

MARK 1:4-8

WHO WAS HE?

⁴ And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

He looked like an Old Testament prophet, spoke like an O.T. prophet, lived like an O.T. prophet (probably even smelled like an O.T. prophet), so, was John an O.T. prophet? Mark certainly presents him as such, but John was even more. While the O.T. prophets convict and cajole, predict and prescript, appoint and anoint, none is recorded as routinely baptizing for the forgiveness of sin. The latter was so much a part of John's ministry that he has not been remembered as "Elijah II" but as John the Baptist, for *so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*. Yet, there was a second element to his message; the announcement of the coming of the Messiah. Both the focus on forgiveness of sin and the announcement of the Messiah define John as the transitional figure between promise and fulfillment.

We too live in a transitional time. Scripture refers to this period variously as the "Last Days" or the "End Times." Whereas John's role was to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, our call is to prepare for the return of the Messiah as King and the consummation of his eternal kingdom. As believers we are tasked with announcing and demonstrating the message and purpose of God in this world. In so doing we are to point beyond ourselves, beyond our ministries and beyond our churches, and to the One who is returning. Our lives are to be defined by the proclamation of God's truth in the midst of this spiritual wilderness. As the people saw John as a prophet, but he became known as the Baptist, may our contemporaries see us as "baptists," but may we become known as Disciples.

As John came before Jesus and prepared the way for his ministry among the people, help me, Lord, to see my call to announce and prepare the way for your return. Amen.