

**Paper 135 — John the Baptist**

© 2014, 2020, 2021 Matthew Block

Most endnotes and Urantia Book cross-references have been deleted to enhance readability.

**Sources for Paper 135, in the order in which they appear**

- (1) “Nazarite,” by S.C., in Dr. William **Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible**, *Volume 3, Marriage to Regem*, Revised and Edited by Professor H. B. Hackett, D.D. et al. (Boston: Houghlin, Mifflin and Co., 1870)
- (2) Wm. Arnold Stevens and Ernest Dewitt Burton, ***A Harmony of the Gospels for Historical Study: An Analytical Synopsis of the Four Gospels*** (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1904, 1932)
- (3) “Nazirite (AV Nazarite),” by John Taylor, in ***Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible***, edited by James Hastings, D.D. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909)
- (4) George Adam Smith, D.D., LL.D., Litt.D., ***Atlas of the Historical Geography of the Holy Land*** (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915)
- (5) “En-ge-di,” by R. A. S. Macalister, in ***Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible***, edited by James Hastings, D.D. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909)
- (6) Robert **Norwood**, *The Man Who Dared to Be God: A Story of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929)
- (7) “Sheep,” by E. W. G. Masterman, in ***Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible***, edited by James Hastings, D.D. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909)
- (8) P. Whitwell **Wilson**, *The Christ We Forget: A Life of Our Lord for Men of To-day* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1917)
- (9) Charles **Fiske** and Burton Scott **Easton**, *The Real Jesus: What He Taught: What He Did: Who He Was* (New York and London, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1929)

- (10) David Smith, M.A., D.D., *The Days of His Flesh: The Earthly Life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, Eighth Edition, Revised (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910)

*Note:* This source is coded **Smith1**.

- (11) David Smith, M.A., D.D., *Our Lord's Earthly Life* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1925)

*Note:* This source is coded **Smith2**.

- (12) Rev. Alfred **Edersheim**, M.A.Oxon, D.D., Ph.D., *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Volume One) (New York: Longman, Green, & Co., Eighth Edition, Revised, 1899)

- (13) J. Middleton **Murry**, *Jesus—Man of Genius* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1926)

## Key

- (a) **Green** indicates where a source author first appears, or where he/she reappears.
- (b) **Yellow** highlights most parallelisms.
- (c) **Tan** highlights parallelisms not occurring on the same row, or parallelisms separated by yellowed parallelisms.
- (d) An underlined word or words indicates where the source and the UB writer pointedly differ from each other.
- (e) **Blue** indicates original (or “revealed”) information, or UB-specific terminology and concepts. (What to highlight in this regard is debatable. The highlights are tentative.)

Work-in-progress Version 7 Jan. 2014  
 © 2014, 2020, 2021 Matthew Block  
*Full paper 27 July 2021*

## PAPER 135 — JOHN THE BAPTIST

[John was born in the City of Judah, March 25, 7 B.C. (122:2.7).]

135:0.1 John the Baptist was born March 25, 7 B.C.,

[It was late in the month of June, 8 B.C., about three months after the marriage of Joseph and Mary, that Gabriel appeared to Elizabeth at noontide one day ...

“... I, Gabriel, have come to announce that you will shortly bear a son who shall be the forerunner of this divine teacher ...” (122:2.2).]

in accordance with the promise that Gabriel made to Elizabeth in June of the previous year.

[For five months, however, Elizabeth withheld her secret even from her husband.

For five months Elizabeth kept secret Gabriel’s visitation;

Upon her disclosure of the story of Gabriel’s visit, Zacharias was very skeptical and for weeks doubted the entire experience ...

and when she told her husband, Zacharias, he was greatly troubled

It was not until about six weeks before John’s birth that Zacharias, as the result of an impressive dream, became fully convinced that Elizabeth was to become the mother of a son of destiny, one who was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah (122:2.5).]

and fully believed her narrative only after he had an unusual dream about six weeks before the birth of John.

Excepting the visit of Gabriel to Elizabeth and the dream of Zacharias, there was nothing unusual or supernatural connected with the birth of John the Baptist.<sup>1</sup>

[ ... and when on the eighth day they presented the child for circumcision, they formally christened him John, as they had been directed aforetime (122:2.7).]

135:0.2 On the eighth day John was circumcised according to the Jewish custom.

He grew up as an ordinary child, day by day and year by year,

[ ... the City of Judah, four miles west of Jerusalem ... (122:2.6).]

in the small village known in those days as the City of Judah, about four miles west of Jerusalem.

[Before Jesus was six years of age, in the early summer of 1 B.C., Zacharias and Elizabeth and their son John came to visit the Nazareth family (123:3.4).]

[*Contrast:* [The elementary school] was attached to the Synagogue; and, since every village had its Synagogue, every village had also its school (Smith 20).]

[Luke 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abijah:

and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth (§4).]

[*Note:* Edersheim states that each of the twenty-four “courses” of the priesthood, of which Zacharias’ course of Abia (Abijah) was one, ministered twice a year in the Temple; see E1 135.]

135:0.3 The most eventful occurrence in John’s early childhood was

the visit, in company with his parents, to Jesus and the Nazareth family.

This visit occurred in the month of June, 1 B.C., when he was a little over six years of age.

135:0.4 After their return from Nazareth John’s parents began the systematic education of the lad.

There was no synagogue school in this little village;

however, as he was a priest,

Zacharias was fairly well educated, and Elizabeth was far better educated than the average Judean woman;<sup>2</sup> she was also of the priesthood,

being a descendant of the “daughters of Aaron.”

Since John was an only child, they spent a great deal of time on his mental and spiritual training.

Zacharias had only short periods of service at the temple in Jerusalem

so that he devoted much of his time to teaching his son.

135:0.5 Zacharias and Elizabeth had a small farm on which they raised sheep. They hardly made a living on this land,

[?]

but Zacharias received a regular allowance from the temple funds dedicated to the priesthood.

## 1. JOHN BECOMES A NAZARITE

NAZ'ARITE, more properly NAZ'IRITE ...  
(*Smith's DB* 2073)

[*Note:* In 124:5.4 Jesus is said to have graduated from school in his thirteenth year. Various source authors say that boys continued till the age of 15, after which they could go to an Academy.]

135:1.1 John had no school from which to graduate at the age of fourteen,

but his parents had selected this as the appropriate year for him to

I. ... It has been conjectured that the Nazarite vow was at first taken with formality, and that it was accompanied by an offering similar to that prescribed at its renewal in the case of pollution (*SDB* 2074).

take the formal Nazarite vow.

Accordingly, Zacharias and Elizabeth took their son to

[PLATE 28 (G2) (*AHGHL*)]

Engedi, down by the Dead Sea.

[See endnote 4.]

This was the southern headquarters of the Nazarite brotherhood, and there the lad was duly and solemnly inducted into this order for life.

The Nazarite, during the term of his consecration, was bound to abstain from wine, grapes, ... and from every kind of intoxicating drink. He was forbidden to cut the hair of his head, or to approach any dead body, even that of his nearest relation. When the period of his vow was fulfilled,

After these ceremonies and the making of the vows to abstain from all intoxicating drinks, to let the hair grow, and to refrain from touching the dead,

he was brought to the door of the Tabernacle,

and was required to offer a he-lamb for a burnt-offering, a ewe lamb for a sin-offering, and a ram for a peace-offering, with the usual accompaniment of peace-offerings ... (SDB 2073).

II. Of the Nazarites for life three are mentioned in the Scriptures: Samson, Samuel, and St. John the Baptist (SDB 2074).

III. ... And Maimonides ... speaks of the dignity of the Nazarite, in regard to his sanctity,

as being equal to that of the high-priest (SDB 2074).

There is a passage in [Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.* ii. 23], which ... seems to show that Nazarites

were permitted even to enter into the Holy of Holies (SDB 2075).

the family proceeded to Jerusalem,

where, before the temple,

John completed the making of the offerings

which were required of those taking Nazarite vows.

135:1.2 John took the same life vows that had been administered to his illustrious predecessors, Samson and the prophet Samuel.

A life Nazarite was looked upon as a sanctified and holy personality.<sup>3</sup>

The Jews regarded a Nazarite with almost the respect and veneration accorded the high priest,

and this was not strange since

Nazarites of lifelong consecration

were the only persons, except high priests,

who were ever permitted to enter the holy of holies in the temple.

135:1.3 John returned home from Jerusalem to tend his father's sheep

[Luke 1:80 And the child **grew**, and waxed **strong** in spirit, and was in the desert hills till the day of his shewing unto Israel (§8).]

and **grew** up to be a **strong** man with a noble character.

135:1.4 When sixteen years old, John, as a result of reading about Elijah, became greatly impressed with the prophet of Mount Carmel and decided to adopt his style of dress.

[Mark 1:6 And John was clothed with camel's hair, and *had* a leathern girdle about his loins, and did eat locusts and wild honey (§18).]

From that day on John always wore a hairy garment with a leather girdle.

At sixteen he was more than six feet tall and almost full grown.

VII. ... But the Nazarite for life, on the other hand, must have been, **with his flowing hair** and persistent refusal of strong drink, a marked man (*SDB* 2076).

**With his flowing hair** and peculiar mode of dress he was indeed a picturesque youth.

And his parents expected great things of this their only son, a child of promise and a Nazarite for life.

## 2. THE DEATH OF ZACHARIAS

135:2.1 After an illness of several months Zacharias died in July, A.D. 12, when John was just past eighteen years of age. This was a time of great embarrassment to John since the Nazarite vow forbade contact with the dead, **even in one's own family**.

[See 135:1.1, above.]

NAZIRITE (AV Nazarite). (*Hastings' DB* 647)

In case of accidental defilement, the Nazirite had to undergo seven days' purification, cut off his hair on the seventh day and have it buried ... , on the eighth day bring two turtle-doves or two young pigeons, ... and thus begin the course of his vow afresh ... In the second Temple there was a chamber in the S.E. corner of the women's court,

where the Nazirites boiled their peace-offerings, cut off their hair and cast it into the caldron (*HDB* 648).

[In September, Elizabeth and John came to visit the Nazareth family.

John, having lost his father, intended to return to the Judean hills to engage in agriculture and sheep raising unless Jesus advised him to remain in Nazareth to take up carpentry or some other line of work (127:3.11).]

[John was tremendously impressed by what he saw at Nazareth

that he should return home and labor for the support of his mother.

Although John had endeavored to comply with the restrictions of his vow regarding contamination by the dead, he doubted that he had been wholly obedient to the requirements of the Nazarite order; therefore, after his father's burial he went to Jerusalem,

where, in the Nazarite corner of the women's court,

he offered the sacrifices required for his cleansing.

135:2.2 In September of this year Elizabeth and John made a journey to Nazareth to visit Mary and Jesus.

John had just about made up his mind to launch out in his lifework,

but he was admonished, not only by Jesus' words but also by his example,

to return home, take care of his mother,

and await the "coming of the Father's hour."

After bidding Jesus and Mary good-bye at the end of this enjoyable visit,



And never again did John and Jesus see each other until that day by the Jordan when the Son of Man presented himself for baptism (127:3.12).]

[*Compare:* Yet where Elijah had been a mere Tishbite, John was to be born a priest, with a right to a priest's portion of the people's offerings. But he was to disendow himself, and subsist on food which ... was to be won by his own hard hands (Wilson 44).]

[Matt. 3:1 And in those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa; (§18)]

[**EN-GEDI** ('spring of the kid').—A place 'in the wilderness' in the tribe of Judah (Jos 15.62) ... There is no doubt of the identification of En-gedi with ' *Ain Jidy*, a spring of warm water that breaks out 330 ft. above the level of the Dead Sea, about the middle of its W. side (Hastings' *BD* 219).]

[*Compare:* It is possible that [John] was a monk trained for his work by the brothers of En-gedi, full of passion for simple righteousness, indignant with the hypocrisies of priests, with the futilities of rabbis....

John had lived at En-gedi from childhood (Norwood 120, 122).] [*See endnote.*]

John did not again see Jesus until the event of his baptism in the Jordan.

135:2.3 John and Elizabeth returned to their home and began to lay plans for the future.

Since John refused to accept the priest's allowance due him from the temple funds,

by the end of two years they had all but lost their home; so they decided to go south with the sheep herd.

Accordingly, the summer that John was twenty years of age witnessed their removal to Hebron.

In the so-called "wilderness of Judea"

John tended his sheep along a brook that was tributary to

a larger stream which entered the Dead Sea at Engedi.

The Engedi colony included not only Nazarites of lifelong and time-period consecration but numerous other ascetic herdsmen who congregated in this region with their herds and fraternized with the Nazarite brotherhood.<sup>4</sup>

They supported themselves by sheep raising and from gifts which wealthy Jews made to the order.

135:2.4 As time passed, John returned less often to Hebron, while he made more frequent visits to Engedi. He was so entirely different from the majority of the Nazarites that he found it very difficult fully to fraternize with the brotherhood. But he was very fond of Abner, the acknowledged leader and head of the Engedi colony.

### 3. THE LIFE OF A SHEPHERD

SHEEP. (*Hastings' DB* 844)

135:3.1 Along the valley of this little brook John built no less than a dozen

When away from villages, the sheep are herded at night in folds, which are roughly made enclosures of piled-up stones;

stone shelters and night corrals, consisting of piled-up stones,

the shepherd lives in a cave or hut adjoining, and is in very intimate touch with his sheep, each of which he knows unfailingly at a glance (*HDB* 844).

wherein he could watch over and safeguard his herds of sheep and goats.

John's life as a shepherd afforded him a great deal of time for thought.

He talked much with Ezda, an orphan lad

PLATE 28 (E1) (*Atlas HGH*) [*Note: Beth-zur* is about 6 mi. N of Hebron.]

of Beth-zur,

whom he had in a way adopted, and who cared for the herds when he made trips to Hebron to see his mother and to sell sheep, as well as when he went down to Engedi for Sabbath services.

John and the lad lived very simply, subsisting on mutton, goat's milk,

[Mark 1:6] and did eat locusts and wild honey (§18).]

**[JOHN THE BAPTIST.**— ... his diet consisting of edible locusts (Lv 11:22) as well as the vegetable honey which exudes from fig-trees and palms (Mt 3:4) (*Hastings' DB* 474).]

wild honey, and the edible locusts of that region.

This, their regular diet, was supplemented by provisions brought from Hebron and Engedi from time to time.

135:3.2 Elizabeth kept John posted about Palestinian and world affairs, and his conviction grew deeper and deeper that the time was fast approaching when the old order was to end; that he was to become the herald of the approach of a new age, “the kingdom of heaven.” This rugged shepherd was very partial to the writings of the Prophet Daniel.

[*Note:* The great image is described in Dan. 2:31-45, but the “great kingdoms of the world,” first mentioned in Dan. 2, are expounded upon in Dan. 7. Sadler very probably studied the Daniel prophecies as a young Seventh-day Adventist. He may have learned that—according to *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (revised edition 1976)—“the early church interpreters and those of the Protestant Reformation ... identified the four empires of Dan 2 and 7 as Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome; the ten horns of ch 7 as the tenfold partition of the Roman Empire followed by antichrist” (“Daniel, Interpretation of,” p. 372). The article goes on to say that “SDA’s identify the nations of the metallic image of ch 2 as the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greco-Macedonian, and Roman empires ... This same succession of political powers is represented by the four beasts of ch 7, with the ten horns as the kingdoms in the area of the old Roman Empire and the little horn of ch 7 as the Papacy” (p. 373).]

He read a thousand times Daniel’s description of the great image, which Zacharias had told him represented the history of the great kingdoms of the world, beginning with Babylon, then Persia, Greece, and finally Rome.

[*Note:* Perhaps the perception of the divisions within the Roman Empire refers to the ten horns mentioned above.]

John perceived that already was Rome composed of such polyglot peoples and races that it could never become a strongly cemented and firmly consolidated empire. He believed that Rome was even then divided, as Syria, Egypt, Palestine, and other provinces;

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed:

and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (Dan. 2:44).

And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him:

his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:14).

And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High,

whose kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him (Dan. 7:27).

13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him (Dan. 7:13).

[*repeated from 135:3.2*] 14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: (Dan. 7:14)

and then he further read

“in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.

And this kingdom shall not be left to other people but shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

“And there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom never shall be destroyed.”

“And the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High,

whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”

135:3.3 John was never able completely to rise above the confusion produced by what he had heard from his parents concerning Jesus and by these passages which he read in the Scriptures.

In Daniel he read:

“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven,

and there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom.”

But these words of the prophet did not harmonize with what his parents had taught him. Neither did his talk with Jesus, at the time of his visit when he was eighteen years old, correspond with these statements of the Scriptures. Notwithstanding this confusion, throughout all of his perplexity his mother assured him that his distant cousin, Jesus of Nazareth, was the true Messiah, that he had come to sit on the throne of David, and that he (John) was to become his advance herald and chief support.

135:3.4 From all John heard of the vice and wickedness of Rome and the dissoluteness and moral barrenness of the empire, from what he knew of the evil doings of Herod Antipas and the governors of Judea, he was minded to believe that the end of the age was impending. It seemed to this rugged and noble child of nature that the world was ripe for the end of the age of man and the dawn of the new and divine age—the kingdom of heaven. The feeling grew in John's heart that he was to be the last of the old prophets and the first of the new. And he fairly vibrated with the mounting impulse to go forth and proclaim to all men: "Repent! Get right with God! Get ready for the end; prepare yourselves for the appearance of the new and eternal order of earth affairs, the kingdom of heaven."

#### **4. THE DEATH OF ELIZABETH**

135:4.1 On August 17, A.D. 22, when John was twenty-eight years of age, his mother suddenly passed away.

Elizabeth's friends, knowing of the Nazarite restrictions regarding contact with the dead, even in one's own family, made all arrangements for the burial of Elizabeth before sending for John. When he received word of the death of his mother, he directed Ezda to drive his herds to Engedi and started for Hebron.

135:4.2 On returning to Engedi from his mother's funeral, he presented his flocks to the brotherhood and for a season detached himself from the outside world while he fasted and prayed. John knew only of the old methods of approach to divinity; he knew only of the records of such as Elijah, Samuel, and Daniel. Elijah was his ideal of a prophet. Elijah was the first of the teachers of Israel to be regarded as a prophet, and John truly believed that he was to be the last of this long and illustrious line of the messengers of heaven.

135:4.3 For two and a half years John lived at Engedi, and he persuaded most of the brotherhood that "the end of the age was at hand"; that "the kingdom of heaven was about to appear." And all his early teaching was based upon the current Jewish idea and concept of the Messiah as the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation from the domination of their gentile rulers.

135:4.4 Throughout this period John read much in the sacred writings which he found at the Engedi home of the Nazarites. He was especially impressed by Isaiah and by Malachi, the last of the prophets up to that time.

[Isa. 62-66.]

He read and reread the last five chapters of Isaiah, and he believed these prophecies.

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

6 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 (Mal. 4:5-6).

Then he would read in Malachi:

“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 hearts of the fathers toward the children and the hearts of the children toward their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

And it was only this promise of Malachi that Elijah would return that deterred John from going forth to preach about the coming kingdom and to exhort his fellow Jews to flee from the wrath to come. John was ripe for the proclamation of the message of the coming kingdom, but this expectation of the coming of Elijah held him back for more than two years. He knew he was not Elijah. What did Malachi mean? Was the prophecy literal or figurative? How could he know the truth? He finally dared to think that, since the first of the prophets was called Elijah, so the last should be known, eventually, by the same name. Nevertheless, he had doubts, doubts sufficient to prevent his ever calling himself Elijah.

135:4.5 It was the influence of Elijah that caused John to adopt his methods of direct and blunt assault upon the sins and vices of his contemporaries. He sought to dress like Elijah, and he endeavored to talk like Elijah; in every outward aspect he was like the olden prophet. He was just such a stalwart and picturesque child of nature, just such a fearless and daring preacher of righteousness. John was not illiterate, he did well know the Jewish sacred writings, but he was hardly cultured. He was a clear thinker, a powerful speaker, and a fiery denunciator.

[Where he failed was that his life was a rebuke to men, not an example that they could follow (Wilson 44).]

He was hardly an example to his age, but he was an eloquent rebuke.

135:4.6 At last he thought out the method of proclaiming the new age, the kingdom of God; he settled that he was to become the herald of the Messiah; he swept aside all doubts and departed from Engedi one day in March of A.D. 25 to begin his short but brilliant career as a public preacher.

## 5. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

### II: THE BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIANITY (Fiske & Easton 6)

135:5.1 In order to understand John's message, account should be taken of the status of the Jewish people at the time he appeared upon the stage of action. For almost one hundred years all Israel had been in a quandary; they were at a loss to explain

At the beginning of our era she had, for nearly six hundred years, been under the power of one foreign nation after another—Babylon, Persia, Egypt, Syria, and Rome (F&E 6).

their continuous subjugation to gentile overlords.

Had not Moses taught that righteousness was always rewarded with prosperity and power?

Why was God's chosen people subject to the iron rule of Rome instead of to the rule of God? (F&E 6-7)

Were they not God's chosen people?

Why was the throne of David desolate and vacant? In the light of the Mosaic doctrines and the precepts of the prophets the Jews found it difficult to explain their long-continued national desolation.



For something like two centuries

135:5.2 About one hundred years before the days of Jesus and John

a new school of prophets—today we call them “apocalyptists”—had been striving to solve these problems.

a new school of religious teachers arose in Palestine, the apocalyptists.

Israel was suffering for her sins: this was the all but universal answer.

These new teachers evolved a system of belief that accounted for the sufferings and humiliation of the Jews on the ground that they were paying the penalty for the nation’s sins.

They fell back onto the well-known reasons assigned to explain the Babylonian and other captivities of former times.

But she might take heart.

But, so taught the apocalyptists, Israel should take heart;

the days of their affliction were almost over;

Her discipline was nearly completed.

the discipline of God’s chosen people was about finished;

God’s patience with the ruthless foreigners was almost at the end, and Israel had but little longer to wait.

God’s patience with the gentile foreigners was about exhausted.

The end of Roman rule was synonymous with the end of the age and, in a certain sense, with the end of the world.

These new teachers leaned heavily on the predictions of Daniel, and they consistently taught that

Creation was about to pass into its final stage;

creation was about to pass into its final stage;

the kingdoms of this world were soon to become “the Kingdom of God” (F&E 7).

the kingdoms of this world were about to become the kingdom of God.

[contd] This was the origin of the **phrase** that meets us everywhere throughout the Gospels.

To Jewish ears it had **but one meaning:**

a perfectly **righteous state**, in which God would rule as completely as He rules in heaven (F&E 7).

[contd] **How soon would the Kingdom come?**

On every side voices were raised, predicting that it could not be long delayed;

perhaps the greater part of the nation expected to see the great **consummation within their own lifetime** (F&E 7).

[contd] What would the Kingdom be like? Here many opinions were held, many views elaborated. All men agreed that it would be given up to the service and worship of God; no true Jew could hesitate in this belief. But the unanimity went no further.

To the Jewish mind of that day

this was the meaning of that **phrase**—the kingdom of heaven—which runs throughout the teachings of both John and Jesus.

To the Jews of Palestine the phrase “kingdom of heaven” had **but one meaning:**

an absolutely **righteous state** in which God (the Messiah) would rule the nations of earth in perfection of power just as he ruled in heaven—

“Your will be done on earth as in heaven.”

135:5.3 In the days of John all Jews were expectantly asking,

**“How soon will the kingdom come?”**

There was a general feeling that the end of the rule of the gentile nations was drawing near.

There was present throughout all Jewry a lively hope and a keen expectation that the **consummation** of the desire of the ages would occur **during the lifetime of that generation.**

135:5.4 While the Jews differed greatly in their estimates of the nature of the coming kingdom,

In accord with the **literal** predictions of the Old Testament, many looked for the Kingdom on this earth;

a **rejuvenated** Palestine, saved from its enemies forever, fertile and prosperous, a land where all would live long and happy lives, and die peaceful and contented deaths.

At the opposite pole of expectation,

others sought the Kingdom **not in this world**—

which was about to be brought to an **end**—

[Isa. 65:17, Isa. 66:23, Rev. 21:1.]

[See 135:3.2, above.]

but in the world to come; in a heaven where all would be **immortal** and would enjoy for all eternity the vision of God (F&E 7-8).

they were alike in their belief that the event was impending, near at hand, even at the door.

Many who read the Old Testament **literally** looked expectantly for a new king in Palestine,

for a **regenerated** Jewish nation delivered from its enemies

and presided over by the successor of King David, the Messiah who would quickly be acknowledged as the rightful and righteous ruler of all the world.

Another, though smaller, group of devout Jews held a vastly different view of this kingdom of God.

They taught that the coming kingdom was **not of this world**,

that the world was approaching its certain **end**,

and that “a new heaven and a new earth” were to usher in the establishment of the kingdom of God;

that this kingdom was to be an everlasting dominion,

that sin was to be ended,

and that the citizens of the new kingdom were to become **immortal** in their enjoyment of this endless bliss.

## 135:5.5 All were agreed that

The actual coming of the Kingdom must bring with it a **drastic purging** process which would leave as its citizens only the worthy.

The strict traditionalists looked for a **war** which would destroy all the enemies of the Lord

and **sweep** the hosts of Israel on to **victory**.

Others pictured the end as a **great judgment**

that would send the unrighteous to **punishment or destruction** (F&E 8).

Practically everyone believed that some Jews would be excluded for their sins, while many taught that some **Gentiles** might be included (F&E 8).

Some teachers maintained that **God** would bring it Himself, without any agent or mediator.

More common was the belief that God would employ an **intermediary**, that He would send some one to bring earth's history to an end and to establish the final consummation.

some **drastic purging** or purifying discipline would of necessity precede the establishment of the new kingdom on earth.

The literalists taught that a world-wide **war** would ensue which would destroy all unbelievers,

while the faithful would **sweep** on to universal and eternal **victory**.

The spiritists taught that the kingdom would be ushered in by the **great judgment** of God

which would relegate the unrighteous to their well-deserved judgment of **punishment** and final **destruction**,

at the same time elevating the believing saints of the chosen people to high seats of honor and authority with the Son of Man, who would rule over the redeemed nations in God's name.

And this latter group even believed that many devout **gentiles** might be admitted to the fellowship of the new kingdom.

135:5.6 Some of the Jews held to the opinion that **God** might possibly establish this new kingdom by direct and divine intervention,

but the vast majority believed that he would interpose some representative **intermediary**,

To this intermediary the Jews gave the name “Messiah” (F&E 9).

[contd] It is of utmost importance for us to note that this is the **only possible sense** “Messiah” ever had or could have on Jewish lips at this time.

“Messiah” could not mean **merely** one who **taught God’s will**, no matter how perfectly;

for such a teacher the Jews had a fixed title, **“prophet.”**

The Messiah was infinitely more than a prophet;

a Messiah who did not **bring** the final Kingdom was no Messiah at all (F&E 9).

[contd] **What would the Messiah be?**

Once more the teachers diverged.

The older tradition clung to the idea of a **“Son of David”**; that is, just as David of old had rid the Holy Land of all enemies, so “David’s Son” would be a Deliverer; only, of course, on a vastly greater scale.

If, however, men thought of the Kingdom as **heavenly**,

they naturally thought of the Messiah as heavenly also.

the **Messiah**.

And that was the **only possible meaning** the term Messiah could have had in the minds of the Jews of the generation of John and Jesus.

Messiah could not possibly refer to one who **merely taught God’s will**

or proclaimed the necessity for righteous living.

To all such holy persons the Jews gave the title of **prophet**.

The Messiah was to be more than a prophet;

the Messiah was to **bring** in the establishment of the new kingdom, the kingdom of God.

No one who failed to do this could be the Messiah in the traditional Jewish sense.

135:5.7 **Who would this Messiah be?**

Again the Jewish teachers differed.

The older ones clung to the doctrine of the **son of David**.

The newer taught that, since the new kingdom was a **heavenly** kingdom,

the new ruler might also be a divine personality,

According to this view he was pictured as sitting at God's right hand from the beginning of creation,

waiting the day when he should descend from heaven to accomplish the final redemption.

And—to our ears most strangely—when the Messiah was thus conceived, and *not* as a human being,

he was given the title “Son of Man.” This seemingly contradictory usage has, of course, its historic explanation, but here we can only state the fact (F&E 9-10).

Such was the background of the Baptist's preaching (F&E 10).

### III: THE RELIGIOUS REVIVAL AT THE JORDAN (Fiske & Easton 11)

[contd] When John appeared with his proclamation, “The Kingdom of God is at hand,” there may well have been in his preaching a vagueness about the details of the coming age. The central message, however, was unmistakable, and to pious Israelites it was the greatest possible good news: the promised salvation was now at last to be fulfilled (F&E 11).

one who had long sat at God's right hand in heaven.

And strange as it may appear, those who thus conceived of the ruler of the new kingdom looked upon him not as a human Messiah, not as a mere man,

but as “the Son of Man”—

a Son of God—a heavenly Prince, long held in waiting thus to assume the rulership of the earth made new.

Such was the religious background of the Jewish world when John went forth proclaiming: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

135:5.8 It becomes apparent, therefore, that John's announcement of the coming kingdom had not less than half a dozen different meanings in the minds of those who listened to his impassioned preaching. But no matter what significance they attached to the phrases which John employed, each of these various groups of Jewish-kingdom expectants was intrigued by the proclamations of this sincere, enthusiastic, rough-and-ready preacher of righteousness and repentance, who so solemnly exhorted his hearers to "flee from the wrath to come."

## 6. JOHN BEGINS TO PREACH

### III: THE MESSIAH'S CALL (Smith1 25)

135:6.1 Early in the month of March, A.D. 25, John journeyed around the western coast of the Dead Sea and up the river Jordan to opposite Jericho,

A great prophet has appeared, and from Jerusalem and all Judæa and all the country about the Jordan an eager multitude is pouring down to the scene of his ministry at Bethany just across the river at the place where the Israelites under Joshua had crossed over into the Promised Land (S1 25).

the ancient ford over which Joshua and the children of Israel passed when they first entered the promised land;

and crossing over to the other side of the river, he established himself near the entrance to the ford and began to preach to the people who passed by on their way back and forth across the river.

[[H]e chose it [partly] because it afforded him a ready audience, being frequented by travellers betwixt Jerusalem and Galilee by the eastern route through Peræa ... (Smith2 32).]

This was the most frequented of all the Jordan crossings.

135:6.2 It was apparent to all who heard John that he was more than a preacher. The great majority of those who listened to this strange man who had come up from the Judean wilderness went away believing that

What was the secret of the preacher's power? It was manifold. *He was prophet, and it was long since a prophet's voice had been heard in the land* (S1 26).

they had heard the voice of a prophet.

No wonder the souls of these weary and expectant Jews were deeply stirred by such a phenomenon.<sup>5</sup>

Never in all Jewish history had

[Luke 2:25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him (§12).]

the devout children of Abraham so longed for the "consolation of Israel"

or more ardently anticipated "the restoration of the kingdom."

Never in all Jewish history could

[W]hen John proclaimed with unfaltering conviction and impassioned earnestness that the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, the Reign of the Messiah, was at hand,

John's message, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand,"

[Matt 3:1 And in those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, 2 saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (§18).]

he won unhesitating credence (S1 27).

have made such a deep and universal appeal

as at the very time he so mysteriously appeared

[The scene of his preaching was the southern ford of the Jordan.. (Smith2 32).]

on the bank of this southern crossing of the Jordan.



[He was six months older than Jesus; and while the latter was employed in His workshop at Nazareth, John was employed, like Amos of old, as a herdsman or a husbandman in the wilderness of Judæa (Smith2 31).]

[T]he idea arose that one of the old prophets would return and usher in the Messianic Kingdom. Some thought of Jeremiah, but the general expectation pointed to Elijah. It chimed in with the idea when John appeared ... “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” wearing a dress like his and living like him on such simple fare as the wilderness afforded ... (S1 27).

[Luke 1:17 And he shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to walk in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him (§4).]

#### HIS CALL (Smith2 31)

It is no wonder that his preaching created a mighty stir (S2 32).

[Luke 3:3 And he came into all the region round about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins; (§18)]

135:6.3 He came from the herdsmen, like Amos.

He was dressed like Elijah of old, and he thundered his admonitions and poured forth his warnings in the “spirit and power of Elijah.”

It is not surprising that this strange preacher created a mighty stir

throughout all Palestine as the travelers carried abroad the news of his preaching along the Jordan.

135:6.4 There was still another and a new feature about the work of this Nazarite preacher:

He baptized every one of his believers in the Jordan “for the remission of sins.”

II, XII: THE BAPTISM OF JESUS: ITS  
HIGHER MEANING (Edersheim 275)

What John preached, that he also symbolised by a rite which, though not in itself, yet in its application, was wholly new.

Again, it was prescribed that such Gentiles as became 'proselytes of righteousness,' or 'proselytes of the Covenant' (*Gerey hatstsedeq* or *Gerey habberith*), were to be admitted to full participation in the privileges of Israel by the threefold rites of circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice—etc. (E1 273).

But never before had it been proposed that Israel should undergo a 'baptism of repentance,' although there are indications of a deeper insight into the meaning of Levitical baptisms (E1 273).

[See 135:6,1, above.]

Although baptism was not a new ceremony among the Jews, they had never seen it employed as John now made use of it.

It had long been the practice thus to baptize the gentile proselytes into the fellowship of the outer court of the temple,

but never had the Jews themselves been asked to submit to the baptism of repentance.

Only fifteen months intervened between the time John began to preach and baptize and his arrest and imprisonment at the instigation of Herod Antipas, but in this short time he baptized considerably over one hundred thousand penitents.

135:6.5 John preached four months at Bethany ford before starting north up the Jordan. Tens of thousands of listeners, some curious but many earnest and serious, came to hear him from all parts of Judea, Perea, and Samaria. Even a few came from Galilee.

VI: THE BEGINNINGS OF THE GOSPEL. (*A Harmony of the Gospels* 30)

§18. THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. Matt. 3:1-12. Mark 1:1-8. Luke 3:1-20.

Luke 3:4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

The voice of one crying in the wilderness,

Make ye ready the way of the Lord,

Make his paths straight.

[ ... make straight in the desert a highway for our God (Isa. 40:3).]

5 Every valley shall be filled,

And every mountain and hill shall be brought low;

[ ... and the rough places a plain (Isa. 40:3).]

And the rough ways smooth;

6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

135:6.6 In May of this year, while he still lingered at Bethany ford, the priests and Levites sent a delegation out to inquire of John whether he claimed to be the Messiah, and by whose authority he preached. John answered these questioners by saying:

“Go tell your masters that you have heard

‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness,’

as spoken by the prophet, saying,

‘make ready the way of the Lord,

make straight a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be brought low;

the uneven ground shall become a plain,

while the rough places shall become a smooth valley;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Matt. 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism,

he said unto them,

Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

[John's vision of them was his own, the vision of a desert anchorite who had seen the snakes gliding away before the oncoming fire.]

Yet John baptized them, with a fierce word of warning, mistrustful of their repentance: (Murry 14)]

8 Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance:

9 and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father:

for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

10 And even now is the axe laid unto the root of the trees:

every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

135:6.7 John was a heroic but tactless preacher.

One day when he was preaching and baptizing on the west bank of the Jordan, a group of Pharisees and a number of Sadducees came forward and presented themselves for baptism.

Before leading them down into the water,

John, addressing them as a group said:

“Who warned you to flee, as vipers before the fire, from the wrath to come?”

I will baptize you, but I warn you to

bring forth fruit worthy of sincere repentance

if you would receive the remission of your sins.

Tell me not that Abraham is your father.

I declare that God is able of these twelve stones here before you to raise up worthy children for Abraham.

And even now is the ax laid to the very roots of the trees.

Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is destined to be cut down and cast into the fire.”

[On that great day, well-nigh fifteen centuries before, when a path was opened through the flood and Israel passed over on dry land, Joshua had taken twelve stones, one for each tribe, from the river-bed and “laid them down in the place where they lodged that night” (Smith 1 30).]

(The twelve stones to which he referred were the reputed memorial stones set up by Joshua to commemorate the crossing of the “twelve tribes” at this very point when they first entered the promised land.)

135:6.8 John conducted classes for his disciples, in the course of which he instructed them in the details of their new life and endeavored to answer their many questions. He counseled the teachers to instruct in the spirit as well as the letter of the law.

Luke 3:10 And the multitudes asked him, saying, What then must we do? 11 And he answered and said unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath food, let him do likewise.

He instructed the rich to feed the poor;

12 and there came also publicans to be baptized, and they said unto him, Master, what must we do? 13 And he said unto them,

to the tax gatherers he said:

Extort no more than that which is appointed you.

“Extort no more than that which is assigned you.”

14 And soldiers also asked him, saying, And we, what must we do? And he said unto them,

To the soldiers he said:

Do violence to no man, neither exact *anything* wrongfully; and be content with your wages.

“Do no violence and exact nothing wrongfully—be content with your wages.”

While he counseled all: “Make ready for the end of the age—the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

## 7. JOHN JOURNEYS NORTH

135:7.1 John still had confused ideas about the coming kingdom and its king. The longer he preached the more confused he became, but never did this intellectual uncertainty concerning the nature of the coming kingdom in the least lessen his conviction of the certainty of the kingdom's immediate appearance. In mind John might be confused, but in spirit never. He was in no doubt about the coming kingdom, but he was far from certain as to whether or not Jesus was to be the ruler of that kingdom. As long as John held to the idea of the restoration of the throne of David, the teachings of his parents that Jesus, born in the City of David, was to be the long-expected deliverer, seemed consistent; but at those times when he leaned more toward the doctrine of a spiritual kingdom and the end of the temporal age on earth, he was sorely in doubt as to the part Jesus would play in such events. Sometimes he questioned everything, but not for long. He really wished he might talk it all over with his cousin, but that was contrary to their expressed agreement.

135:7.2 As John journeyed north, he thought much about Jesus. He paused at more than a dozen places as he traveled up the Jordan.

PLATE 25 (C3) (AHGHL)

It was at Adam

that he first made reference to "another one who is to come after me" in answer to the direct question which his disciples asked him, "Are you the Messiah?"

Mark 1:7 And he preached, saying,

And he went on to say:

There cometh after me he that is mightier than I,

"There will come after me one who is greater than I,

the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

whose sandal straps I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

["I indeed baptise you in water unto repentance, but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose sandal-strap I am not worth to unloose ..." (Smith 28).]

8 I baptized you with water; but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:17 whose fan is in his hand, thoroughly to cleanse his threshing-floor,

And his shovel is in his hand thoroughly to cleanse his threshing floor;

[Then comes the winnower, with his "fan," or large winnowing shovel (Fiske & Easton 12-13).]

and to gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.

he will gather the wheat into his garner, but the chaff will he burn up with the judgment fire."

135:7.3 In response to the questions of his disciples John continued to expand his teachings, from day to day adding more that was helpful and comforting compared with his early and cryptic message: "Repent and be baptized." By this time throngs were arriving from Galilee and the Decapolis. Scores of earnest believers lingered with their adored teacher day after day.

## 8. MEETING OF JESUS AND JOHN

135:8.1 By December of A.D. 25, when John reached

PLATE 20 (E5) (AHGHL)

the neighborhood of Pella in his journey up the Jordan,

his fame had extended throughout all Palestine, and his work had become the chief topic of conversation in all the towns about the lake of Galilee. Jesus had spoken favorably of John's message, and this had caused many from Capernaum to join John's cult of repentance and baptism. James and John the fishermen sons of Zebedee had gone down in December, soon after John took up his preaching position near Pella, and had offered themselves for baptism. They went to see John once a week and brought back to Jesus fresh, firsthand reports of the evangelist's work.

135:8.2 Jesus' brothers James and Jude had talked about going down to John for baptism; and now that Jude had come over to Capernaum for the Sabbath services, both he and James, after listening to Jesus' discourse in the synagogue, decided to take counsel with him concerning their plans. This was on Saturday night, January 12, A.D. 26. Jesus requested that they postpone the discussion until the following day, when he would give them his answer. He slept very little that night, being in close communion with the Father in heaven. He had arranged to have noontime lunch with his brothers and to advise them concerning baptism by John. That Sunday morning Jesus was working as usual in the boatshop. James and Jude had arrived with the lunch and were waiting in the lumber room for him, as it was not yet time for the midday recess, and they knew that Jesus was very regular about such matters.



X: CHRIST THE QUESTIONER  
(Wilson 73)

**The Practice of Obedience.** (Wilson 77)

To serve men was good, but to win them was better ... If there had been any doubt about it, this doubt would have been dispelled by the challenging voice of John the Baptist ... To the echo of that trumpet-call Jesus listened; listening, He recognized “the word of the God.” He laid aside His tools for ever;

He walked to the banks of the Jordan (W 79).

135:8.3 Just before the noon rest,

Jesus laid down his tools,

removed his work apron, and merely announced to the three workmen in the room with him, “My hour has come.” He went out to his brothers James and Jude, repeating, “My hour has come—let us go to John.”

And they started immediately for Pella,

eating their lunch as they journeyed.

This was on Sunday, January 13. They tarried for the night in the Jordan valley and arrived on the scene of John’s baptizing about noon of the next day.

135:8.4 John had just begun baptizing the candidates for the day. Scores of repentants were standing in line awaiting their turn when Jesus and his two brothers took up their positions in this line of earnest men and women who had become believers in John’s preaching of the coming kingdom.

John had been inquiring about Jesus of Zebedee's sons. He had heard of Jesus' remarks concerning his preaching, and he was day by day expecting to see him arrive on the scene, but he had not expected to greet him in the line of baptismal candidates.

135:8.5 Being engrossed with the details of rapidly baptizing such a large number of converts, John did not look up to see Jesus until the Son of Man stood in his immediate presence.

§19. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS. Matt. 3:13-17.  
Mark 1:9-11. Luke 3:21, 22, [23a].

Matt. 3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John,

to be baptized of him.

14 But John would have hindered him, saying,

I have need to be baptized of thee,

and comest thou to me?

15 But Jesus answering said unto him,

Suffer *it* [ERV mg.: Or, *me*] now:

for thus it becometh us to

fulfil all righteousness. [Note: See 135:11.4, below.]

When John recognized Jesus, the ceremonies were halted for a moment while he greeted his cousin in the flesh and asked,

“But why do you come down into the water to greet me?”

And Jesus answered,

“To be subject to your baptism.”

John replied:

“But I have need to be baptized by you.

Why do you come to me?”

And Jesus whispered to John:

“Bear with me now,

for it becomes us to

set this example for my brothers standing here with me, and that the people may know that my hour has come.”

CHRONOLOGY (Smith2 x)

135:8.6 There was a tone of finality and authority in Jesus' voice. John was atremble with emotion as he made ready to

26 A.D. His Baptism . . . January (S2 xiii).

baptize Jesus of Nazareth in the Jordan at noon on Monday, January 14, A.D. 26.

Thus did John baptize Jesus and his two brothers James and Jude. And when John had baptized these three, he dismissed the others for the day, announcing that he would resume baptisms at noon<sup>6</sup> the next day. As the people were departing, the four men still standing in the water heard a strange sound, and presently there appeared for a moment an apparition immediately over the head of Jesus,

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him; 17 and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying,

and they heard a voice saying,

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

A great change came over the countenance of Jesus, and coming up out of the water in silence he took leave of them, going toward the hills to the east. And no man saw Jesus again for forty days.

135:8.7 John followed Jesus a sufficient distance to tell him the story of Gabriel's visit to his mother ere either had been born, as he had heard it so many times from his mother's lips. He allowed Jesus to continue on his way after he had said, "Now I know of a certainty that you are the Deliverer." But Jesus made no reply.

## 9. FORTY DAYS OF PREACHING

### III: THE MESSIAH'S CALL (Smith 25)

135:9.1 When John returned to his disciples

Clem. Rom. *Hom.* ii § 23 : as Jesus had twelve disciples answering to the months of the year, John had **thirty**, answering to the days of the month (S1 26, fn).

(he now had some twenty-five or **thirty** who abode with him constantly),

he found them in earnest conference, discussing what had just happened in connection with Jesus' baptism. They were all the more astonished when John now made known to them the story of the Gabriel visitation to Mary before Jesus was born, and also that Jesus spoke no word to him even after he had told him about this. There was no rain that evening, and this group of thirty or more talked long into the starlit night. They wondered where Jesus had gone, and when they would see him again.

135:9.2 After the experience of this day the preaching of John took on new and certain notes of proclamation concerning the coming kingdom and the expected Messiah. It was a tense time, these forty days of tarrying, waiting for the return of Jesus. But John continued to preach with great power, and his disciples began at about this time to preach to the overflowing throngs which gathered around John at the Jordan.

135:9.3 In the course of these forty days of waiting, many rumors spread about the countryside and even to Tiberias and Jerusalem. Thousands came over to see the new attraction in John's camp, the reputed Messiah, but Jesus was not to be seen. When the disciples of John asserted that the strange man of God had gone to the hills, many doubted the entire story.

§21. JOHN'S TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES. John 1:19-28.

19 And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent unto him from Jerusalem priests and Levites

to ask him, Who art thou? 20 And he confessed and denied not; and he confessed, I am not the Christ. 21 And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah?

And he saith, I am not.

Art thou the prophet?

135:9.4 About three weeks after Jesus had left them, there arrived on the scene at Pella

a new deputation from the priests and Pharisees at Jerusalem.

They asked John directly if he was Elijah

or the prophet that Moses promised;

[Moreover, it was understood that the Messiah's Advent would, in accordance with the ancient promise [Deut. xviii. 15] be heralded by a prophet like unto Moses ... (Smith 27).]

And he answered, No.

22 They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? That we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? 23 He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet. 24 And they had been sent from the Pharisees.

25 And they asked him, and said unto him,

Why then baptizest thou, if thou art not the Christ, neither Elijah, neither the prophet?

[26] John answered them, saying,

I baptize with water:

in the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not, 27 *even* he that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose. 28 These things were done in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

[See 135:9.7, below]

and when John said, "I am not,"

they made bold to ask, "Are you the Messiah?" and John answered, "I am not."

Then said these men from Jerusalem:

"If you are not Elijah, nor the prophet, nor the Messiah, then why do you baptize the people

and create all this stir?"

And John replied:

"It should be for those who have heard me and received my baptism to say who I am, but I declare to you that,

while I baptize with water,

there has been among us one

who will return to baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

135:9.5 These forty days were a difficult period for John and his disciples. What was to be the relation of John to Jesus? A hundred questions came up for discussion. Politics and selfish preferment began to make their appearance. Intense discussions grew up around the various ideas and concepts of the Messiah. Would he become a military leader and a Davidic king? Would he smite the Roman armies as Joshua had the Canaanites? Or would he come to establish a spiritual kingdom? John rather decided, with the minority, that Jesus had come to establish the kingdom of heaven, although he was not altogether clear in his own mind as to just what was to be embraced within this mission of the establishment of the kingdom of heaven.

135:9.6 These were strenuous days in John's experience, and he prayed for the return of Jesus. Some of John's disciples organized scouting parties to go in search of Jesus, but John forbade, saying: "Our times are in the hands of the God of heaven; he will direct his chosen Son."

§22. JESUS THE LAMB OF GOD. John 1:29-34.

29 On the morrow he

seeth Jesus coming unto him,

and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God,

who taketh away the sin of the world!

135:9.7 It was early on the morning of Sabbath, February 23, that the company of John,

engaged in eating their morning meal, looked up toward the north

and beheld Jesus coming to them.

As he approached them, John stood upon a large rock and, lifting up his sonorous voice,

said: "Behold the Son of God,

the deliverer of the world!

SOURCE OR PARALLEL

URANTIA PAPER 135

30 This is he of whom I said,

After me cometh a man who is become before me: for he was before me.

31 And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing with water.

32 And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon him.

33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, he said unto me,

Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. 34 And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.

This is he of whom I have said,

‘After me there will come one who is preferred before me because he was before me.’

For this cause came I out of the wilderness to preach repentance and to baptize with water,

proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And now comes one who shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

And I beheld the divine spirit descending upon this man.<sup>7</sup>

and I heard the voice of God declare,

‘This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.’”

<sup>135:9.8</sup> Jesus bade them return to their food while he sat down to eat with John, his brothers James and Jude having returned to Capernaum.



135:9.9 Early in the morning of the next day he took leave of John and his disciples, going back to Galilee. He gave them no word as to when they would again see him. To John's inquiries about his own preaching and mission Jesus only said, "My Father will guide you now and in the future as he has in the past." And these two great men separated that morning on the banks of the Jordan, never again to greet each other in the flesh.

## 10. JOHN JOURNEYS SOUTH

135:10.1 Since Jesus had gone north into Galilee, John felt led to retrace his steps southward. Accordingly, on Sunday morning, March 3, John and the remainder of his disciples began their journey south. About one quarter of John's immediate followers had meantime departed for Galilee in quest of Jesus. There was a sadness of confusion about John. He never again preached as he had before baptizing Jesus. He somehow felt that the responsibility of the coming kingdom was no longer on his shoulders. He felt that his work was almost finished; he was disconsolate and lonely. But he preached, baptized, and journeyed on southward.

[See 135:7.2, above, for first mention of Adam.]

135:10.2 Near the village of Adam, John tarried for several weeks, and it was here that

[Mark 6:18 For John said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife (§65).]

he made the memorable attack upon Herod Antipas for unlawfully taking the wife of another man.

By June of this year (A.D. 26) John was back at the Bethany ford of the Jordan, where he had begun his preaching of the coming kingdom more than a year previously. In the weeks following the baptism of Jesus the character of John's preaching gradually changed into a proclamation of mercy for the common people, while he denounced with renewed vehemence the corrupt political and religious rulers.

III, XXVIII: THE STORY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, FROM HIS LAST TESTIMONY TO JESUS TO HIS BEHEADING IN PRISON. (Edersheim 654)

According to Josephus, [Herod Antipas]

135:10.3 Herod Antipas,

in whose territory John had been preaching,

was afraid that [John's] absolute influence over the people ... might lead to a rebellion (E1 657).

became alarmed lest he and his disciples should start a rebellion.

On the other hand, the Evangelic statement, that Herod had imprisoned John on account of his declaring his marriage with Herodias unlawful, is in no way inconsistent with the reason assigned by Joseph (E1 657-58).

Herod also resented John's public criticisms of his domestic affairs.

In view of all this, Herod decided to put John in prison. Accordingly, very early in the morning of June 12, before the multitude arrived to hear the preaching and witness the baptizing, the agents of Herod placed John under arrest. As weeks passed and he was not released, his disciples scattered over all Palestine, many of them going into Galilee to join the followers of Jesus.

## 11. JOHN IN PRISON

135:11.1 John had a lonely and somewhat bitter experience in prison. Few of his followers were permitted to see him. He longed to see Jesus but had to be content with hearing of his work through those of his followers who had become believers in the Son of Man. He was often tempted to doubt Jesus and his divine mission. If Jesus were the Messiah, why did he do nothing to deliver him from this unbearable imprisonment? For more than a year and a half this rugged man of God's outdoors languished in that despicable prison. And this experience was a great test of his faith in, and loyalty to, Jesus. Indeed, this whole experience was a great test of John's faith even in God. Many times was he tempted to doubt even the genuineness of his own mission and experience.

IX: PERIOD OF PREACHING AND BAPTIZING IN JUDEA. (*A Harmony of the Gospels* 39)

§30. JOHN'S TESTIMONY TO CHRIST AT ÆNON. John 3:25-36.

25 There arose therefore a questioning on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purifying. 26 And they came unto John,

and said to him,

135:11.2 After he had been in prison several months,

a group of his disciples came to him

and, after reporting concerning the public activities of Jesus,

said:

"So you see,

SOURCE OR PARALLEL

URANTIA PAPER 135

Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond the Jordan,

Teacher, that he who was with you at the upper Jordan

to whom thou hast borne witness,

prospers and receives all who come to him.

behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

He even feasts with publicans and sinners.

You bore courageous witness to him, and yet he does nothing to effect your deliverance.”

27 John answered and said,

But John answered his friends:

A man can receive nothing, except it have been given him from heaven.

“This man can do nothing unless it has been given him by his Father in heaven.

28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said,

You well remember that I said,

I am not the Christ, but, that I am sent before him.

‘I am not the Messiah, but I am one sent on before to prepare the way for him.’

And that I did.

29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom:

He who has the bride is the bridegroom,

but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him,

but the friend of the bridegroom who stands near by and hears him

rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice:

rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice.

this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

This, my joy, therefore is fulfilled.

30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

He must increase but I must decrease.

31 He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaketh:

I am of this earth and have declared my message.

he that cometh from heaven is above all.

Jesus of Nazareth comes down to the earth from heaven and is above us all.

32 What he hath seen and heard, of that he beareth witness; and no man receiveth his witness. 33 He that hath received his witness hath sent his seal to *this*, that God is true.

The Son of Man has descended from God, and the words of God he will declare to you.

34 For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God:

For the Father in heaven gives not the spirit by measure to his own Son.

for he giveth not his Spirit by measure.

35 The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.

The Father loves his Son and will presently put all things in the hands of this Son.

36 He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life;

He who believes in the Son has eternal life.

but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

And these words which I speak are true and abiding.”

135:11.3 These disciples were amazed at John's pronouncement, so much so that they departed in silence. John was also much agitated, for he perceived that he had uttered a prophecy. Never again did he wholly doubt the mission and divinity of Jesus. But it was a sore disappointment to John that Jesus sent him no word, that he came not to see him, and that he exercised none of his great power to deliver him from prison.

But Jesus knew all about this. He had great love for John, but being now cognizant of his divine nature and knowing fully the great things in preparation for John when he departed from this world and also knowing that John's work on earth was finished, he constrained himself not to interfere in the natural outworking of the great preacher-prophet's career.

XV: THE SECOND PREACHING TOUR. (*A Harmony of the Gospels* 71)

§52. JOHN THE BAPTIST'S LAST MESSAGE. Matt.11:2-30. Luke 7:18-35.

135:11.4 This long suspense in prison was humanly unbearable.

Just a few days before his death

Luke 7:19 And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to the Lord, saying,

John again sent trusted messengers to Jesus, inquiring:

“Is my work done? Why do I languish in prison?”

Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?

Are you truly the Messiah, or shall we look for another?”

20 And when the men were come unto him, they said, John the Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?

And when these two disciples gave this message to Jesus,

21 In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits; and on many that were blind he bestowed sight.

22 And he answered and said unto them,

the Son of Man replied:

Go,

“Go back to John

and tell him that I have not forgotten but to suffer me also this,

[See 135:8.5, above.]

and tell John what things ye have seen and heard;

the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good tidings preached to them.

23 And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.

for it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness.

Tell John what you have seen and heard—

that the poor have good tidings preached to them—

and, finally, tell the beloved herald of my earth mission that

he shall be abundantly blessed in the age to come if he finds no occasion to doubt and stumble over me.”

And this was the last word John received from Jesus. This message greatly comforted him and did much to stabilize his faith and prepare him for the tragic end of his life in the flesh which followed so soon upon the heels of this memorable occasion.

## 12. DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

III, XXVIII: THE STORY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, FROM HIS LAST TESTIMONY TO JESUS TO HIS BEHEADING IN PRISON. (Edersheim 654)

135:12.1 As John was working in southern Perea when arrested,

[The fortress of Machærus] will be immediately described as the place of the Baptist’s imprisonment and martyrdom (E1 657).

he was taken immediately to the prison of the fortress of Machærus, where he was incarcerated until his execution.

The dominions of [Herod] embraced, in the north: Galilee, west of the Jordan and of the Lake of Galilee; and in the south: Peræa, east of the Jordan (E1 656).

Here [in Peræa] he had two palaces, one at Julius, or Livias, the other at Machærus (E1 657).

Tiberias, his Galilean residence, with its splendid royal palace, had only been built a year or two before ... (E1 657).

[Matt. 14:5 And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude,

because they counted him as a prophet (§65).]

[Mark 6:[20] And when he heard him, he was much perplexed; and he heard him gladly (§65).]

Herod ruled over Perea as well as Galilee,

and he maintained residence at this time at both Julius and Machærus in Perea.

In Galilee the official residence had been moved from Sepphoris to the new capital at Tiberias.<sup>8</sup>

135:12.2 Herod feared to release John lest he instigate rebellion.

He feared to put him to death lest the multitude riot in the capital,

for thousands of Pereans believed that John was a holy man, a prophet.

Therefore Herod kept the Nazarite preacher in prison, not knowing what else to do with him.

Several times John had been before Herod, but never would he agree either to leave the domains of Herod or to refrain from all public activities if he were released. And this new agitation concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was steadily increasing, admonished Herod that it was no time to turn John loose. Besides, John was also a victim of the intense and bitter hatred of Herodias, Herod's unlawful wife.

135:12.3 On numerous occasions Herod talked with John about the kingdom of heaven, and while sometimes seriously impressed with his message,

he was afraid to release him from prison.



135:12.4 Since much building was still going on at Tiberias, Herod spent considerable time at his Perea residences, and he was partial to the fortress of Machaerus. It was a matter of several years before all the public buildings and the official residence at Tiberias were fully completed.

§65. DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. Matt. 14:1-12. Mark 6:14-29. Luke 9:7-9.

Mark 6:21 And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords,

and the high captains, and the chief men of Galilee;

[Herodias at length got her desire, winning by craft what had been denied to her importunities and blandishments ... (Smith 229).]

22 and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced,

she pleased Herod and them that sat at meat with him;

and the king said unto the damsel,

Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee.

23 And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom.

135:12.5 In celebration of his birthday Herod made a great feast in the Machaerian palace for his chief officers

and other men high in the councils of the government of Galilee and Perea.

Since Herodias had failed to bring about John's death by direct appeal to Herod, she now set herself to the task of having John put to death by cunning planning.

135:12.6 In the course of the evening's festivities and entertainment,

Herodias presented her daughter to dance before the banqueters.

Herod was very much pleased with the damsel's performance

and, calling her before him, said:

"You are charming. I am much pleased with you.

Ask me on this my birthday for whatever you desire, and I will give it to you,

even to the half of my kingdom."

[The young princess, a mere girl some seventeen years of age, was sent by her wicked mother into the banquet-chamber to entertain the wine-inflamed company by executing a lewd dance before their lascivious eyes (Smith 229).]

24 And she went out, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask?

And she said, The head of John the Baptist.

25 And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying,

I will that thou forthwith give me on a platter the head of John the Baptist.

26 And the king was exceeding sorry;

but for the sake of his oaths, and of them that sat at meat, he would not reject her.

27 And straightway the king sent forth a soldier of his guard, and commanded to bring his head:

and he went and beheaded him in the prison,

28 and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the damsel;

and the damsel gave it to her mother.

29 And when his disciples heard thereof,

And Herod did all this while

well under the influence of his many wines.

The young lady drew aside and inquired of her mother what she should ask of Herod.

Herodias said, "Go to Herod and ask for the head of John the Baptist."

And the young woman, returning to the banquet table, said to Herod,

"I request that you forthwith give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

135:12.7 Herod was filled with fear and sorrow,

but because of his oath and because of all those who sat at meat with him, he would not deny the request.

And Herod Antipas sent a soldier, commanding him to bring the head of John.

So was John that night beheaded in the prison,

the soldier bringing the head of the prophet on a platter and presenting it to the young woman

at the rear of the banquet hall.

And the damsel gave the platter to her mother.

When John's disciples heard of this,

they came and took up his corpse,

they came to the prison for the body of  
John,

and laid it in a tomb.

and after laying it in a tomb,

they went and told Jesus.

1. *Compare:* The only supernatural event associated with the birth of Jesus was this announcement to Ardnnon and his associates by the seraphim of former attachment to Adam and Eve in the first garden (119:7.6).

Gabriel's announcement to Mary was made the day following the conception of Jesus and was the only event of supernatural occurrence connected with her entire experience of carrying and bearing the child of promise (122:3.4).

2. *Compare:* The families of both Joseph and Mary were well educated for their time. Joseph and Mary were educated far above the average for their day and station in life (122:5.5).

3. **NAZIRITE** (AV **Nazarite**).— ... (5) Eusebius (*HE* ii. 23) appears to represent James the Just as a **lifelong Nazirite**: 'He was **holy** from his mother's womb. Wine and strong drink he drank not, neither did he eat flesh. A razor passed not over his head' (*Hastings' DB* 648).

4. Norwood was almost certainly referring to the Essenes, who were known to have had a colony near the Dead Sea. A 1921 article in the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, "Essenes and Apocalyptic Literature," by K. Kohler, mentions an "Essene colony at En-Gedi" (p. 163). (See Vol. 11, pp. 145-168). *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible* (1909) says, in the article on the Essenes: "So we find, possibly late in the 1st cent. B.C., the main group of Essenes colonizing near the Dead Sea, and constituting a true monastic order" (*HDB* 238).

Sadler turns the Essene brotherhood/colony into the Nazirite brotherhood, but such a brotherhood is not known to have existed. The Nazirites were individuals who took oaths but never became a sect or formed separate communities. Sadler mentions that the Engedi colony consisted of other groups and individuals besides the Nazarites, but, perhaps pointedly, doesn't name the Essenes. Some commentators have said that John the Baptist couldn't have been an Essene since the Essenes were vegetarians and John ate locusts.

The scenario of John's living for a time in a colony at En-gedi certainly comes from Norwood.

5. Toward the close of the year 25 A.D. the Jewish people were **deeply stirred**. A prophet had arisen ... (**Smith2** 31).

6. People in Bible times seem to have had no concept of "noon". See "Time in Bible Times," by Charles Francis Potter, in *Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada*, Vol. 35 (1941), p.163:

[http://articles.adsabs.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/nph-iarticle\\_query?journal=JRASC&year=1941&volume=..35&letter=.&b\\_key=AST&page\\_ind=185&data\\_type=GIF&type=SCREEN\\_GIF&classic=YES](http://articles.adsabs.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/nph-iarticle_query?journal=JRASC&year=1941&volume=..35&letter=.&b_key=AST&page_ind=185&data_type=GIF&type=SCREEN_GIF&classic=YES)

7. According to 136:2.3: Only the eyes of Jesus beheld the Personalized Adjuster.
8. He spent one week at Tiberias, the new city which was soon to succeed Sepphoris as the capital of Galilee; (129:1.2)