

# Occasional Update #13

15 May 2023

## PASSING ON THE BATON

In a relay race, the runners each run a fixed distance, then the next runner in the team takes over and runs the next leg of the race, and so on, until the last (fourth) runner reaches the finish line. In order to make sure a new runner doesn't start before the previous runner has reached them, they carry a baton (stick) which they have to pass on to the next runner. This is called "passing on the baton", until the fourth runner, with the baton, reaches the finish.

In some ways the Christian "race" is similar to a relay race in which the 'baton' that is passed on is the Word of God and the Gospel. Paul wrote:

Do you not know that in a **race** the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we run for an imperishable one. (1 Corinthians 9:24-25)

As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation [an offering or sacrifice], and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the **race**, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for His appearing. (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the **race** that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

**Four "runners"** (forerunners) who 'passed on the baton'

1. Prophets (including Moses) who lived in times of the Old Covenant; the last one being Malachi, who wrote the book of Malachi about 430 BC.
2. John the Baptist – the last Old Covenant, and first New Covenant, prophet.
3. Jesus the Christ (Messiah) – who brought us the New Covenant.
4. Christians – true followers (disciples) of Jesus, who live in New Covenant times and are commissioned to finish the race and pass on the baton to the whole world.

**Old Testament prophets** and their messages would have been familiar to John the Baptist, and in a sense they 'passed on the baton' to him.

**John the Baptist**, a cousin of Jesus, passed on the messages concerning repentance and water baptism. He also had the privilege of baptising Jesus, and in a sense 'passed on the baton' to Jesus (see below).

**Jesus the Messiah** passed on the baton to His disciples, including John the Apostle. John was the last of the 12 apostles to pass on the baton – the Word of God, and the Gospel of Good news – to us. He died about 95 AD.

**Christians** are now called to pass on the baton to others – to the 'ends of the earth'!

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

Regarding John the Baptist, Isaiah 40:1-3 and Malachi 3:1 are both quoted in the NT.

**Mark 1:2-3** As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight'."

**Luke 7:24-28** Jesus spoke to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? ... What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'" I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he."

**John 1:19-23** This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

The following references to John the Baptist, also show the relationship between Jesus and himself, and between their ministries. **They are well worth reading!**

Matthew 3:1-12 & 11:7-15. Mark 1:1-11. Luke 1:76-79 [Zechariah's prophecy over his son John, when he was born]. Luke 3:1-6, 15-16 & 7:24-28. John 1:6-9, 19-23 & 3:28-30.

## **JESUS THE MESSIAH AND SAVIOUR**

Of course, supremely, Jesus was the One who came to fulfill all that was written of Him in the OT, through the Law and the Prophets. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus' coming ministry. He also baptised Jesus, and the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus.

John the Baptist testified about Jesus:

"This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because He was before me'." (John 1:15). "He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30).

Jesus said of John the Baptist:

"This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight'.'" (Matthew 3:3).

"This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he." (Matthew 11:10-11).

John the Baptist was imprisoned, and beheaded; he never saw Jesus' death, resurrection or ascension. He was a 'way-maker'; he paved the way for Jesus, who is "the Way". In a sense, John the Baptist 'passed on the baton to Jesus'.

## **JOHN THE APOSTLE**

Jesus chose 12 disciples (apostles), and John was one of the 3 disciples who was especially 'close to Jesus' – the one who 'Jesus loved' (John 21:20)

**John's Gospel** especially focusses on Jesus, and God the Father; in John's Gospel, Jesus uses the title, "Father" 120 times. John's Gospel also expounds what might be called 'theology' [writing about God], while the other three gospels contain more 'historical' aspects of Jesus' time on earth, His 'general' teachings, miracles, etc. (John's Gospel, three Letters, and Revelation were written at least 15 years after the other Gospels).

John was also the one Jesus chose to write His 7 letters to the 7 churches in different cities (Revelation chapters 2 and 3). This is the last book of the Bible, probably written about 95 AD, while John was in prison. This book was written at least 30 years after the deaths of Paul, Peter, and the other disciples.

## CHRISTIANS TODAY:

### PASSING ON THE BATON (GOSPEL) TO ALL THE WORLD

The apostle John was one of those who heard, received, and obeyed Jesus' command to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. The word 'apostle' means a person who has been 'sent out' with a mission to fulfill.

**Matthew 28:18-20.** Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

**Mark 16:15-20.** Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned." ... So then the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken to them, was taken up into Heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.

The baton has now been passed on to us, and succeeding generations of God's people. Help pass on the baton – to our family, friends, the church, ... wherever and whenever God leads us. Like the Old Testament prophets, like John the Baptist, like Jesus, like John the Apostle. The end of the race is close – help by 'passing on the baton' (God's word and the gospel) – and that's what we have been called to do, too!

*Are we running the race? Are we passing on the baton to others?*

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