

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

Vol. XXXI

January 24, 2021

No. 04

The Other Messenger

By (Jerry Fite)

As the Old Testament closed, God’s prophet Malachi prophesied of the messenger that was to come. “Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me...” (Malachi 3:1a). In preparing the way before God, this messenger would be “the voice crying in the wilderness” to prepare all for the coming glory of God (Isaiah 40:3). John fulfilled this role as God broke His four-hundred-year silence with the cry: “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2).

John’s mission was to prepare people for the holy nature of the coming spiritual kingdom by turning hearts from sin in repentance and pointing their eyes in faith toward Jesus. Those who came to his baptism came not only “confessing their sins,” but clearly understood God’s demand to produce “the fruit of repentance” in a renewed commitment (Matthew 3:6, Luke 3:8-14). After he baptized Jesus, John exhorted people to “behold, the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). John’s voice was urging all to “...believe on Him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus” (Acts 19:4).

We are familiar with God’s messenger crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord, but

do we know the other messenger in Malachi’s prophecy? After prophesying of preparing the way before God, Malachi continues: “...and the Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom ye desire, behold, He cometh, saith Jehovah of hosts” (Malachi 3:1b).

John fulfilling his role as God’s messenger in pointing people to Jesus is also pointing to the other messenger of God in Malachi 3:1. This messenger would be “the Lord.” While the word “Lord” emphasizes “authority” and can denote a slave owner or a king in Scripture, Malachi seems to point to God. He, “the Lord,” will come suddenly to “His temple.” This would be the spiritual temple of Jehovah, which we understand as the “church” in the New Testament (cf. I Corinthians 3:16-17).

“The Lord” whom Malachi says we will seek, is also “the messenger of the covenant” whom we desire. Jesus as mediator of a “new covenant,” with the promise of an eternal inheritance, established an eternal covenant “of peace” between God and His people (cf. Hebrews 9:15, 13:20).

Malachi’s prophecy helps us understand that John’s mission was to be fulfilled as he and Jesus interacted at the same time. It was not

that John lives, fulfills his prophetic mission, dies and later Jesus appears. John physically baptized Jesus; He physically saw Jesus; and He physically pointed to Jesus for others to behold with their eyes.

Recognizing the two messengers illuminates what is occurring when Jesus is reported to be “baptizing more disciples than John” (John 4:1). Jesus was not taking over John’s work in baptizing for John was alive, and not yet imprisoned (cf. John 3:24). To assume that Jesus through His disciples, who were doing the baptizing, were baptizing with the baptism of John needs to be proven, for it is not necessarily implied. Baptizing disciples occurred, but were they made followers of John? Were they made John’s disciples when baptized in the presence of Jesus, the one in whom they were to believe?

While united with John, Jesus’ distinct mission was to declare “the covenant,” God’s eternal promise. Jesus’ disciples were not baptizing in the name of the lord, for Jesus had not yet died and arose. Jesus and His disciples, through the connotation of “relationship” in baptism may have been taking the next step in the preparatory process of people believing upon Jesus. John explains the baptizing issue by saying, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (Jn. 3:22-30).