



John the Baptist

Preparing the Way

Part 3 - The Breaker and Our Calling

The Breaker

Though John the Baptist died in prison, he fully fulfilled the role he was born to. Shortly before His own death, Yeshua, along with Peter, James, and John - three of His most trusted disciples, climbed a mountain where in a vision, Moses and Elijah appeared to be talking with Yeshua. In the vision, Peter asks this of Yeshua -

^{ESV} **Matthew 17:4** . . . "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

All three of the synoptic gospels ¹ record this event, and all three record the Peter asking this seemingly irrelevant question. So what is the significance of this question and how does it add to our understanding of the role of John the Baptist?

The Bible is the story of a wedding - the wedding of God to His people. In Jewish eschatology there are two important characters who assist the bride and groom - the *friend of the bride* and the *friend of the bridegroom*. The Jewish sages understand Moses to be the friend of the bride. He's the one who helps prepare the bride - teaching her the things she would need to know as she prepares for a life of marriage, and brings her to the bridegroom. A biblical example might be Hegai, the man who helped Esther prepare to meet the king². The other character - the friend of the bridegroom - is understood to be Elijah the prophet. He is a close friend of the groom, and in modern Christian weddings, he would be called "the best man". In Jewish eschatology, he's the one who escorts the groom to fetch his bride, and he's the one who announces the groom's arrival.

In the vision all four parties were represented³ - Yeshua (the groom), the disciples (a representation of the bride⁴), Moses (friend of the bridegroom) and Elijah (friend of the bride). This pictured a wedding, but not just any wedding - it pictured the wedding of Israel to God. There again - in Jewish eschatology this wedding takes place at the beginning of the biblical *Feast of Tabernacles*⁵, but just prior to "the Feast", God will gather His (remnant) people -

Isaiah 10:20-22 In that day⁶ the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. ²¹
A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. ²² For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.

Thus we can see that the transfiguration helped Yeshua's disciples understand that Yeshua was indeed "the bridegroom", and it also helped them to see the role of John the Baptist, who just weeks before had declared -

¹ Matthew, Mark, and Luke

² Esther 2:8

³ Keep in mind that the disciples not only experience the vision, they were also participants in the vision

⁴ The book of Acts, along with the epistles of the disciple, clearly show that Peter, James, and John - along with Paul - were the ones who took the lead in spreading the gospel to the nations where much of the "bride" had been scattered.

⁵ Lev. 23:54. At the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites were to live in a "booth" (Hebrew - "sukkah") for seven days.

⁶ "in that day" is a Jewish idiom for the "birthpains of the Messiah" or what commonly referred to as the "tribulation"

John 3:28-29 ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

In that statement, John identified himself as the *friend of the bridegroom*, i.e. - Elijah. What's more, he indicated that the bridegroom - Yeshua - was about to collect his bride. So when His disciples asked Yeshua -

^{NKJ} **Matthew 17:10** . . . "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

He answered by confirming the role of John the Baptist -

^{NKJ} **Matthew 17:11-13** . . . "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished . . . ". ¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

Thus, the encounter on the mountain showed the disciples that the gathering of the remnant had begun, and John was a key player in it. With that in mind, let's go back to the time when John was in Herod's prison.

As shown in part 2 of this series, John had a question about the role Yeshua was playing at that point in His life, and thus sent two of his disciples to ask Him about it. In that narrative Yeshua said this about John -

^{ESV} **Matthew 11:12** ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John . . .

This is repeated in Luke's account as well –

Luke 16:16 ¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

What was Yeshua trying to say about John? Did John's message lead to violence? Are violent people stealing the kingdom from its rightful inheritors? There have been a number of explanations for this somewhat confusing statement. Some say that violent men are trying to wrest the kingdom from the followers of the Messiah. Others say that the kingdom of God will only appear thru the actions of strong and forceful men. Can either of these explanations possibly be true?

The key to understanding this passage is to understand that the statement was made in the context of John the Baptist. We can understand it if we understand John's calling and purpose in life as well as the underlying theme of the Bible, that is - God is going to gather His scattered bride. To help us understand, we'll begin by searching out the meaning of these key words or phrases in Yeshua's statement - *suffer violence*, *violent*, and *take by force* – by attempting to find their Hebrew counterpart in the Tnakh through the use of the Septuagint (LXX).

In the Matthew account, the phrase "suffer violence" is translated from the single Greek word "biazo" (Strong's 971). In Luke's account, the word "forces" is "biazo" as well. According to Strong's, "Biazo" means "to use force", "to apply force", and "press". Though the exact form of the Greek word is not found in the LXX, a similar form is used in Exodus 19:24 to translate the Hebrew word "harac" (2040) which is translated "break through" in English –

^{NKJ} **Exodus 19:24** Then the LORD said to him, "Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through (*harac*) to come up to the LORD, lest He break out against them."

Moses had been instructed to set up a boundary around the mountain to keep the people from getting too close, and God did not want them to *break through* the boundary. So the word “harac” means to break through or break down, and in this case, what would be broken down is a boundary or a fence.

A synonym of “harac” is “parats” (6555), a word we’re familiar with because it is the root word from which we get the name of one of Yeshua’s early ancestors.

^{NKJ} **Genesis 38:28-29** And so it was, when she was giving birth, that *the one* put out *his* hand; and the midwife took a scarlet *thread* and bound it on his hand, saying, "This one came out first."
²⁹ Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, "How did you break through (*parats*)? *This breach (perets) be upon you!*" Therefore his name was called Perez.

This obviously is the story of Tamar, Judah’s daughter-in-law who had been childless. She gave birth to twins, but even though one child was in the birth canal, the other one apparently wanted to be first and thus reached his hand past the other and appeared first, thus breaching the womb.

A breach is a gap in a wall or a barrier. It is usually caused by something breaking through the wall (like a battering ram) or as a result of someone removing part of the wall so that others can pass through. In the case of a dam, a breach allows water to flow out at an un-intended place and will usually grow larger as the water continues to flow through it and erode away the dam.

Thus, our first word - “biazo” - is used in some places in the Bible to mean “breach” or “break through”.

The next word – “violent” – is translated from “biastes” which is simply the noun form of “biazo”. Thus if “biazo” means to “break through”, then “biastes” is simply the one who makes the breach. We could call him the “breaker” – the one who breaks through. In the example above, Perez is the “breaker” since he broke through first.

The final word is “force”, and it is translated from the Greek word “harpazo” (Strong’s 726). Strong’s says that *harpazo* means “to seize”, to “carry off by force”, “to claim for one’s self eagerly”, “to snatch out or away”. The LXX uses it in a couple of forms to translate the Hebrew word “gazel” (1497) which means “to tear away”, “seize”, “plunder”, “rob”, “take by force”. *Harpazo* is also used to translate the Hebrew word “taraph” (2963) which means “to tear”, “rend”, “pluck”. These meanings all appear to have a negative connotation, but that’s not always the case. For instance the word “gazel” is used in an uplifting sense in this passage in Judges that talks about the sons of Benjamin “catching” a wife.

^{ESV} **Judges 21:23** And the people of Benjamin did so and took their wives, according to their number, from the dancers whom they carried off. Then they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and lived in them.

In this case, the women were not taken violently, but were taken in a way to avoid the guilt of an oath taken by the men of Israel.

Such is the same in the New Testament. Though *harpazo* carries a negative connotation in many places, in some cases it is used as a positive. One example is in the case of Philip and the eunuch -

^{ESV} **Acts 8:39** And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried (harpazo) Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

In this context, the Spirit of God seized Philip and carried him away. Another example is where Paul spoke of his friend -

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 12:2** I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up (harpazo) to the third heaven- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

Again, *harpazo* is used in a positive way in this verse, specifically to indicate that something or someone was “seized” and “carried off or away”. Now we know at least an alternative meaning to the major words used by Yeshua in His statement regarding John in Matthew 11:12. We know that -

- suffer violence = “break through”
- the violent = “the breaker” or the one who breaks through
- take it by force = “to seize” or to “carry off” and can be either a positive or negative force depending on the context

With that, let’s re-write the Matthew’s and Luke’s account using the terms above -

TLK Version **Matthew 11:12** From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has *broken through* and the *breakers seize it*.

TLK Version **Luke 16:16** ¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and men *break their way* into it.

If Yeshua had been speaking in Hebrew when saying this to His disciples, He probably would have used the word “parats” where we have the words “broken through” and “breakers”.

Let’s pause for a moment and review again John’s purpose for being. We know that the angel told Zacharias that John would -

- turn the hearts of the children of Israel back to the “fathers” and to YHVH
- make ready a people for YHVH
- give the knowledge of salvation to his people

We also saw that Zacharias claimed that salvation would come through the “Dayspring from on high” who we likened to the “Sun of righteousness” of Malachi 4:2, a prophecy that indicates that with knowledge of that salvation, God’s people would “go out leaping like calves from the stall”, an allusion to people being freed who had been penned up.

Finally, we saw John’s allusion to the fact that the Jewish people did not have sole access to the Kingdom of God because God could metaphorically make “sons of Abraham” out of stones. With these points fresh in our minds, let’s now look at an end-time prophecy found in the book of Micah.

Micah’s prophecy pertains to two different peoples - Israel (Samaria) and Judah (Jerusalem) -

ESV **Micah 1:1** The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

The next 11 verses touch on the decrepit state of Israel as it has turned away from God over the years which ultimately lead to their being banished from the land and scattered throughout the nations, just as had been prophesied by Moses⁷. Yet, as is the case in most every prophecy of Israel’s demise, the prophet provides a glimmer of hope to those who turn back to God. In verse 12 he says -

ESV **Micah 2:12** “I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men.”

As part of their redemption, God said He would assemble like sheep in a fold “all of Jacob”; but all doesn’t necessarily mean “all”, because He qualifies “all of Jacob” with the word “remnant” - all those who turn to Him. Let’s understand the significance of that statement by seeing what it means to be gathered into a fold.

⁷ See the sidebar *The Kingdom Gospel* in part 1 of this series

When a shepherd took his flocks to graze, if they stayed in the field over night he would build a makeshift corral (called a “fold”) out of rocks and sticks, then drive the sheep into it, put a few rocks or sticks in the narrow opening and sleep there in order to keep them in and keep harm out. In other words, the fold is a place to protect the sheep.

In Micah’s prophecy, God is going to gather His sheep into a fold where they are protected. This will happen while still scattered throughout the nations. They will run right past their oppressors while being brought into the fold through the breach - the narrow opening into the fold. The shepherd will lie at the door and protect them through the night. The LXX renders it like this -

^{LXE} **Micah 2:12** Jacob shall be completely gathered with all *his people*: I will surely receive the remnant of Israel; I will cause them to return together, as sheep in trouble, as a flock in the midst of their fold: they shall rush forth from among men through the breach made before them:

The next morning - when the light appears - the shepherd will remove the sticks and stones from the opening and call out his sheep.

^{NKJ} **Micah 2:13** The one who breaks open will come up before them; They will break out, Pass through the gate, And go out by it; Their king will pass before them, With the LORD at their head."

In this passage, the word for “one who breaks” is “parats”, just as it likely would have been if Yeshua had spoken in Hebrew. The breaker (the one who breaks) is the one who makes the opening in the fold then calls the sheep. The sheep have been penned up over night and are anxious to get out, so once they are called, they all want to exit the fold at once, and once that first sheep heads toward the opening, the others follow - all at once. Thus, the small opening in the makeshift fold becomes larger and larger as the sheep stampede out and “break down” the walls on each side of the opening. So the “breaker” is the shepherd who begins to set the sheep free by opening, or taking down the wall. The sheep are the ones who continue to break down the walls as they exit the fold into freedom, and the King is the one who goes before them.

According to ancient Jewish midrash, Elijah the prophet is the “breaker”. He is the one who prepares the way for the King by removing the sticks and stones from the gate of the fold. In his book “Jesus- the Jewish Theologian”, Brad Young writes -

“The breaker (haporetz) who opens the breach rises up before them, they will break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king will pass on before them, the LORD at the head of them.” In Micah, the two figures are portrayed by the designations (1) the breaker and (2) the king. These two characters, the breaker and their king, were popularly interpreted as referring to Elijah and the Messiah. A beautiful description of the future redemption is preserve the homiletical midrash, Pesikta Babbati, which is filled with early Jewish teachings . . . ⁸

As Brad Young points out, the ancient Jewish people understood Elijah the prophet to be the “breaker” of the Micah 2 prophecy and the King to be the Messiah. If this midrash extended back to the first century is unclear, but it’s clear that Yeshua and His disciples did understand it.

Let’s now return to the passage in Matthew.

Matthew 11:12-13 ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John . . .

You will recall that we have defined the important words and have come up with this understanding of Matthew 11:12 -

⁸ Jesus - the Jewish Theologian pg. 63

Matthew 11:12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has *broken through* and the *breakers seize it*.

Tying this passage back to Micah 2, we find that John the Baptist - acting in the spirit of Elijah - is the breaker - the one who opens the wall, and once the opening is made, the sheep make the opening wider by continuing to break the walls as they follow the King - Yeshua - the one who leads them.

John the Baptist began the restoration of Israel by using his baptism to show all people, both Jew and non-Jew, that they could be restored to fellowship with God. He began to break down the wall that kept the sheep penned up when he likened the Pharisees and Sadducees to a brood of vipers and then showed that tax collectors and Roman soldiers could be the "stones" from which God makes Abraham's seed (Luke 3:7-14). What needed to be broken down was the resistance the Jewish leadership had to allowing non-Jews rejoin the commonwealth of Israel. This is a problem that the apostles dealt with for the rest of their lives, and it's a problem we still have today.

Paul speaks of this in his letter to the Ephesians –

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:8;11-14** ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God . . . ¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision"⁹ by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands - ¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility . . .

Just as it was in Yeshua's day, we are those of the house of Israel who are just now leaving the fold, breaking down walls as we go. God kept us up penned up and protected in churches for years, but now has set us free to perform the job for which we've been called. We do so just as Malachi prophesied – we:

^{LXE} **Malachi 4:2** “. . . go forth, and bound as young calves let loose from bonds.”

Like calves let loose, or sheep set free, we bound out kicking up our heels - sometimes tripping others up along the way, or making fools of ourselves as we go. But before long we buckle down and get to work.

Before we leave the discussion of the breaker, let me draw your attention to one more detail of Yeshua's statement. Let's once again go to Yeshua's words concerning John, but using "corrected" translations -

^{TLK Version} **Matthew 11:12** From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has *broken through* and the *breakers seize it*.

^{TLK Version} **Luke 16:16** ¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and men break their way into it.

You'll notice that in Matthew's account, Yeshua did not say that Israel "breaks through", "breaks in", or "seizes" it. Instead, He said that the "kingdom of heaven" is what has broken through. In Luke's account, the thought is that the "gospel of the Kingdom is being preached and that men are breaking down walls to enter in to it.

⁹ The word "uncircumcision" does not necessarily mean that a person is not circumcised. See our article "Circumcision - According to Paul" on our web site - <http://www.amiyisrael.org/articles/CircumcisionAccordingtoPaul.htm>

The phrase “kingdom of heaven” refers to the messianic kingdom that the 1st century Jewish people likened to the Kingdom of Israel under King David; and just as it was in David’s day, the kingdom did not come together until the northern and southern tribes – Israel and Judah – became a people.

When the process of reconciliation between Israel and Judah begins in earnest, then the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Thus with John’s ministry of repentance and reconciliation between the Jews and non-Jews, the Kingdom began to break forth – little by little – and it hasn’t stopped yet. Back then, especially since the baptism of Cornelius, the non-Jews began to flood the synagogues in their attempt to seize - to grab hold of the Kingdom of Heaven. The same is happening today.

Standing in the Temple some 2020 years ago, an old man heard the voice of an angel who told him he was going to have a son. That son was to return the hearts of the people to God and prepare a people for the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist was that son, and he fulfilled the role he was called to do.

John was called to be a witness of the Messiah. In their last hour of seeing Yeshua on the earth, His disciples were given the same calling -

Acts 1:8 ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Though there may have been others, we know that at least one of John’s disciples went on to become a disciple of Yeshua.¹⁰ Before His death, Yeshua’s disciples were told to raise up other disciples to Yeshua, and we can assume that those disciples should do the same.

We are those disciples, and as disciples of Messiah Yeshua, we share the calling given to John the Baptist. Are we willing to perform that role as the second coming of the Messiah draws near? Are we willing to help those whom God is drawing to His torah to understand the Torah as Messiah Yeshua understood it? Are we willing to help turn the hearts of God’s people to the fathers - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? And finally, are we willing to become that people – a people prepared for the Lord?

Like John the Baptist - that’s our calling.

Shalom Alecheim

¹⁰ John 1:35-40