

A NATION'S HEART

During the month of December, the theme of our Wednesday Christmas special is “Turning Hearts.”

- On Dec. 5, we will study “**Turning the nation’s heart back to the Lord**” (Luke 1:16).
- On Dec.12, we will study “Turning the father’s back to the children” (Luke 1:17a).
- On Dec.19, we will study “Turning the hearts of the disobedient back to wisdom” (Luke 1:17b).
- On Dec.26, we will study “Turning the heart of Zachariah back to faith” (Luke 1:20).

Our theme, Turning Hearts, is taken from Gabriel’s prophetic Christmas message to the priest Zachariah while in the service of the temple of shadow Christology (Lk.1:5-11). “Turning hearts” is mentioned twice in regards to John the Baptizer’s ministry in Lk.1:16-17.

The Greek word for “turning” is **epistrepho**. In the transitive use, it can be translated convert (James 5:19-20). But in the intransitive, it is translated “turning back” or “returning”. It is used in the intransitive form in our lesson text of today’s study: “And he (JB) will turn back (epistrepho / f.a.ind) many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.” (Lk.1:16)

**This lesson will study four aspects of the ministry of JB to
TURN THE HEART OF THE NATION BACK TO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.**

NOTE: Epistrepho is used to describe the ministry of JB to a nation in reversionism, much like ours today.

1. The Christmas story involving Zachariah is a reminder about how God directs the stage of great drama regarding Jesus Christ with spiritual advancing believers (Lk 1:5-11).

Zachariah was the 8th of the 24 orders of priesthood who served the temple of shadow Christology (1 Chron.24:10) [Abijah].

Being selected to burn incense before the Holy of Holies and offer prayer for the nation was the greatest moment in a priest’s life (Ex.30:1-9; 1 Chron.23:30-31; Dan.9:21; Rev.5:8; 8:3). He was selected by lottery: “They divided them impartially by drawing lots.” (1 Chron.24:5; Luke 1:8-10).

The drama of the Plan of God this day involves a special priest, in a special place, at a special time, performing a special service, encountering a special angel with a special message to his nation regarding Christ, plus a special personal Christmas card sent from God to him and his wife Elizabeth (Lk.1:11-25).

WHAT AN UNBELIVABLE CHRISTMAS!

2. Zachariah and Elizabeth were members of a small pivot of Spiritually Advancing Believers in Israel who were looking for the coming of Christ into the world (Luke 1-2; 2:25 and 38).

God sent Gabriel, the teaching angel of Christ, with a special Christmas message for this small pivot to tell Israel and the world. One of the greatest awakenings in a believer’s soul is the revelation of God’s grace using you to fulfill some part of His plan in human history (Heb.11).

Zachariah was told that his son to be born would be the long awaited prophet to pronounce the coming of Christ (1:13-17; Isa.40:3-5; Mal.3:1).

3. John the Baptist's ministry would be to build-up this pivot of Believers in Israel amidst apostate reversionism for the coming of Christ.

“And **he will** turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (1:16-17) [Note the five things JB was assigned to do – turn back many; go as forerunner, turn hearts of the fathers, turn hearts of disobedient, and make ready a people prepared for the Lord.]

This would be no easy task to a reversionistic nation. But JB is not alone in this task; he has a small pivot to help him prepared for the coming of Christ.

- Luke is the only writer that connects JB to the pivot of Believers that were carrying the plan of God in Israel.

They were God's salt and light to Israel and the world (Matt.5:13-14). “There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through Him. He was not that light, but came that he might bear witness of the light.” (John 1:6-8)

WHAT AN UNBELIEVABLE CHRISTMAS!

4. John the Baptist's ministry was to turn the nation's heart back to God through Jesus Christ after 500 years of divine discipline and apostate reversionism.

(Billy Graham has had a similar ministry to our generation).

John's ministry was to a nation whose popular religious leaders were misleading them through false teachings (1 Tim.4; 2 Pet.2). Teaching that legalism (work's system) was the way to gain the favor (grace) of God – **“Thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”** (Mark 7:13; Eph.2:8-9)

“But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. Neglecting the commandments of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” (Mark 7:7-8)

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.” (Matt.11:28-30; 11:1-19)

Jesus gave JB's ministry a great compliment: “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; **yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**” (Matt.11:11)

“I AM THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE STRIAHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,’ AS ISAIAH THE PROPHET SAID.” (John 1:23)

Jesus Christ is the most unbelievable “Christmas gift” from heaven to everyone on earth who will believe

**“The Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes:
first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”
(Rom.1:16)**