

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS – ISAIAH 40:3

John the Baptist was born into a priestly family – the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth who were both of the tribe of Levi. It would have been quite natural therefore that John would have grown up to follow in his father's footsteps and enter the priestly order. However, somewhere along the line John makes a choice in life and in John's Gospel we find him firmly outside of the Jerusalem establishment and Temple order preaching in the wilderness a gospel of repentance.

All four gospel writers record in harmony the unusual ministry of John Baptist as he calls Israel back to God. Many Jewish writings of the period record that there was a sense of the imminent coming of the Messiah to their Nation. In the scriptures we read of Simeon and Anna the prophetess in Luke 2 who both patiently waited and yet eagerly looked for the 'consolation' and the 'redemption' of Israel. Both had lived in and around the Temple precincts for many years but now on this special day as they behold the infant Jesus, they experience a satisfaction that the Messiah of Israel had come. However, they only represented a minority. In the main over the coming years, Israel would reject the kind of Messiah that Jesus turned out to be.

Scripture is silent over the struggles that John had with the religious authorities of the time. All we know is that at some stage John had come to the conclusion that he could

no longer continue in the secure priestly ministry for himself and chose instead a life of isolation, rejection and solitude out in the wilderness. I wonder how many of God's servants down the centuries have been faced with the same conflicts and chosen for themselves a similar path. No doubt all the previous prophets of Israel experienced similar rejection and yet because of their discernment and courage which the Lord promised them (see Jeremiah 15:19-20) they were able to stand as signposts for the nation.



It seems to me that we are living in a similar time to John the Baptist. With increasingly regularity discerning and faithful saints are experiencing the cold winds of rejection and isolation from churches that are Christian in name only. It is not the world that is rejecting the truth of the gospel, the Bible, Biblical morality and Gods purposes for Israel – it is the Church. Thankfully, not all Churches are descending the pathway of 'liberal', 'liberation' and 'replacement' theology. But there are difficult choices that many are having to make to distance themselves from the mainstream movements. Many however, are finding like John the Baptist, that it is actually the best place to be. For just as He was 'out in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord,' so too the generation

of true believers who are looking for and anticipating His coming, might well find that it is a lot less hostile and easier to hear the Word of the Lord than remaining amongst the noise and clamour of so many competing voices in the bigger city.

Many of the PFI prayer partners are members of small fellowships. Many of the fellowships that we pray for in Israel are also small. Whilst we fervently desire to see many more Jewish and Arab people come to a living faith in Yeshua the Messiah of

all, we shouldn't be disappointed that many are being discipled in small groups without all the modern 'necessities' of western style churches. So long as they are hearing and acting on the Word of the Lord – we should rejoice with them. Let's ensure we don't pray that they should be like us in building 'resource hungry' Churches but that we together with them might ready ourselves for the coming of the Lord.

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