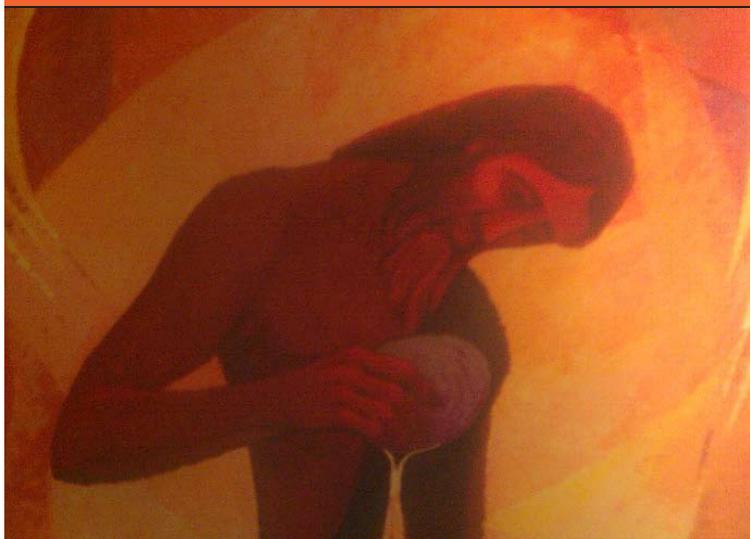


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THE LORD IS GRACIOUS

AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY INTO THE LIFE
AND MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

BY
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“I tell you, among those born of women there is no-one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he.”
(Luke 7:28)

In exploring the Gospel accounts relating to the life and ministry of John the Baptist, I understand that there are three main areas of significance for followers of Jesus, to reflect upon. I will begin by looking at these three areas and will conclude with some wider reflections relating to the nature of John’s baptismal ministry and his possible links with the Essenes at Qumran.

FIRSTLY, JOHN THE BAPTIST IS THE KEY LINK BETWEEN THE OLD TESTAMENT (TANAKH) AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

In trying to understand both the essential continuity and the elements of discontinuity within the revelation of the Bible, there is no better place to focus than on the life and ministry of John the Baptist, which provides a catalyst for exploring the Scriptures with an emphasis on both the New Covenant Age (the Kingdom) which is coming into reality through the ministry of Jesus and God’s on-going faithfulness (continuity) to all His past covenantal promises.

Even a casual reader of the Gospel accounts will see clearly the important role of John the Baptist. John is introduced early in all four Gospel accounts (Matthew 3:1, Mark 1:4, Luke 1:13 and John 1:6). In Matthew, John the Baptist is introduced in the context of marking the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. This follows Matthew’s birth narratives which contain his unique Gospel material relating to the visit of the Magi, Herod’s massacre of the innocents, the escape of Jesus to sanctuary in Egypt and His return (following Herod’s death) to Nazareth. In Mark, John the Baptist is introduced immediately in the opening verses (Mark has no birth narratives) following the opening quotation from the prophet Isaiah. Only in Luke’s Gospel is John the Baptist introduced in the context of the birth narratives, as Luke records the foretelling of John’s birth, Mary’s visit to Elizabeth and Zechariah’s song of praise. In John’s Gospel, John the Baptist is introduced in the context of the ‘prologue’ (1:1–18) which sets the scene for understanding the purpose of Jesus’ coming into the world and the mystery, glory and

wonder of the incarnation, namely; “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...” (John 1:14).

In terms of Luke’s account I think it is particularly important to see that John the Baptist is not simply preparing the way for Jesus with regard to making public pronouncements, but rather there is the celebrating and exploring of the link woven between Jesus and John the Baptist, which goes right back to the time of their conception and birth. It is as if the lives of Jesus and John the Baptist are entwined tightly together into a fabric of family, ministry and message. It is particularly moving to see how God provides practical support for Mary in coming to an acceptance of her role, via her extended family and specifically the example of Elizabeth’s own ‘surprising’ pregnancy. I suggest it is the reality of Elizabeth’s pregnancy which enables Mary to come confidently to the place where she can joyfully proclaim; “I am the Lord’s servant... May it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38). Such faith and trust is repeated later at the climax of the Gospel narrative when Jesus makes a similar statement while praying on the Mount of Olives; “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

These four different yet complementary introductions to John the Baptist from the four Gospel writers all affirm the sense that the Lord is doing a new thing, yet this newness, this move of God, this pioneering revelation must be securely linked to the promises of the past. The new thing the Lord is doing does not cause a radical severing from the past, but rather affirms and invites many to enter into God’s faithful continuity. This new thing flows and grows from the past faithfulness of the Lord to His covenant people.

It is as if the life and ministry of John the Baptist can only be properly understood when seen in the context of the mighty acts of God which have gone before. This is why all four Gospel writers, while focusing on the life and ministry of John the Baptist, give a number of specific quotes from Old Testament (the Tanakh) texts and alluding to many others. For example, Isaiah 40:3, Isaiah 4:4, Isaiah 9:7, Joel 2:28–32, Malachi 3:1, Malachi 4:1–6, and Numbers 24:17. In addition to these direct Scriptural quotes and allusions we can see the continuity in many other ways. For example firstly, Zechariah’s song (Luke 1:67–79) is full of references back to God’s faithfulness, mention is given to salvation being raised up in the house of David, the holy prophets

of old and the covenantal oath given to our father Abraham. Secondly, John the Baptist is presented as taking on the mantle of Elijah¹ and by so doing fulfilling Malachi 4:5 (Matthew 17:9–13, Mark 9:9–13 and Luke 1:17). Thirdly, John the Baptist in proclaiming the ministry of Jesus, does so by drawing from Old Testament motifs such as the pre-eminence of Jesus (John 1:15) and especially Jesus as the true sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:29). This links back to Genesis 22:8, Exodus 12:21, Isaiah 53:7 and forward to what New Testament writers such as Paul would declare in 1 Corinthians 5:7, Peter in 1 Peter 1:19 and John in Revelation 5:12, 14:4, 19:9 and 21:23.

It is also worth noting with regard to continuity, that in terms of the ordering of the Biblical books in most Bibles² the book of Malachi is the final book in the Old Testament. Following the book of Malachi there was a period of about 400 years of silence with regard to Biblical revelation. Malachi is regarded by most scholars as the final prophet of the Old Testament era³. Therefore, for most people reading through the Bible, the final revelation of the Old Testament presents to them a longing for and a questioning about the coming Day of the Lord, the prophet Elijah and the promise of restoration of fathers to their children. A longing and a questioning which is then addressed as the Gospels are read and the account of the life and ministry of John the Baptist is given. In this way his life and ministry is seen as the next vital link in the chain of revelation which leads across the centuries towards the person and work of Jesus.

This vital link provides the sense of continuity, which is affirmed by Jesus Himself when He refers to John the Baptist as “the greatest man born of a woman” (referring to the age prior to the Kingdom/Gospel) but also Jesus stresses the discontinuity, namely the least in the Kingdom (referring to those born again by the Spirit of Jesus⁴) is greater than John the Baptist (Luke 7:28/ Matthew 11:11).

SECONDLY, JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY FOR THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

The immediate context of Isaiah’s prophetic declaration (Isaiah 40:3–5) was that before a great King made a journey the road/highway he was to travel would be improved. There are a number of historical records of such work

taking place in the Near-East, as roads were levelled, re-surfaced and drained. John the Baptist takes this declaration and uses it as a metaphor for his ministry, namely doing all he could to prepare the people for the arrival of the Messiah. The main focus of ‘getting ready’ and ‘preparing the way’ would be in terms of helping people to make Godly moral and spiritual decisions. Such decisions would then be marked by ‘baptism’ and accompanied by radical acts of repentance, justice and mercy. The message of John the Baptist was a message for all the people, yet there appear to be specific groups (tax collectors and soldiers – Luke 3:12–14) who are singled out in terms of their engagement with his teaching. Such groups of people may well have been considered by the ‘religious elite’ to be way beyond the scope of God’s redemptive purposes, yet such groups are not only specifically addressed in the ministry of John the Baptist but they regularly appear at key points in the outworking of the Gospel narrative. For example, tax collectors as recorded in Matthew 9:9–13 (Mark 2:14–17/Luke 5:27–32) Luke 18:9–15 and Luke 19:1–10 and soldiers (centurions) in Matthew 8:5–13 (Luke 7:1–10), Matthew 27:54 (Mark 15:39/Luke 23:47), Acts 10 and Acts 27:43.

For John the Baptist the message of Isaiah in terms of preparing the way also has an eschatological reality. The ‘highway passage’ of Isaiah 40 has connections with the ‘highway passage’ of Isaiah 19 which is clearly set in the day of the Lord’s reign, a reign marked by former enemies (Egypt, Assyria and Israel) being united in friendship, loyalty and a shared allegiance to the Lord. The preparation of the highway in Isaiah’s prophecies is in order to prepare for the Messiah’s arrival and the establishing of the Messianic Kingdom/reign.

Crowds of people (Luke 3:7) came out to the desert regions around the river Jordan/Judean wilderness and asked their questions in response to the message of John the Baptist, namely the question, “What shall we do?” (Luke 3:10). This question has echoes with Acts 2:37, where Luke records the people’s response to Peter’s preaching following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Many people responded to the call of John the Baptist and he acquired a group of disciples. The ‘success’ of the ministry of John the Baptist can be seen both by the fact that these disciples continued aspects of his ministry and kept in contact with him, even after his imprisonment by Herod (Luke 8:18-23) and by the fact that many years later and far away from the Jordan valley, there was a group of disciples who’s baptismal identity was found in the baptism of John (Acts 19:3).

Yet for John the Baptist his purpose was not to build up his own influence or his own group of disciples, but rather to point to and help people prepare to meet Jesus. John's ministry was a ministry of preparation and his 'baptism' was meant to be provisional. John the Baptist directs people to Jesus, firstly by stating his own role and also by stating who he is not. John the Baptist declares, when asked by the Levites and Priests, "I am not the Christ." (John 1:20). Clearly there was much Messianic expectation around John the Baptist, for example Luke 3:15 states, "The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ." Secondly, John the Baptist does this by referring to and testifying about who Jesus is. This testimony reaches its climax at the 'baptism' of Jesus where John the Baptist declares that Jesus is both the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) and that He is the Son of God (John 1:34).

John the Baptist prepares the way for the ministry of Jesus by primarily encouraging the people to be ready to receive Him as the Messiah. However John the Baptist also prepares for the forthcoming ministry of Jesus by ministering to Him directly. As stated earlier⁵ John the Baptist does this indirectly through his conception and birth which provides a framework for supporting Mary the mother of Jesus. However, his direct ministry also occurs through the act of the 'baptism' of Jesus. Each of the Gospels give an account of this event (Matthew 3:13–17, Mark 1:9–11, Luke 3:21–23 and John 1:29–34) although in John's Gospel the detail of the actual 'baptism' are not directly reported, emphasis is rather placed upon John's testimony regarding the identity of Jesus. In all four accounts the role of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus is given central focus and in three accounts, excluding John⁶, the descent of the Spirit is linked to the voice from heaven⁷ declaring the love of God the Father for Jesus the Son.

It is only in Matthew's account that mention is explicitly given to John's concern about the appropriateness of him baptising Jesus. Yet Jesus reassures him using the phrase "to fulfil all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15). In all accounts the 'baptism' which John the Baptist administers to Jesus, marks the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. This public ministry will be marked primarily by Jesus' Kingdom preaching, healing (including deliverance) and the calling of a group of disciples. However in Matthew, Mark and Luke, prior to the commencement of this public ministry, Jesus faces the time of

temptation in the wilderness. The wilderness for both Jesus and John the Baptist is far more than a place to retreat to; it is seen as a place of significant spiritual warfare, a place of conflict and struggle. At the heart of this time of testing for Jesus is the issue of His own unique identity as God's Son (Matthew 3:3 and 3:6) which was of course the very issue confirmed by the declaration at the 'baptism'.

THIRDLY, JOHN THE BAPTIST PROVIDES A MODEL FOR OUR OWN PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP

As we explore the life and ministry of John the Baptist we see much which inspires and directs our own discipleship. Firstly, John provides an example of commitment and courage. Throughout his prophetic ministry, his commitment and courage is clear to see, but perhaps most significantly we see this as he faces death courageously following his conflict with Herod (Matthew 14:1–12/Mark 6:14–29). Also his commitment and courage is shown in his willingness in the first place to confront the powerful ruler Herod about his relationship with Herodias. This type of relationship (Herodias was married to Herod's brother who was still alive) was forbidden by the Torah (Leviticus 18). It was this confrontation which led finally to the execution of John the Baptist.

Secondly, John the Baptist wrestles with doubts. For us as disciples of Jesus, it is important to realise that doubts are not the opposite of faith (the opposite of faith is unbelief). As John the Baptist's ministry is truncated by his imprisonment (Luke 7:18–30) he begins to question the Messianic ministry of Jesus (Luke 7:19). Some commentators suggest that this questioning does not indicate significant doubts, but rather it is better understood as John the Baptist's attempt to spur Jesus on to greater or more public ministry which will lead to the downfall of oppressors such as Herod. I do not find this line of interpretation convincing. For me the most straightforward interpretation is that John did have doubts at times. This is quite natural to the life of faith (especially as John the Baptist lingers in Herod's prison) and maybe it is an important lesson for us to recognise and work through our doubts, rather than to suppress or deny their existence.

Thirdly, John the Baptist has an authentic lifestyle which connects with his ministry role. While probably very few would feel called to take on aspects of the lifestyle of John the Baptist, nevertheless we see through the example of John the Baptist this clear connection between ministry and lifestyle. Matthew 3:4 tells firstly of his clothing, namely camel hair (not fine wool) and a leather belt (not an ornate waistband) which identifies him with the poor (also the belt probably links to Elijah). Secondly the focus is on his diet, namely locusts⁸ and wild honey⁹. Again such foods were traditionally associated with the poor and those on the margins of society. In this I suggest the key point is John the Baptist realises that in order to confront the powerful establishment with his message he needed to maintain a distance from the centres of power. He chooses to live in the wilderness in his simple way, in order to be devoted to his ministry and to be able to communicate his message without the trappings of human power and religious status. His simple and perhaps austere lifestyle (Luke 7:33) has resonated with aspects of Christian monasticism down through the ages. However, I suggest the key point for us is that whatever the specifics of our lifestyles may or may not be, our faith, ministry, message and lifestyle should be intertwined. There must be authenticity in our discipleship which demands a holistic approach and not fragmented choices and disconnected values.

Fourthly, and perhaps most significantly, John the Baptist declares the most poignant goal for all disciples, namely; “He (Jesus) must become greater, I must become less.” (John 3:30). In all Christian ministries the aim should be to present and make known the person and work of Jesus. Sadly, some ministries are undermined by personal need for affirmation, misplaced ego and selfish agendas. John the Baptist shows the need to know one’s role and one’s special calling, but always within this self-understanding to have a central focus on Jesus. The lurking temptation for most of us is to grasp for ourselves the role and calling belonging to someone else and to seek to make ourselves central and indispensable. Jesus Himself shows the perfect understanding of and attitude towards exercising genuine ministry; “Who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance of a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:6–8)

SOME WIDER REFLECTION ON THE NATURE OF JOHN'S BAPTISMAL MINISTRY AND POSSIBLE LINKS WITH THE ESSENES AT QUMRAN

Firstly what is happening in John's baptismal ministry and how does this relate to John's baptism of Jesus? The Greek word "baptizien" is translated as baptism (or to baptise) in most English Bible texts. The term means to dip/soak/ or immerse into a liquid. The purpose of this act is either to cleanse that which is immersed, or that the object immersed into the liquid will take on the qualities of the liquid, for example, the process of dying cloth or tanning leather. Later in Christian tradition the practice of baptism¹⁰ in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19) was the sign (sacrament) which pointed to a person's commitment to enter into the New Covenant community, to repent from their sin and to place their trust in Jesus as Saviour, Messiah and Lord.

In the Old Testament period baptism/immersion in water was a key part of the many ritual purity laws (Exodus 29:4, Leviticus 15, Numbers 19:13 and Mark 7:9). Many special pools/ritual baths (mikvot) were constructed for this purpose. Ritual purity could be lost for a host of reasons and special care was needed before entering the Temple (or Tabernacle) as one needed to be ritually pure, hence the many mikvot around the southern walls of Temple area (it was probably these mikvot which provided the water for the mass baptisms which took place on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2).

Ritual washing could also mark a particular decision, such as a religious vow or embarking on a pilgrimage journey. From the Christian perspective it is important to understand that the washing is not primarily in response to ethical failings (sin), it is not necessary linked to repentance, but it is linked to ritual (cultic) laws. Today many Jewish people continue with a range of mikveh practices and the Talmud and other rabbinical writings have much material on such practices. Maybe an understanding of this mikveh tradition sheds some light upon the practice of John the Baptist and New Testaments texts, such as John 13:6–11 and Hebrews 13:4.

Probably John the Baptist in his ministry is taking the mikveh practice and 're-casting' it in terms of marking an ethical/spiritual decision. Namely, the

decision to mark the desire to be cleansed from sin in order to flee from God's coming judgement and to be made ready to welcome the Messiah and be restored back into God's covenantal purposes . If this is the case, the baptism of John is the key stepping-stone in evolving aspects of Jewish practice, which takes one from regular ritual purity washings to a once-and-for-all baptismal sacrament. A sacrament rooted in a sense of present election and future hope through the person and work of Jesus.

In the baptism of Jesus clearly there is the concern of the appropriateness of the act of baptism if it is seen as a turning away, or a cleansing from, sin as Jesus is sinless. Traditional Christian responses to this concern normally focus on the idea that in order to 'fulfil righteousness' Jesus identified Himself with human sinfulness and therefore submits to baptism, both to mark the beginning of His public ministry and to provide an example for His future followers. Also in this understanding of 'fulfilling righteousness' it is as if in the baptism of Jesus, the whole of creation was in some sense sanctified and re-orientated to God. This idea was developed in part by Gregory of Nazianzen¹¹ who, in reflecting upon the baptism of Jesus, states; "As Christ came up out of the waters, uplifting the whole world, he saw the heavens opened that Adam had shut for himself and for all his race." Such traditional responses and associated reflections may well be helpful, but in understanding the mikveh tradition, it would also be worth exploring the idea that this 'baptism' is far better understood in the context of an act of dedication, or consecration which marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry alongside some form of ritual anointing of Jesus as the true Messiah with an emphasis on His key ministry roles as Prophet, Priest and King.

With regard to this idea that baptism equals an anointing, there have been further suggestions. For example one intriguing thesis is that John the Baptist should be understood as functioning in the role of High Priest. The thesis is based on the view that the High Priestly office had been so corrupted and 'politicised' that the official office of High Priest ceased to have any true spiritual authority in the eyes of John the Baptist and others. Certainly there was corruption within Temple practices and appointments; this was especially rife in the Ptolemaic period (305–30 BC) with the power struggles between the Oniads and the Tobiads. For example, according to Old Testament teaching the office of High Priest should have been passed down the generations

through one distinct family line. This was not the case, for during the period of 37BC until the destruction of the Temple, Josephus names 28 different High Priests and it appears from John 11:51 that in some cases the office of High Priest was an annual appointment. This thesis then leads to the view that if proper Torah arrangements had been followed in regard to Temple practices and priestly appointments then John the Baptist would have in fact been the High Priest following the death of his father, Zechariah. It is worth noting in this context that John the Baptist was also of priestly descent from the line of Aaron. Therefore, based on this line of reasoning this anointing/baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist should really have taken place in the Temple (with John the Baptist functioning as High Priest) as a sign to all Israel of the Messianic ministry of Jesus rather than in the 'exile' of the Judean wilderness.

Secondly, is there a link between the ministry of John the Baptist and the community of the Essenes at Qumran? The Essenes were a strict Jewish religious sect which had its origin in around 150 BC and their reaction against the corruption, as they saw, in the priestly community. Qumran is a remote area some 15 miles south of Jericho on the western bank of the Dead Sea. It was here that an Essene settlement was established. Their occupancy of the site was broken by a major earthquake in 31 BC but they resettled and it grew in size until its destruction by the Roman army in 68 AD. The Essene community produced the manuscripts known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered in 1947.

Otto Betz¹² has proposed the thesis that John the Baptist grew up in the community of the Essenes at Qumran, but left in order to share his prophetic calling with a much wider audience. Betz argues that John the Baptist eventually found that the enclosed, strict and sectarian nature of the Essenes restricted the development of his universal message. It is clear from the Biblical texts that John the Baptist was giving to all who came to him the opportunity to repent and to be baptised (including those traditionally excluded from religious life such as tax collectors and Roman soldiers). This sense of being able to choose implies free will which would have been disputed by the separatist Essenes who developed a theology rooted in very narrow understandings of predestination and election.

On what does Betz present his thesis? Firstly Betz cites the fact that the Essenes were often in the habit of adopting children into their community. This fact is affirmed by Josephus and leads to the idea that following the death of the parents of John the Baptist, John was taken to be cared for by the Essenes.

Thirdly, Betz cites the similarities between the Essenes and John the Baptist. Namely both are operating in the same small geographical area (the Judean wilderness) at the same time and they appear to share a theological worldview based on a distrust of the Jerusalem Temple elite, the desire to combine the priestly with the prophetic Scriptures, the need for repentance, ritual purification and holy simplistic living. All of this is then wrapped up in an imminent eschatological vision drawing from the Biblical prophets, a Biblical prophetic vision which has a strong emphasis on an elect group and a faithful remnant (the new Israel) within Israel. Also John the Baptist is seen as reminiscent of Elijah and he is seeking to use Isaiah 40:3 as his 'mission statement', while the Essenes also took the very same text¹³ as their call to withdraw from the wider community and set up their own separate community as an eschatological sign.

In regard to ritual purification there are many mikvot found at Qumran, but there also appears to be in the Essenes teaching¹⁴ a strong emphasis that ritual purity must always be linked to personal repentance and holy living. In this the parallels with the ministry and message of John the Baptist are striking. Another parallel would be that the Essenes also practiced fasting and liturgical prayer and these two religious practices were particularly noteworthy in the disciples of John the Baptist (Mark 2:18 and Luke 11:1).

Clearly there are some striking parallels, but these certainly do not add up to taking the position of affirming an explicit connection between John the Baptist and the Essenes. Against this connection one may suggest the following; firstly in the description of the ministry of John the Baptist given by Josephus there is no mention of a link to Qumran or the Essenes. Secondly early Christian sources speak of John the Baptist growing up in and around Ain Karim and there is no mention of a link to Qumran. Thirdly, there is no mention of this link in the Gospel accounts of John the Baptist. Clearly an argument from silence is not compelling but it is worth noting.

I think the view of Shimon Gibson on this point probably best sums up my current understanding of the possible link between John the Baptist and the Essenes, Gibson states, “When John took up his mission and descended to the lower Jordan River region, it is most likely that he would have been fully aware of the existence of the sect of the Essenes, their teaching and the situation of their settlement. He may even have had the hope that some of the Essene community members might feel inclined to leave Qumran and join up with his movement instead. But there is absolutely no evidence that John himself was an Essene or that he had lived with them either early on in his life or as an adult.”¹⁵

As stated above I find Gibson’s summing up of this point very helpful; however it is worth noting that Gibson takes a different path to the one I take regarding the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus. Gibson sees that John the Baptist expected Jesus to be one of his protégés¹⁶ and John’s questioning of Jesus (Luke 7:19) reflects, according to Gibson, John’s disillusionment with Jesus in as much as Jesus had turned away from John’s teachings and his baptismal practices and had most significantly sought to establish His own group of disciples¹⁷. I find no evidence for this line of reasoning or textual interpretation presented by Gibson and clearly such reasoning fails to fit in with the Biblical texts.

All of the above opens up areas of interesting speculation and such speculation is often widened to include the question; what if any link did Jesus and His disciples have with the Essenes? Again we enter the world of speculation. Clearly if one thinks John the Baptist had a strong link with the Essenes then this would add weight to the idea that Jesus may have also had a similar link. I am aware of the suggestion that the man identified in Luke 22:10 is in fact an Essene community member¹⁸ and therefore the Passover meal celebrated by Jesus and His immediate disciples takes place in rooms belonging to the Essene community in Jerusalem.

I think however, rather than focusing on one or two possible specific links, it is better to focus on a wider point, namely that the narrative of Israel (the journey from exile to restoration and the true fulfilling of Torah hope), as told by the preaching of Paul and many other followers of Jesus, is a narrative which has echoes with other ‘new-covenant’ movements and other Jewish

eschatological sects of the Second Temple period of which the Essenes at Qumran are a prime example¹⁹.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is clear that John the Baptist (and of course Jesus and His disciples) grew up and was influenced by and responded to real historical and social contexts. One can say with confidence that John the Baptist would have encountered ideas and individuals from the Temple priests, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, Zealots, Roman soldiers, Herod's court and the Essenes to name but a few. His ministry must be initially understood in its immediate historical context, but his significance also goes far beyond this context. The life and ministry of John the Baptist contains a message for us today, a message which helps us appreciate the link between the Old and New Testaments, a message which points us to Jesus and a message which ultimately can help and equip us in our own radical and costly journeys as disciples of Jesus.

FOR FURTHER STUDY AND REFLECTION

- i. Read and reflect upon the Gospel references relating to the ministry of John the Baptist
- ii. Read some of the following background books

Dapaah Daniel, *The Relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus*, University Press of America, 2005.

Dunn James, *Christianity in the Making – Jesus Remembered (Vol 1)*, Eerdmans, 2003.

Feinberg John (Ed), *Continuity and Discontinuity*, Crossway Books, 1988.

Ferguson Everett, *Baptism in the Early Church*, Eerdmans, 2009.

Gibson Shimon, *The Cave of John the Baptist*, Arrow Books, 2005.

Sandmel Samuel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*, Oxford University Press, 1978.

Scott Julius J Jr, *Jewish Background of the New Testament*, Baker Books, 1995.

Taylor Joan E, *The Essenes, the Scrolls and the Dead Sea*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Wright N T, *The New Testament and the People of God*, SPCK, 1992.

Paul and the Faithfulness of God, SPCK, 2013.

1. Also some New Testament commentators suggest Elijah is one of the two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11:3.
2. In the ordering of the Tanakh in Jewish circles the final book is 2 Chronicles not Malachi. This is because Jewish sources use the threefold order of Scripture (Law/ Prophets/writings) dating from the time of Ezra while Christian sources use a fourfold order of Scripture dating from the earliest known Greek manuscripts of the Tanakh
3. Some scholars argue that the prophet Joel is slightly later.
4. See John 3:3–15.
5. See paragraph 3 of this paper.
6. In John's account it is John the Baptist who gives witness to Jesus as God's Son.
7. The voice from heaven occurs three times within key moments in the ministry of Jesus, here in the baptism, at the transfiguration (Mark 9:7) and later as Jesus prepares for His crucifixion (John 12:28). Also the link with the voice (of the Father), the Spirit and Jesus the Son gives momentum to understanding God as Trinity.
8. Leviticus 11 mentions four types of locusts which may be treated as kosher and therefore eaten.
9. Probably date palm honey(there are no bees in the Jordanian desert) which was plentiful from the oasis areas around Jericho
10. For further study on the meaning of Christian baptism see question 31 in The Bible Student – Fifty key themes explored through the Bible, edited by Peter Sammons, published by Glory to Glory publications, 2012.
11. Gregory of Nazianzen was a leading theologian of the early Church (4th Century) and was Archbishop of Constantinople.
12. Otto Betz, Was John the Baptist an Essene? Biblical Review Journal, Dec 1990.
13. See the Essenes Manual of Discipline/community rule 8:12-16

14. See the Essenes Manual of Discipline/community rule 2:24-25 and 3:3-6
15. Shimon Gibson, *The Cave of John the Baptist*, page 149.
16. Shimon Gibson, *The Cave of John the Baptist*, page 189.
17. Shimon Gibson, *The Cave of John the Baptist*, page 184.
18. This suggestion is that this man was an Essene “monk” and only a monk would be carrying water as normally this was women’s work. So it is argued the reference to a man carrying water is really a well known code for an Essene. Also some suggest that if the Passover was at an Essene guest house then clearly the celebration would have taken place following the Essenes calendar. This calendar is slightly different from the main Jewish calendar and this fact may shed some light upon the dating of events towards the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus.
19. For a fuller discussion of this point see N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (part 3) published by SPCK, especially the section on ‘the eschatological challenge of redefined election’, pages 1128-1257.

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