

The Appointed Times II John the Baptist #1

Michael Heiss—October 18, 2016

I want to partially answer a request concerning Hebrew. This is not exactly a short lesson in Hebrew, but when you understand the tenses in Hebrew, you can better understand the Scriptures.

Jeremiah 31:11: “For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of the one stronger than he.” Jeremiah was prophesying about the time of the fall of the second temple, and even early in the days of Josiah. Had God fully redeemed Israel at that time? *No! Yet, He says that He did!* How do you square that?

Isaiah 43:1: “But now, thus says the LORD Who created you, O Jacob, and He Who formed you, O Israel; ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; you *are* Mine.’”

How is it that God could say, ‘I have redeemed you,’ when obviously He hadn’t? In reality, it is in the understanding of the Hebrew and the mind of God using the tenses of Hebrew.

The Apostle Paul was a rabbi; he was trained in rabbinic lore; he understood all this. He gives us the answer in the book of Romans.

Romans 4:17: “(Exactly as it is written: ‘I have made you a father of many nations.’) before God in Whom he believed, Who gives life to the dead, and calls the things that are not as though they are.” God can call something that does not exist as though it does.

In Hebrew we have two tenses; in English we have more: present tense, past tense, present perfect, past perfect, future perfect; I do, I did, I have done, I shall have done. In Hebrew we don’t have that. We have two and one two tenses that corresponds to the present and the past; to be more specific: imperfect and perfect, meaning *action on-going*, *action not completed*. That’s the present, the imperfect. Perfect means *action completed, it’s done!*

The difficulty in reading the Bible in English is that where it is clearly in the past, you don’t know if the Hebrew is addressing *past tense* or beyond that *past perfect*. So, you read where So and So did something, but you don’t know if it was a simple past, or if had done it before something else. That’s why it’s a little frustrating sometimes in understanding the order.

But in the Hebrew you simply have those two tenses. God is so powerful and strong, and so in control of things, that He can express the thought in the perfect tense completed, even though it may be another 2, 3, 4, 5 thousand years before He finally does it.

Have you ever given an assignment to somebody, asking them to do something for you? Sometimes the person will say, ‘Consider it done!’ He hadn’t done it, yet; but consider it done. Well, with God, trust me, *consider it done, because there’s nothing that’s going to stop Him! There is no power in heaven or on earth that going to prevent Him from doing what He says He’s going to do!*

Only God, by the way, can pull this off! He’s the only One Who can do this. He can express Himself of thought that has not yet been completed, and yet, write it as though it had been completed. He has the power! So sure is it going to be that you know it’s going to be done.

That’s just a little introduction or insight into the Hebrew, and how you understand those verses in Jeremiah and Isaiah. It’s what the rabbis call the ‘prophetic perfect.’ God’s prophesying something that has not yet been done, but writing it in the past tense as though it had been done; *with God consider it done!*

With that we’re going to continue on with *the appointed times*, in particular concerning John the Baptist. Sometimes I don’t always realize how important and how great a man John the Baptist was. In fact, Jesus said, ‘Of men born of women there was none greater than John the Baptist.’ There’s a reason for that. We’re going to see some things that maybe we haven’t seen before.

Luke 1:5: “There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest of *the* course of Abijah... [the 8th course; the priests were divided into 24 courses and Abijah was #8] ...Zacharias by name; and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elizabeth.”

Not only was Zacharias of the lineage of Aaron, but we find that his wife Elizabeth was of the lineage of Aaron.

Verse 6: “Now, they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord.” I

submit to you, that's not said of very many people, yet, God said it of Zacharias and Elizabeth. This is very similar to what God said concerning Abraham.

This was after Abraham was dead, and God is conferring/talking with Isaac; Genesis 26:1: "And there was a famine in the land (besides the *former* famine that had been in the days of Abraham). And Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, to Gerar. And the LORD appeared to him and said, 'Do not go down into Egypt. Live in the land, which I shall tell you of. Stay in this land, and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your seed, I will give all these lands; and I will establish the oath, which I swore to Abraham your father'" (vs 1-3).

Remember when God made that oath absolutely certain, when He commanded Abraham to slay his own son Isaac? Then when Abraham was about to do it God stopped him and He said, 'Now I know, Abraham, that you are faithful and loyal. In blessing I will bless you. I swear by myself. There's no greater authority that He could use except Himself. So, He made it absolutely certain. This is what He's referring to. "...the oath, which I swore to Abraham your father."

Verse 4: "And I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and will give to your seed all these lands. And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, **because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws**" (vs 4-5).

Abraham did all that, and in reality so did Zacharias and Elizabeth. This was a remarkable couple. But, even though they walked blamelessly in all the commandments of the Lord:

Luke 1:7: "But they did not have a child, as Elizabeth was barren; and both were *well* advanced in age."

According to the records, being advanced in age or agedness began at age 60. If you're not yet age 60 you were not considered advanced in years or elderly. People didn't live as long in those days, as we live today through certain health procedures and even medical procedures for that matter. So, they were probably in their 60s—somewhere between 60 and 70. That's a guess! Conceivably they could have been in their early 70s. I don't think so, but you never know.

They were childless; v 8: "And it came to pass *that* in fulfilling his priestly service before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priestly service, it fell to him by lot to burn incense when he entered into the temple of the Lord" (vs 8-9).

This is very interesting, because only if the

lot fell to you would you burn incense at the altar. It's also a fact that only once in a lifetime as a priest could you do this. Only once! If you had already done it because the lot fell to you, that was it, you were out of the running, so to speak. You couldn't win the lotto anymore.

Think of what this means. Think of the plan of God and remember that He's a strategic thinker. God had to work it out so that the lot never fell to Zacharias before this time. Otherwise, Zacharias would not have been in the temple offering incense when God was going to send His angel Gabriel to announce the birth of John the Baptist. It couldn't have worked out.

So, whether God did it directly, or gave charge to the angels to make sure that the lot never fell on Zacharias. As I said, God has His plan. He knows what He's doing!

Zacharias lived in the hill country of Judea. We find because Mary had just received her annunciation from Gabriel and she rose up to visit Elizabeth. Remember, they're relatives. Elizabeth is the aunt and Mary is the niece. They are blood relatives.

Verse 39: "And Mary rose up in those days *and* went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth" (vs 39-40).

This was far from rich gated communities. There was a section in Jerusalem where many priests lived, but they were the 'chief mucky-mucks.' These were the rich priests, the well-to-do, we'll-connected, wealthy priests. Zacharias was not one of them. The other great center for priests was Jericho. Many priests lived in Jericho and also were well-to-do. It was a very influential priestly city, but Zacharias didn't live there.

God says that He chooses the weaker to confound the wise and the powerful. God chose... We don't want to call him a 'hillbilly.' But to use some phrases, he was:

- a rustic priest
- a plain priest
- a log-cabin priest

He was a simple priest; God called him! None of the other priests, because God knew the heart of Zacharias.

Now that we have some of the background of Zacharias and Elizabeth, let's to look what God said is going to be the destiny of John the Baptist.

We have Zacharias about to offer the incense, and it says, v 11: "Then an angel of *the* Lord appeared to him, standing at *the* right side of

the altar of incense. And when he saw *the angel*, Zacharias was troubled, and fear fell upon him” (vs 11-12).

Remember, you’re supposed to be all alone in that part of the temple. You and you alone, nobody else is allowed in there. You’re going to offer incense and all of a sudden there’s this bright shiny being standing in front of you. Your mouth would drop open. You would be a little fearful, too.

Verse 13: “But the angel said to him, ‘Fear not, Zacharias, because your supplication has been heard; and your wife Elizabeth shall bear a son to you, and you shall call his name John.’”

What does this first tell us? *Having a son had been on John’s mind*, probably to the extent that it was on Abraham’s mind wishing for and desiring a son, obviously. It says, “...your supplication has been heard...” God heard Zacharias’ prayer. Who knows how many times Zacharias prayed. Remember, they were probably married 20-30 years earlier. For 30 years or so they had been suffering without a child. In those days it was a real reproach if you were a married woman without a child.

In today’s world there are women who say, ‘A kid! Ahhh! Who wants a kid, they just get in the way. I want my career.’ Not back then at all!

Verse 14: “And he... [the coming John the Baptist] ...shall be a joy and exultation to you; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For **he shall be great** before the Lord...” (vs 14-15).

How many people in the Bible do you know of whom it is said, “...he shall be great before the Lord...” It doesn’t mean great before kings, before the wise of this world. But really who cares about them? *God is the One Who counts!* This angel is saying that John the Baptist “...shall be great before the Lord...”

“...And he shall never drink wine or strong drink in any form...” (v 15). We’re going to stop there and realize that this is part of the Nazarite vow. Whether John was fully under the Nazarite vow in every sense of the word, I’m not sure. Let’s take a look at that vow:

Numbers 6:1: “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, “When a man (or woman) shall separate *himself* in order to vow the vow of a Nazarite, in order to separate *himself* to the LORD, he shall separate from wine and strong drink and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink; neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes or dried. All the days of his consecration he shall eat nothing that is made of the grapevine, from grape seeds even to a stem. All the

days of his vow to separate, no razor shall come upon his head...”” (vs 1-5).

Now, we don’t know if that part was true of John the Baptist. Maybe yes, maybe no. I’m not here to say, I’m not prepared to say, because God doesn’t tell us. But clearly, John was dedicated all the days of consecration. Remember, even from before his birth he was consecrated to God—***in the womb, at birth and for a little over 30 years, his entire life was consecrated to God!***

Of those born of women, that cannot be said of anyone else, except possibly—if we understand it correctly—the prophet Jeremiah. God did say to Jeremiah, ‘Before you were born, in your mother’s womb, I knew you.’ God said that ***He knew Jeremiah!*** But God doesn’t say that Jeremiah’s entire life from birth to end was necessarily dedicated or consecrated to God. I don’t know to what extent we can make that equation.

Luke 1:15: “For he shall be great before the Lord. And he shall never drink wine or strong drink in any form, **but he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb.**” I don’t know of anyone born of women—except for Jesus of Nazareth, but then His Father was the Almighty God—in the natural way with a human mother and human father had God’s Holy Spirit even before he was born.

Yet, the angel says that ‘he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb. Is it any wonder that Jesus said, ‘Of men born of women there’s none greater than John the Baptist’? I don’t think we really realize how great He was, what God thought of him, and the tremendous assignment that God gave to John the Baptist.

Verse 16: “And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to *the* Lord their God.” That’s quite a commission! That is a huge assignment!

Verse 17: “And he shall go before Him in *the* spirit and power of Elijah, to turn *the* hearts of the fathers to *the* children, and *the* disobedient to *the* wisdom of *the* righteous, to make ready a people prepared for *the* Lord.”

Let’s look at this Elijah. Let’s see what God said to the prophet Malachi, the last of the prophets.

Malachi 4:4: “Remember the Law of Moses My servant, which I commanded to him in Horeb for all Israel, *with* the statutes and judgments. Behold, I *will* send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the LORD. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth *with* utter destruction” (vs 4-6).

Here we have God telling to Malachi to remember the Law of Moses; that He's going to send "...Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the Lord." John the Baptist came fulfilling this, but this is very interesting, because God doesn't always fill in all the intervening timeslots. Before the "dreadful Day of the Lord" hasn't come, yet!

God did not specify that. He said He would send Elijah before that day, but He did not say how close to that day it would come. Actually, it was going to be some 2,000 years ahead of time. Not ahead of God's time, not ahead of His plan, but He did not specify.

When you talk about prophecy, you see mountain peaks. You see this peak, that peak, the other peak, events that take place, true; but you don't always see the valleys in between those peaks. We don't realize all the events that have to take place before you get from peak to peak.

John the Baptist came in the same year that Jesus was born, and yet, "...the great and dreadful Day of the Lord..." has been 2,000 years *and coming*. At any rate let's see what Jesus had to say, where Jesus will confirm this.

Matthew 11:7: "And as they were leaving, Jesus said to the multitudes concerning John, 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings' houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and *one* more excellent than a prophet" (vs 7-9).

In the days of the Old Testament, from the time of Adam until the days of Jesus, in Israel or without, who had the highest office? *A prophet! God spoke directly to prophets*, who then in turn passed it on to the people.

Nathan was used as a seer and prophet for David. God didn't speak to David directly very much. David inquired, God answered, but often times it was through the prophet.

When Josiah inquired and wanted to know what God thought or what God said, what did he do? *He went to Hulda the prophetess!* So, there were female prophets and we call them *prophetesses*. God is no respecter of persons—male or female—if God's going to use you, He's going to use you. Holda was a very righteous person, but God did not speak directly to Jeremiah.

There was no greater office than that of prophet, not even a priest, because God did not speak directly to the priests. You could say that the high priest went into the Holy of Holies, he was the

only one who could do that, so wasn't that a very high office? *Yes, it was, but God rarely, if ever, spoke directly to the priests!*

Yes, on the breastplate God would communicate, but the priests never heard the voice of God, but the prophets did. What does Jesus say of John? *He's more excellent than a prophet!* That is the highest honor you could ever have!

Verse 10: "For this is *he* of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who shall prepare Your way before You.' Truly I say to you, there has not arisen among *those* born of women *anyone* greater than John the Baptist..." (vs 10-11).

I would hope that many of you would read in close detail Luke 1 & 2. There are so many deep spiritual truths in here. Most of us just read right over it. I know that I have! 'I know that; I've read that.' But you stop and think: *Jesus specifically said that John the Baptist was the messenger that God would send him and that there was none greater among those born of women than John the Baptist!*

He didn't say that of anybody else! But He went on to say, and this is for us:

"...But the one who *is* least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he" (v 11). What did He mean by that? *He meant that when we are born as spirit beings, Divine spirit beings with faces that shine as the sun in full strength, just glorious beings*

- *however you want to categorize us*
- *however you want to rank from the least to the highest*

I don't know how you do that; I don't know how God is going to do that, or if He is really going to do it, but Jesus is emphasizing those who would be in the 'lower rungs' of the Family—I don't know if there are lower rungs. *If you're a Divine God being, that's glorious!*

So, the least Divine glorious being is going to be *greater* than the physical John the Baptist, is going to be greater than the physical *anyone*.

We have yet to complete this section about the Holy Spirit coming upon Zacharias and Elizabeth and what they said. When you read what they said it is amazing! Elizabeth said, 'How is it that the mother of my Lord has come to me.' That word *Lord* is the same word used to refer to *the Lord!*

- What did Elizabeth really know?
- How much did she know?

Sometimes I don't think we give them

enough credit, but then again, it says that they were filled with the Holy Spirit when they said that. So, God's Spirit was working with them.

Scriptural References:

- 1) Jeremiah 31:11
- 2) Isaiah 43:1
- 3) Romans 4:17
- 4) Luke 1:5-6
- 5) Genesis 26:1-5
- 6) Luke 1:7-9, 39-40, 11-15
- 7) Numbers 6:1-5
- 8) Luke 1:15-17
- 9) Malachi 4:4-6
- 10) Matthew 11:7-11

Scripture referenced, not quoted: Luke 2

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