name to be given to someone when they entered into a covenant with God. Abram's name was changed to Abraham. Sarai's name was changed to Sarah (Ge 17:15–16).

(Ge 17:3–5) “Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, {4} “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations. {5} “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.”

For newborn sons, it was common to wait until the day that they were circumcised to give them a name. We find that when Jesus was born, His name was given to Him on the eighth day, the day He was going to be circumcised.

(Lk 2:21) “And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.”

So, on this day, when John was being circumcised, they were going to name him Zacharias, after his father. I do not believe that “they” refers to Zacharias and Elizabeth. I believe that “they” refers to the neighbors, relatives, and others that were attending the circumcision. Elizabeth answered them and said, “No indeed; but he shall be called John.” They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.” And they made signs to Zacharias, as what he wanted him called, and he asked for a tablet, and then wrote on it, “His name is John.” We see clearly that both Elizabeth and John were in agreement about naming him John, as Gabriel had instructed them to do. These other people were all astonished that they had given him the name, John.

(Lk 1:59-63) “And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. {60} But his mother answered and said, “No indeed; but he shall be called John.” {61} And they said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.” {62} And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called. {63} And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, “His name is John.” And they were all astonished.”

The name John (Johanan) comes from two Hebrew words, Jehovah (Strong's H3068, Lord) and chanan (Strong's H2603, mercy, favor, grace). The compound word means God's favor, mercy, or grace. God took away Sarah's disgrace and gave her grace and favor.

As soon as Zacharias wrote on the tablet that his name is John, his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed. The discipline for doubting Gabriel was ended, and his mouth was opened. The first thing that Zacharias did was to begin speaking in praise of God. God had given them a son, something that they had prayed and he was full of praise of God.

(Lk 1:64) “And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God.”

When those that lived around them saw and/or heard what had happened, fear came on them. The birth of John by Elizabeth, an elderly woman, and the unmuting of Zacharias was big news, and it was talked about in all the hill country of Judea. Everyone who heard of it wondered about the life and future of John. They said, “What then will this child turn out to be? For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.”

(Lk 1:65-66) “Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. {66} All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, “What then will this child turn out to be?” For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.”

## 2. **John’s calling** (Lk 1:67-79)

After John was named, Zacharias opened his mouth and began to praise God, He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied. What did he prophesy? He prophesied about the Messiah and the role that John would play, his calling as the forerunner of Christ.

(Lk 1:67) “And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

John’s tongue was loosed and he began praising God, and was filled with the Holy Spirit. We know from Ephesians 5:18-19 that one of the ways to be filled with the Holy Spirit is to speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing and making melody with our hearts to the Lord. As Zacharias praised God, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. We are temples of the Holy Spirit and if we want our temples to be full of the Holy Spirit, we need to fill our temples with the praises of God.

(Eph 5:18–19) “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, {19} speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;”

When Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, he prophesied. That is a very common occurrence when people are filled with the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2, after the Holy Spirit had been poured out at Pentecost, Peter was preaching and he quoted Joel 2:28, saying that in the last days God was going to pour forth His Spirit on all mankind, and their sons and daughters would prophesy. Prophecy is a common manifestation when people are filled with the Holy Spirit.

(Ac 2:17–18) “‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; {18} even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy.’”

When the Apostle John was on the Island of Patmos, he “was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” and he had visions and revelations. The Lord told him to “write in a book what you see.” We have the prophetic book of Revelations that came about when John was in the Spirit.

(Re 1:10–11) “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet, {11} saying, “Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

Another example is in Acts 19 when Paul went from Corinth to Ephesus. He found some disciples, and he asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit. They answered, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” So, Paul laid hands upon them and the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.

(Ac 19:6) “And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying.”

Paul wrote that we are to pursue love and to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially prophecy. If we want to see more prophetic words released, we can fill ourselves with scripture, and spend time worshiping the Lord, filling our temple with the praises of God. In that atmosphere of praise, the Holy Spirit often releases prophetic words.

(1 Co 14:1) “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.”

Zacharias has two prophecies. The first prophecy is about Jesus, and the second prophecy is about the calling of his son, John.

#### **a. Zacharias’ prophecy about Jesus**

Zacharias began by blessing the Lord God of Israel. He blessed God for visiting them and accomplishing His redemption for His people. The redemption had not taken place yet; that would happen at the cross, where Jesus redeemed us with His precious blood. Zacharias sees in the Spirit that the redemption of God’s people is in progress. The forerunner of the Messiah has been born; the virgin Mary is three months pregnant with the Messiah, and he praises God for accomplishing the redemption of His people.

(Lk 1:68) “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,

(1 Pe 1:18–19) “knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, {19} but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.”

Next, Zacharias prophesies about raising up a horn of salvation for them in the house of David, His servant. The Messiah was going to come through the lineage of David because the prophets had prophesied that the throne of David would be everlasting.

(Lk 1:69-70) “and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant— {70} as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—”

The prophet, Nathan, had prophesied to David that God was going to set up one of his descendants and establish his kingdom. His throne would be established forever.

(1 Ch 17:11–15) “When your days are fulfilled that you must go *to be* with your fathers, that I will set up *one of* your descendants after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. {12} He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. {13} I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. {14} But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.”” {15} According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.”

In Psalm 89, Ethan prophesied about the seed of David being established, and that his throne would be to all generations. Samuel had prophesied about it (2 Sam 7:13). Isaiah had prophesied

about it (Is 9:7). Zacharias' prophecy lined up with all the other prophetic words that had been given, that salvation for the Jews was going to come from the house of David.

(Ps 89:3–4) “I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to David My servant, {4} I will establish your seed forever and build up your throne to all generations.” Selah.

(Is 9:7) “There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.”

Zacharias prophesied that this horn of salvation would save them from their enemies and from the hand of all who hate them. He would show mercy to their fathers, and remember His holy covenant, the one that He had sworn to Abraham. He prophesied that they would be rescued from the hand of their enemies so that they could serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all their days. This was a joyful expectation for the Jews, who had not been free to worship freely under some of the Roman rulers.

(Lk 1:71-75) “salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; {72} to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, {73} the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, {74} to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, {75} in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

All of this prophecy is true, but the timetable of the prophecy was not understood by the Jews. When they considered whether Jesus was the Messiah, He was not rescuing them from the Roman rule and from their “enemies.” Jesus is going to rescue them from their enemies, but it was not on His first visit. Jesus came to save us and redeem us from our sins. When He returns, He will be establishing His kingdom on earth, and in that day He will save them from all their enemies.

### **b. Zacharias' prophecy about John**

Zacharias' second prophecy is about his newborn son, John. He said, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways.” Zacharias is prophesying by the unction of the Holy Spirit, but it is also the same thing that the angel, Gabriel, had spoken to him nine months earlier. Gabriel said that John would turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God and would go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

(Lk 1:76) “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways;”

(Lk 1:16–17) “And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. {17} It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Zacharias' prophecy also lined up with Malachi's prophecies, that God was going to send a messenger to clear the way. God was going to send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the

great and terrible day of the Lord to restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. All of these prophecies lined up, and John was that prophet.

(Mal 3:1) “Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts.”

(Mal 4:5–6) “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. {6} He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

When we are evaluating prophetic words, are taught to pass judgment on them. In judging prophetic words, we need to examine them closely to see if they line up with God’s word. If a prophetic word does not line up with God’s word, we are to toss it out. We are taught to hold fast to that which is good, and obviously disregard those that are not from God.

(1 Co 14:29) “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.”

(1 Th 5:19–22) “Do not quench the Spirit; {20} do not despise prophetic utterances. {21} But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; {22} abstain from every form of evil.”

During Jesus’ ministry, He confirmed that John the Baptist was indeed the prophet that had come in the power and spirit of Elijah.

(Mt 11:14) “And if you are willing to accept *it*, John himself is Elijah who was to come.”

(Mt 17:10–13) “And His disciples asked Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” {11} And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; {12} but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” {13} Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.”

Zacharias continued, prophesying that John would give His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. That is exactly what John did; he preached a baptism of repentance. In Luke 3, John came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He was fulfilling the ministry calling that God had given him to do.

(Lk 1:77) “to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins,”

(Lk 3:3–6) “And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; {4} as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight. {5} ‘Every ravine will be filled, And every mountain and hill will be brought low; The crooked will become straight, And the rough roads smooth; {6} And all flesh will see the salvation of God.”

John preached the forgiveness of sins because of the tender mercy of our God. God did not have to forgive us of our sins. We have forgiveness only because of the tender mercy of God. In Titus

3, Paul wrote that “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” We have forgiveness and salvation because of God’s love and mercy, not by anything that we have done.

(Lk 1:78) “because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,”

(Tt 3:5–6) “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, {6} whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,”

Sometimes we think that preaching repentance is a hard message, but John preached repentance. It may have seemed hard to Herod, who had him imprisoned for telling him that he should not have his brother’s wife, but his message of repentance was given so that people could receive the tender mercy of God and be saved. It is really a message of hope; it is good news.

The Sunrise from on high refers to the Messiah, who was going to come and shine light upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Jesus is the Light. When John came, he told people that he was not the Light, but was there to testify of the Light. Jesus was the Light that came into the world to guide our feet into the way of peace.

(Lk 1:79) “to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

(Jn 1:6–9) “There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. {7} He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. {8} He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light. {9} There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.”

### 3. **John’s preparation** (Lk 1:80)

Luke has given us the birth and circumcision of John, where he was given the name, John, the name given by Gabriel. After John was named, Zacharias’ tongue was loosened, and he began praising God. He was filled with the Spirit and began prophesying. After prophesying about the Messiah, he prophesied about the calling on John’s life. He was going to be the prophet of the Most High, who was going before the Lord to prepare His way.

We have one sentence that takes us from the birth and circumcision until the day of his public appearance to Israel. A lot happens to John in that one verse, so I want to unwrap it for us. “The child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.” These are the years of preparation.

(Lk 1:80) “And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”

When a person is called as a deacon, elder, prophet, teacher, pastor, or evangelist, or apostle, he or she is not necessarily ready for ministry. In the introduction, I mentioned that when the Lord spoke to me that I was going to be a teacher, and I would study the word, apply it to my life, and teach it; I was not ready. I did not have the maturity of character, and I did not have the ministry



skills and knowledge necessary. God put me through much training, and much of this was during a wilderness or desert time in my life.

In chapter three, Luke tells us about the beginning of John's public appearance to Israel. He tells of who was the governor or tetrarch in the various regions, and who was Caesar at the time. He tells us that in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John. Where was John when the word of the Lord came to him? He was in the wilderness. He came out of the wilderness into the district around the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. We find that one of the things that happens in the wilderness is the development of our relationship with God.

(Lk 3:1–3) “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, {2} in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. {3} And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;”

Consider Moses for a minute. He was called to lead the nation of Israel, but he was not ready until he had spent forty years in the wilderness pasturing the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law. While he was in the wilderness, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush, yet the bush was not consumed.

(Ex 3:1–2) “Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. {2} The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.”

When the Lord saw that Moses had turned aside to look, God called to him from the mist of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” After Moses responded, God told him to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. Then God introduced Himself to Moses, saying, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Before we can begin ministering for the Lord, we have to know God, and we have to get to know Him well. This often happens in a wilderness time or season in our lives.

(Ex 3:4–6) “When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” {5} Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” {6} He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.”

Consider the Apostle Paul. After the Lord saved him on the road to Damascus, he went off to Arabia, and then back to Damascus. It was about fourteen years before Barnabas searched him out and brought him to Antioch to serve as a pastor under him. I have been to Arabia, and it is literally a desert and wilderness. While Paul was in the wilderness, God gave him revelations about the gospel, the Lord's Supper, and many other things, and prepared him for the ministry that he had been called to do.

(Ga 1:15–18) “But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased {16} to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, {17} nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. {18} Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.”

Consider Jesus, after He was baptized by John, and declared the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. He did not immediately launch His public ministry; He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. There was further preparation for Him before He began His ministry. Jesus was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him. The Greek word for wild beasts is *therion* (Strong’s G2342), and it is the same word used in Revelations for the beasts. These are demonic spirits, and Jesus was involved in spiritual warfare. We often learn to fight spiritual battles in the desert.

(Mk 1:12–13) “Immediately the Spirit impelled Him *to go* out into the wilderness. {13} And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.”

In Luke’s account, we find that Jesus was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness, being tempted by the devil. It is in the wilderness that we often learn how to walk and be led around by the Spirit. Luke also records that Jesus did not eat during those forty days; He was fasting. Our wilderness times are often accompanied by fasting and prayer.

(Lk 4:1–2) “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness {2} for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry.”

In Luke 5, we see that Jesus would often slip away to the wilderness and pray. The wilderness had less distractions and was an ideal place for Jesus to get away to pray. Jesus said that He only did what He saw the Father doing, and He spent time with the Father in the wilderness. He was getting daily instructions about what He would be doing, teaching, and ministering.

(Lk 5:16) “But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray.”

John lived in the deserts or wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. I believed he was becoming strong in spirit. He was getting to know God. He was learning to hear from the Lord, be led by the Spirit, to engage in spiritual warfare, and to deal with temptations. I believe that it was in the wilderness that John received specific instructions about his ministry. He learned where he was to go and minister, what he was to preach, and many other lessons.

(Lk 1:80) “And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”

## Conclusion and Applications

At John’s birth and circumcision, he was given his name, his identity. When a person is born into the kingdom of God, God circumcises the heart and puts His Spirit in him. He is a new creature, and old things pass away. He has a new identity in Christ; he is a son of God.

John's father prophesied over John, and told him the ministry that he was going to have. John was the forerunner of Christ, to prepare the way of the Lord. He was a prophet and was coming in the spirit of Elijah. He would turn people away from their sins, and prepare the way of the Lord.

God has fashioned each one of us inside our mother's womb. He knows the days ordained for us before there was yet one (Ps 139:13-16). We are His workmanship and He has created good works for each of us to walk in (Eph 2:10). He has given us a unique spiritual gift that we are to use to serve Him and the body of Christ (1 Pe 4:10). Each one of us is a different member of the body of Christ, and God has placed us just as He desired (1 Co 12:12-18). We are to use our gifts to build up the body of Christ. We need to know the ministry that God has called us to do.

God may speak to us out of His word. He may send an angel into our life. He may speak through our parents. He may speak prophetically through others. He may speak through your pastor, or someone else. God wants us to know our ministry, so that we can take heed to the ministry and fulfill it (Col 4:17). If you are not sure of what God has called you to do, I encourage you to ask the Lord to reveal it to you. I encourage you to speak with one of your pastors and ask them to help you identify your calling.

John was given a name, and his ministry, but he went out into the wilderness until the time for his public appearance. There is a season of preparation for everyone. You may be in a wilderness time now, and that is okay. I encourage you to use the time to press into the Lord. Spend time with the Father. Spend time worshiping God and being filled with the Spirit. Journal and learn to hear God's voice. Study God's word and strengthen the spiritual foundations in your life. Use the time to grow, mature, and get equipped for the ministry that God has called you to do.

### **Closing Prayer**

Father God, thank You for this passage about John's birth, circumcision, ministry, and preparation in the wilderness. Your desire is for each of us to know our identity in Christ. You want us to be secure in Your love. You want us to know the rights and privileges that we have in Christ. Help us to know our identity. You have a plan for each one of us. I ask You to reveal those plans and/or to confirm those plans to each of us. Help us to do our part in preparing for the work You have called us to do. I pray that we will persevere through the desert times in our lives and press in to know You more. Help us to grow strong in Spirit during those times. Father, help each one of us take heed to the ministry we have received from you and to fulfill it. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Why is the name of a person significant?
- What are some verses that speak to our identity in Christ?
- Do you know your gift and your place in the body of Christ?
- Have you been equipped to use your gift to serve the body? If not, what training is needed?
- Describe a period of time when you were in the wilderness. What was God teaching you? How has this time impacted your life? What advice can you give for those going through a wilderness time in their life?
- John became strong in spirit. What are some things that help us grow strong in spirit?

**Birth of John the Baptist (Lk 1:57-80)**

**Introduction (Ezr 7:10, Lk 1:57–80)**

1. **John's identity** (Lk 1:57-66, Lk 1:25, Ge 17:10–14, 17:3-5, Lk 2:21)
2. **John's calling** (Lk 1:67-79, Eph 5:18–19, Ac 2:17–18, Re 1:10-11, Ac 19:6, 1 Co 14:1)
  - a. Zacharias' prophecy about Jesus (Lk 1:68-75, 1 Pe 1:18–19, 1 Ch 17:11-15, 2 Sa 7:13, Is 9:7, Ps 89:3-4)
  - b. Zacharias' prophecy about John (Lk 1:76-79, 1:16-17, Mal 3:1, 4:5-6, 1 Co 14:29, 1 Th 5:19-22, Mt 11:14, 17:10-13, Lk 3:3-6, Tt 3:5–6, Jn 1:6-9)
3. **John's preparation** (Lk 1:80, 3:1–3, Ex 3:1-6, Ga 1:15-18, Mk 1:12–13, Lk 4:1-2, 5:16)

**Conclusion and Applications**

1. My identity in Christ (2 Co 5:17):
2. My calling and ministry (Ps 139:13-16, Eph 2:10, 1 Pe 4:10, 1 Co 12:12-18, Col 4:17)
3. My preparation (wilderness):