



Chapter 3

Ministry of John the Baptist

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3:1–12 John’s proclamation (see Mk. 1:2–8; Lk. 3:1–18). John the Baptist was the leader of a significant religious movement. His call to repentance in the light of God’s coming judgment was a clear warning that Israel, as so often in the past, was not living up to its calling as the people of God. His words about being *children of Abraham* (9) indicate that to be a Jew was not alone sufficient protection against judgment. His practice of *baptizing* those who responded, just as Gentiles who wanted to join Israel had to be baptized, marked them out as the ‘remnant’ who now represented the true people of God.

Matthew is careful to show the continuity between John’s mission and that of Jesus. John’s proclamation in v 2 is the same as that of Jesus in 4:17 (and of his disciples in 10:7). Echoes of John’s words also occur later in Jesus’ teaching (see 7:16, 19; 12:34; 13:30; 23:33), while 8:10–12 reinforces John’s warning against relying on Jewish racial origin alone. John was thus not just a curtain-raiser for the coming of Jesus; he was already launching the mission which Jesus would develop. (Cf. 11:7–19; 21:23–32 for further indications of this close connection.)

John was, however, only the forerunner, as the quotation from Is. 40:3 (v 3) indicates and as his own words about the coming *one who is more powerful* confirm. The contrast between *water* and *the Holy Spirit* (11) leaves no doubt that it was in Jesus’ ministry that real spiritual renewal would be found.

The *Desert of Judea* is the uninhabited area near the Jordan. Passages like Is. 40:3; Je. 2:2–3 and Ho. 2:14–15 show the desert as a place of new beginnings. **2** *The kingdom of heaven* is Matthew’s version of ‘the kingdom of God’ in the other gospels. It signifies God’s effective rule on earth. *Is near* is lit. ‘has come near’ and is virtually an announcement of arrival. John’s clothes mark him as a second Elijah (see 2 Ki. 1:8), as 11:14 and 17:10–13 will explain.¹

Matthew 3:1

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

Almost 30 years had passed since the events of Matthew 2. Here John the Baptist burst onto the scene. His theme was “Repent!” Repentance means doing an about-face—a 180-degree turn—from the kind of self-centeredness that leads to wrong actions such as lying, cheating, stealing, gossiping, taking revenge, abusing, and indulging in sexual immorality. A person who repents stops rebelling and begins following God’s way of living prescribed in his Word. The first step in turning to God is to admit your sin, as John urged. Then God will receive you and help you live the way he wants. Remember that only God can get rid of sin. He doesn’t expect us to clean up our lives *before* we come to him.

Cf. compare

lit. literally

¹Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Mt 3:1). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

“John the Baptist” appears with a prophetic word that God was about to act again in history. The prophetic spirit was once more active, after a long period of silence during which much of Judaism had come to feel that God had withdrawn from involvement in their history. John announces the coming of the kingdom (a prominent theme in Matthew, mentioned some 50 times); Jesus inaugurates it. John’s ministry prepares the way (Matt 3:3), and Jesus is the Way (cf. John 14:6). John is the forerunner of the Messiah, and Jesus is the Messiah. Both John (Matt 3:2) and Jesus (Matt 4:17) announce that God’s dynamic activity within Israel’s history is about to take place, after years of apparent silence. John heralds God’s reign; Jesus brings the kingdom in His own Person and ministry. His words give evidence of the kingdom’s power; His deeds are the very works of the kingdom. Jesus brings the dynamic redemptive reign of God within history ahead of the final (eschatological) consummation of the kingdom of God at the end of history. The redemptive blessings of God’s reign are now available. The kingdom is fulfilled within history and consummated at the end of history.²

As Christ’s forerunner, **John the Baptist** preceded the Lord Jesus in birth, ministry, and death. Luke describes John’s birth (see Luke 1), but Matthew jumps directly into the account of John’s proclamation of the coming of the kingdom of heaven. John is called “the Baptist” because he baptized people. Unlike the common practice of proselytes and Jews administering ceremonial cleansings to themselves, John baptized those who came to him professing repentance and identifying with his message.³

[In those days] The days here referred to cannot be those mentioned in the preceding chapter, for John was but six months older than Christ. Perhaps Matthew intended to extend his narrative to the *whole time* that Jesus dwelt at Nazareth; and the meaning is, "*in those days while Jesus still dwelt at Nazareth.*" John began to preach. It is not probable that John began to baptize or preach long before the Saviour entered on his ministry; and, consequently, from the time that is mentioned at the close of the second chapter, to that mentioned in the beginning of the third, an interval of twenty-five or more years elapsed.⁴

John = *Yo-chanan*, meaning, "YHVH was gracious, showed favor."

This John is not to be confused with John the Gospel writer, who wrote five books of the New Testament. Son of Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-20,39-80). John the Baptist was born into the priesthood, his father was Zacharias. He is preaching out of the camp, in the desert (therefore must have rejected the Levitical/Talmudic establishment).

² Believer’s Study Bible

³ The Nelson Study Bible

⁴ Barne’s Notes on the New Testament

John the Baptist was mentioned in prophecy in Isaiah 40:

(Isaiah 40:3-5) *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

[Baptist] Literally, baptizer (John 1:31).

John *the baptizer* - so called from his principal office, that of baptizing. Baptism, or the application of water, was a rite well known to the Jews, and practised when they admitted proselytes to their religion from heathenism.-*Lightfoot*.

[preaching] The word rendered *to preach*, means, to proclaim in the manner of a public crier; to make proclamation. The discourses recorded in the New Testament are mostly brief, sometimes a single sentence. They were public proclamations of some great truth. Such appear to have been the discourses of John, calling men to repentance.

[preaching in the wilderness of Judaea] Preaching is a part of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:3). John was the greatest of prophets in this respect (Matthew 11:9-11). He also foretold certain events (Matthew 3:2-3,11-12; John 1:29-33; John 3:30).

John Preached Thirty Doctrines:

1. Repentance (Matthew 3:2-8; Mark 1:4)
2. Kingdom of heaven at hand (Matthew 3:2)
3. Prophecy (Matthew 3:3-12; John 1:15-34)
4. Water baptism (Matthew 3:11; John 1:31)
5. Restitution (Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8)
6. Godliness (Matthew 3:3-10; Matthew 14:4)
7. Wrath to come (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3)
8. Against pride (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:7)
9. Miracles (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8)
10. Heaven and hell (Matthew 3:10-12; Luke 3)
11. Spirit baptism (Matthew 3:11; John 1:33)
12. First coming of Christ (Matthew 3:11; John 1:29)
13. Second coming of Christ (Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:17)
14. Judgment on sin (Matthew 3:10; Luke 3)
15. Salvation (Luke 3:6; John 1:29)
16. Love to others (Luke 3:11)
17. Honesty in business (Luke 3:13)
18. Absolute justice (Luke 3:14)
19. Jesus, God's Lamb (John 1:29)
20. Jesus, the Spirit Baptizer (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33)
21. Jesus, God's Son (John 1:34)
22. Jesus, the sin-bearer (John 1:29)
23. Unworthiness of man (John 1:27)

24. Jesus, the bridegroom (John 3:29)
25. Greatness of Jesus (John 3:30)
26. Jesus, from heaven (John 3:31-36)
27. Rejection of Jesus (John 3:32)
28. Jesus, the truth (John 3:30-36)
29. Jesus, the Anointed (John 3:34)
30. Jesus, God's heir (John 3:35)

[in the wilderness of Judea] This country was situated along the Jordan, and the Dead Sea, to the east of Jerusalem. The word translated *wilderness* does not denote, as with us, a place of boundless forests, entirely destitute of inhabitants; but a mountainous, rough, and thinly-settled country, covered, to some considerable extent, with forests and rocks, and better fitted for pasture than for tilling. There were inhabitants in those places, and even villages, but they were the comparatively unsettled portions of the country, 1 Samuel 25:1,2. In the time of Joshua there were six cities in what was then called a wilderness, Joshua 15:61,62.

Jewish New Testament Commentary: Yochanan the Immerser, usually rendered “John the Baptist.” The name “John,” along with numerous variants in many languages—Jan, Juan, Jon, Jean, Ivan, Giovanni—comes from Hebrew *Yo-chanan*, which means, “*YHVH* was gracious, showed favor.”

While the Greek verb “*baptizein*” is obviously the source of the English words “baptize” and “Baptist,” its root meaning is “to dip, soak, immerse” into a liquid, so that what is dipped takes on qualities of what it has been dipped in—for example, cloth in dye or leather in tanning solution.

But to understand what “*baptizein*” means here one needs the Jewish background. According to the *Torah* one had to be ritually pure before entering the Tabernacle or Temple. Ritual purity could be lost in many ways; the preeminent means of restoring it was through washing. A quick review of Leviticus shows how frequently the matter is mentioned, and one of the six major divisions of the Talmud (*Taharot*, “Cleansings”) is devoted to it. Even though there is no longer a Temple, observant Jewish women immerse themselves in a *mikveh* (ritual bath) after each menstrual period, in obedience to Leviticus 15; see MJ 13:4N.

A person who immerses himself participates in an obvious yet living metaphor of purification, with the water, as it were, washing away the impurity. Here Yochanan the Immerser proclaims for the old practice of immersion a new context, cleansing from a life pattern of sin (see vv. 2&N, 6, 11).

Today’s ritual baptism in some branches of Christianity does not involve complete immersion of the body in water, but pouring or sprinkling instead. Some scholars believe that at least in some instances, even New Testament baptisms may have been sprinklings or pourings and not actual immersions; verses such as Ezekiel 36:25 (MJ 10:22) and Lk 3:16 with Ac 2:17–18, 10:45 are adduced in support. The various “Baptist” denominations sprang from a movement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that stressed complete immersion of believers, as opposed to sprinkling or pouring baptismal water on infants not yet old enough to have decided consciously to be Christian.

Traditional Judaism has developed its own theology of Christian baptism. Perhaps because a form of baptism (complete self-immersion in a *mikveh*) is required at the point when a non-Jew converts to Judaism, the latter has traditionally understood Christian baptism to be the moment when a Jew removes himself from the Jewish community and adopts a religion alien to, or even in opposition to, Judaism and the Jewish people. Because of these false associations which have become attached to the word "baptism" in the Jewish community, the text of the *JNT* uses the more accurately descriptive word "immersion" throughout.⁵

Matthew 3:2

And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[**Repent**] = "*T'shuvah*," (teh-SHOO-vah) and means turning from sin and returning to God. God "grants repentance" but it still requires "action" on our part (See Lamentations 5:21). Biblical repentance and turning from sin involves turning toward God. As we are all easily deceived, how do we know we are in fact turned "*toward God?*" What revelation has He given us as a guideline? He has given His Torah for this purpose (see 3:6 below).

Repentance implies sorrow for past offences, (2 Corinthians 7:10) a deep sense of the evil of sin as committed against God, (Psalms 51:4) and a full purpose to turn from transgression and to lead a holy life. A true penitent has sorrow for sin, not only because it is ruinous to his soul, but chiefly because it is an offence against God, and is that abominable thing which he hates, Jeremiah 44:4. It is produced by seeing the great danger and misery to which it exposes us; by seeing the justness and holiness of God, (Job 42:6) and by seeing that our sins have been committed against *Christ*, and were the cause of his death, Zech 12:10, Luke 22:61, 62. There are two words in the New Testament translated *repentance*- one of which denotes a *change of mind*, or a *reformation* of life; and the other, *sorrow or regret that sin has been committed*. The word used here is the former; calling the Jews to a change of life, or a *reformation* of conduct. In the time of John, the nation had become extremely wicked and corrupt, perhaps more so than at any preceding period, Hence both he and Christ began their ministry by calling to repentance.

[**The kingdom of heaven is at hand**] The phrases, kingdom of heaven, kingdom of Christ, and kingdom of God, are of frequent occurrence in the Bible. They all refer to the same thing. The expectation of such a kingdom was taken from the Old Testament, and especially from Daniel, Daniel 7:13,14. The prophets had told of a successor to David that should sit on his throne, 1 Kings 2:4, 8:25, Jeremiah 33:17. The Jews expected a great national deliverer. They supposed that when the Messiah should appear, all the dead would be raised; that the judgment would take place; and that the enemies of the Jews would be destroyed, and themselves advanced to great national dignity and honour.⁶

⁵Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 3:1). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

⁶ Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

[Heaven] The word *heaven*, or *heavens*, as it is in the original, means sometimes the *place*, so called; and sometimes is, by a figure of speech, put for the Great Being whose residence is there; as in Daniel 4:26, "the *heavens* do rule." See also Mark 11:30, Luke 15:18. As that kingdom was one of purity, it was proper that the people should prepare themselves for it by turning from their sins, and directing their minds to a suitable fitness for his reign.

The Greek verb translated **repent** indicates a change of attitude and outlook which well may result in sorrow for sins. But the basic idea is a reversal of thinking which changes one's life (see v. 8). **The kingdom of heaven** is most likely synonymous with "the kingdom of God." Both terms seem to be used consistently throughout the New Testament to refer to God's heavenly kingdom coming to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. This kingdom begins with the incarnation of Christ, continues with the inception of the church, and will be fully manifested when Christ returns. The kingdom was **at hand** because it was being offered to Israel in the person of the Messiah. John's preaching assumed that judgment would precede the coming of the kingdom, a fact that was taught by the Old Testament prophets (see Isa. 4:4, 5; 5:15, 16; 42:1; Jer. 33:14–16; Ezek. 20:33–38; Dan. 7:26, 27; Joel 1:14, 15; 3:12–17; Zeph. 1:2–18; 3:8–13; Zech. 13:2, 9; Mal. 3:1–5; 4:1–6). At this point, John assumed that the nation of Israel would repent and the kingdom would come. John was telling the Jews of his generation to repent in order to gain entrance into Christ's kingdom.⁷

McGee: Now, all of a sudden, John the Baptist walks onto the pages of Scripture. If we had Matthew's gospel only, we would ask, "Where did he come from, and what is his background?"—because Matthew gives us none of that, and the reason is obvious. The prophet Malachi had said that the messenger would come ahead to prepare the way for the coming of the King—"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me ..." (Mal. 3:1). This messenger was John the Baptist. You don't really need to know about the background of a messenger. When the Western Union boy delivers a message to your door, do you say to him, "Young man, did your ancestors come over on the Mayflower? What is your background?" You're not interested in that. You are interested in the message because the message is all-important, and that is what you want. So you thank him, give him a tip, and dismiss him. You are through with him.

John the Baptist made it very clear that he was just the messenger, and Matthew is making that clear, too. Therefore, he walks out onto the page of Scripture, preaching in the wilderness of Judea saying, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Now let's deal with these expressions: (1) "Repent ye"; (2) "the kingdom of heaven"; and (3) "is at hand." They are very important.

"Repent" is an expression that always has been given to God's people as a challenge to turn around. "Repent" in the original Greek is *metanoia*, meaning "to change your mind." You are going in one direction; turn around and go in another direction.

Repentance is primarily, I think, for saved people, that is, for God's people in any age. They are the ones who, when they become cold and indifferent, are to turn. That was the message to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2 and 3, and it was the message of the Lord Jesus Himself.

⁷ The Nelson Study Bible

Someone may ask whether the unsaved man is supposed to repent. The unsaved man is told that he is to *believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ. That was the message of Paul to the jailer at Philippi (see Acts 16:31). That old rascal needed to do some repenting; but when an unsaved man believes in Jesus, he is repenting. Faith means to turn to Christ, and when you turn to Christ, you must also turn from something. If you don't turn from something, then you aren't really turning to Christ. So repentance is really a part of believing, but the primary message that should be given to the lost today is that they should *believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ. We like to see folk come forward in a service to receive Christ or sign a card signifying that they have made that decision, but the important thing is to *trust* Christ as your Savior, and if you really turn to Him, you turn *from* something else.

The expression “kingdom of heaven” means the rule of the heavens over the earth. The Lord Jesus is the King. You can't have a kingdom without a king; neither can you have a king without a kingdom. Remember Richard III who said in the Shakespearean play, “My kingdom for a horse.” If he had traded his kingdom for a horse, he wouldn't have been a king. He would have been only a man on horseback. A king must have a kingdom. So what did John the Baptist mean by “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”? He meant that the kingdom of heaven is present in the Person of the King.

Is there a present reality of the kingdom of heaven? Yes, there is. Those who come to Him as Savior and acknowledge Him are translated into the kingdom of His dear Son. They belong to Him now. And they have a much more intimate relationship than that of a subject with a king. Christ is the Bridegroom, and believers are part of His bride!

Then someone may ask whether we are like subjects in a kingdom because we are to carry out His commands. Again I say, there is more to it than that. We are to obey Him because we love Him. It is a love relationship. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

The “kingdom of heaven” is the rule of the heavens over the earth. That's not in existence today. Christ is not reigning over the world now. There must be something wrong with the thinking of those who insist that the kingdom of heaven is in existence in our day. Christ is not reigning in any form, shape or fashion—except in the hearts of those who have received Him. However, He is coming someday to establish His kingdom on the earth. When He does, He will put down rebellion. Believe me, He is really going to put it down.

The kingdom of heaven was at hand, or was present, in the Person of the King. That was the only way in which it was present.

Matthew now tells us that what he is recording is in fulfillment of prophecy—⁸

for the kingdom of heaven is at hand—This sublime phrase, used in none of the other Gospels, occurs in this peculiarly Jewish Gospel nearly thirty times; and being suggested by Daniel's grand vision of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of days, to receive His investiture in a world-wide kingdom (Da 7:13, 14), it was fitted at once both to meet the national expectations and to turn them into the right channel. A kingdom for which *repentance* was the proper preparation behooved to be essentially spiritual. Deliverance from sin, the great blessing of Christ's kingdom (Mt 1:21), can be

⁸McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

valued by those only to whom sin is a burden (Mt 9:12). John's great work, accordingly, was to awaken this feeling and hold out the hope of a speedy and precious remedy.⁹

Jewish New Testament Commentary: Turn from your sins to God. The English language has a perfectly good word for this, "repent," used in the King James and most other versions; but those who image an overwrought, undereducated charlatan yelling it at a frightened and equally illiterate crowd can no longer hear the message in the word. For this reason I have gone back to the original languages to educe the original sense. The Greek word "*metanoiete*," related to "*nous*" ("mind"), means "change your mind, have a complete change of heart." The underlying Hebrew concept is expressed in the word "*t'shuvah*" ("turning, returning"), which in the context of religious behavior means "turning" from one's sins and "returning" to God. Note that there is not only a "from" but a "to," for turning from one's sins is impossible unless at the same time one turns to God—otherwise one only turns from one set of sins to another! The Jewish understanding of repentance, correct on this point, is that each individual must do it, yet it requires God's grace to be able to do it—"Turn us to you, O *Adonai*, and we will be turned" (Lamentations 5:21).

It is not without wisdom that a Jew raised with little knowledge of Judaism who later adopts an Orthodox Jewish lifestyle is termed a "*ba'al-t'shuvah*," literally, a "master of repentance," that is, one who has "turned" from his nonobservant ways and "returned" to an attempt at serving God in the manner prescribed by Orthodox Judaism. My heart's desire is that all Jews become true *ba'alei-t'shuvah* through Yeshua the Messiah, and that all Christians become truly repentant as well (1 Yn 1:9).

Yochanan's message here is identical with Yeshua's at 4:17.

Kingdom of Heaven. The word "Heaven" was used in pious avoidance of the word "God" (see 1:20N); and to this day Hebrew *malkhut-haShammayim* ("Kingdom of Heaven") substitutes in Jewish religious literature for "Kingdom of God," an expression found frequently in the New Testament, first at 6:33 below. In the *Jewish New Testament* "Heaven" is capitalized when it refers to God; "heaven" is in lower-case when it refers to the sky or paradise.

In both Yochanan's and Yeshua's preaching (4:17) the reason for urgency to repent is that **the Kingdom of Heaven is near**. The concept of the Kingdom of God is crucial to understanding the Bible. It refers neither to a place nor to a time, but to a condition in which the rulership of God is acknowledged by humankind, a condition in which God's promises of a restored universe free from sin and death are, or begin to be, fulfilled.

In relation to the Kingdom of God history can be divided into four periods: before Yeshua, during his lifetime, the present age (the *olam hazeh*) and the future age (the *olam haba*). There was a sense in which the Kingdom was present prior to Yeshua's birth; indeed, God was king over the Jewish people (see 1 Samuel 12:12). Yeshua's arrival brought a quantum leap in the earthly expression of the Kingdom, "For in him, bodily, lives the fullness of all that God is" (Co 2:9).

The New Testament teaches two seemingly contradictory things about the Kingdom of God: that it is near or present (this verse, 4:17, 12:34; Lk 17:21), and that it is yet to

⁹Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Mt 3:2). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

come (25:1, Yn 18:36, Ac 1:6–7). The theologian George Ladd both highlighted and resolved this conflict by calling his book on the Kingdom of God “*The Presence of the Future*.”

Today the Kingdom of God comes immediately and truly—but partially—to all who put their trust in Yeshua and his message, thus committing themselves to live the holy lives God’s rulership demands. As an example of the “partialness,” they have peace in their hearts even though there is not peace in the world. But in the future, at the end of the present age of history, when Yeshua returns, he will inaugurate the Kingdom truly and completely (Rv 19:6); then God will fulfill the rest of his Kingdom promises.

One of the most profound spiritual studies a person can undertake in the Bible is of the Kingdom of God in both the *Tanakh* and the New Testament.¹⁰

Matthew 3:3

For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

[**Esaias**] First of 21 times in New Testament (Matthew 3:3; Matthew 4:14; Matthew 8:17; Matthew 12:17; Matthew 13:14; Matthew 15:7; Luke 3:4; Luke 4:17; John 1:23; John 12:38-41; Acts 8:28-30; Acts 28:25; Romans 9:27-29; Romans 10:16,20; Romans 15:12).

[**The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight**] This is the 6th Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Matthew (Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1). The next is in Matthew 4:15.

(Isaiah 40:3) *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

The prophet quoted is Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3), one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament and one of the most quoted in the New. Like Isaiah, John was a prophet who urged the people to confess their sins and live for God. Both prophets taught that the message of repentance is good news to those who listen and seek the healing forgiveness of God’s love, but terrible news to those who refuse to listen and thus cut off their only hope.

John the Baptist *prepared* the way for Jesus. People who do not know Jesus need to be prepared to meet him. We can prepare them by explaining their need for forgiveness, demonstrating Christ’s teachings by our conduct, and telling them how Christ can give their lives meaning. We can “make straight paths for him” by correcting misconceptions that might be hindering people from approaching Christ. Someone you know may be open to a relationship with Christ. What can you do to prepare the way for this person?¹¹

¹⁰ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 3:2). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

¹¹ Life Application Notes

McGee: “The prophet Esaias” is Isaiah, and the prophecy is in Isaiah 40:3].

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness”—all that John the Baptist claimed for himself was that he was a voice crying in the wilderness. And his purpose was to “prepare the way of the Lord.”¹²

Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight—This prediction is quoted in all the four Gospels, showing that it was regarded as a great outstanding one, and the predicted forerunner as the connecting link between the old and the new economies. Like the great ones of the earth, the Prince of peace was to have His immediate approach proclaimed and His way prepared; and the call here—taking it generally—is a call to put out of the way whatever would obstruct His progress and hinder His complete triumph, whether those hindrances were public or personal, outward or inward. In Luke (Lu 3:5, 6) the quotation is thus continued: “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” Levelling and smoothing are here the obvious figures whose sense is conveyed in the first words of the proclamation—“*Prepare ye the way of the Lord.*” The idea is that every obstruction shall be so removed as to reveal to the whole world the salvation of God in Him whose name is the “Saviour.” (Compare Ps 98:3; Is 11:10; 49:6; 52:10; Lu 2:31, 32; Ac 13:47).¹³

Jewish New Testament Commentary: This quotation initiates the second part of the book of Isaiah (chapters 40–66), which offers comfort to Israel and contains many references to the Messiah. The **one who cries** is Yochanan, identified in spirit with the prophet Elijah; see Mk 1:2–3N.

The voice of someone crying out: “In the desert prepare the way of Adonai!” KJV has, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord”; and most versions, as well as the first two printings of the *JNT*, say that the crier is in the desert. But this is wrong; one learns it by examining the punctuation/cantillation marks in the Masoretic Hebrew text of Isaiah. These show that “in the desert” goes with “prepare the way,” not with “someone crying.” Although these markings are not God-inspired, they indicate how the text was read and understood at the time they were added (not later than the 8th century C.E.); and without a positive reason for understanding the text differently, it is best to assume these markings are correct.¹⁴

in the wilderness

Yeshua challenges the crowd of onlookers by saying, “*What did you go out in the Wilderness to see?*” (Matt 11:9) Why were these people going *out to the Wilderness*? The answer lies with a commonly mistranslated verse, John 1:23, which usually reads: “*The voice of one crying in the Wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'*”

¹²McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹³Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Mt 3:3). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹⁴Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary: A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 3:3). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

The problem lies with the punctuation, which is shown to be different in the Masoretic text, which reads:

"The voice of one crying: 'In the Wilderness make straight the way of the Lord.'"

The Hebrew shows that the message is being cried out *to the people who are in the Wilderness*. Why are they there? Because there was an understanding based on Scripture that the Messiah would first come there – which He did. The "crier" may or may not be in the desert - but the Messiah definitely is. Yeshua appeared to this community (Essenes?), was baptized by John, and only then came to Jerusalem. For anyone wondering where Yeshua was between the ages of 13-30, this might offers some insight.¹⁵

Matthew 3:4

And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

John also dressed like Elijah. John ate locusts and wild honey, may have been eating actual locusts or pods from the Locust tree (carob-like fruit; 2 Kgs 1:8). John is testifying to Jesus' preexistence before birth: He was Jesus' cousin, three months older (Jn 1:15).

Malachi had predicted the arrival of a prophet "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal 4:5). In current thought, Elijah was expected to precede the messianic era. John's clothing recalls the apparel of Elijah (2 Kin 1:8), whose spirit is reflected in his message (1 Kin 18:21). John's clothing is that of a prophet (Zech 13:4), and his theme is derived from Isaiah (Isa 40:3-5).¹⁶

John took an unyielding stand against iniquity (Mt 14:4). He was chosen as a Herald (Jn 1:29-31; Lk 1:15-17) "to open the door of the sheepfold" (Jn 10:2,3).

[camel's hair] Compare 2 Kings 1:8. Rough garments were a mark of prophets (Zech. 13:4; Matthew 11:8). His clothing. This is not the fine hair of the camel from which our elegant cloth is made, called *eamlet*; nor the more elegant stuff, brought from the East Indies, under the name of camel's hair; but the long, shaggy hair of the camel, from which a coarse, cheap cloth is made, still worn by the poorer classes in the East, and by monks. This dress of the camel's hair, and a leathern girdle, it seems, was the common dress of the prophets.

[leathern girdle about his loins] Worn only by the poor. The rich used girdles of silk or linen, decorated with gold, silver, and precious stones.

[locusts and wild honey] A clean food (Leviticus 11:22). Only the poor ate locusts with butter or honey after they were salted and dried. These constituted the food of the common people. Among the Greeks, the vilest of the people used to eat them; and the fact that John made his food of them is significant of his great poverty and humble life.

¹⁵ <http://www.yashanet.com/studies/matstudy/mat5c.htm>

¹⁶ Believer's Study Bible

The Jews were allowed to eat them, Leviticus 11:22. Locusts are flying insects, and are of various kinds. The green locusts are about two inches in length, and about the thickness of a man's finger. The common brown locust is about three inches long. The general form and appearance of the locust is not unlike the grasshopper. They were one of the plagues of Egypt, Exodus 10:1. In eastern countries they are very numerous. They appear in such quantities as to darken the sky, and devour in a short time every green thing. The whole earth is sometimes covered with them for many leagues, Joel 1:4, Isaiah 33:4.

[wild honey] This was probably the honey that he found in the rocks of the wilderness. Palestine was often called the land flowing with milk and honey, Exodus 3:8,17, 13:5. Bees were kept with great care and great numbers of them abounded in the fissures of trees and the clefts of rocks. There is also a species of honey called wild-honey, or *wood-honey* 1 Samuel 14:27, or honey-dew, produced by certain little insects, and deposited on the leaves of trees, and flowing from them in great quantities to the ground. See 1 Samuel 14:24-27. This is said to be produced still in Arabia; and perhaps it was this which John lived upon.

McGee: He's a strange individual, isn't he? He follows a strange diet and has an unusual way of dressing. I hate to say this, but today John would probably qualify in his looks as a vagrant. His raiment was of camel's hair, his leathern girdle was about his loins, his meat was locusts and wild honey. We're told that he never shaved and had long hair. Here's an unusual man, friend, a man with a mission. He's really an Old Testament character, walking out of the Old Testament onto the pages of the New Testament. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets.¹⁷

Jewish New Testament Commentary: Camel's hair was woven into coarse cloth by the poor who could not afford wool garments. While the rich could afford ornate waistbands a poor man would wear a **leather belt**. Thus Yochanan, like many prophets before him, identified with the poor. But the leather belt also elicits association with Elijah (v.3N, 2 Kings 1:8).

Locusts. Leviticus 11:21–22 mentions four species of locusts that may be eaten. Mishna Chullin 3:7 defines the characteristics of *kosher* locusts and in the Gemara, Chullin 65a–66a analyzes these rules at length. Locusts were food for the poor in Yeshua's day; Bedouins cook and eat them to this day, as did the Jews of Yemen before that community was removed to Israel by Operation Flying Carpet in 1950.

Wild honey is that of wild bees. The verse tells us that Yochanan lived outside the normal economic framework of the country so that he could be wholly devoted to his prophetic task.¹⁸

¹⁷McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁸Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 3:4). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Matthew 3:5

Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,

[Jerusalem] The people of Jerusalem.

[all Judea] Many people from Judea. It does not mean that literally *all* the people went, but that great multitudes went. It was general. Jerusalem was in the part of the country called Judea. Judea was situated on the west side of the Jordan. Matthew 2:1.

Why did John attract so many people? He was the first true prophet in 400 years. He blasted both Herod and the religious leaders, daring acts that fascinated the common people. But John also had strong words for his audience—they too were sinners and needed to repent. His message was powerful and true. The people were expecting a prophet like Elijah (Malachi 4:5; Luke 1:17), and John seemed to be the one!

McGee: Notice that the crowds went out to him. John did not rent a stadium or an auditorium or a church, and there was no committee that invited him. In fact, he didn't come to town at all. If you wanted to hear John, you went out to where he was. Obviously, the Spirit of God was on this man.¹⁹

Matthew 3:6

And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

[baptized] Greek: *baptizo* (GSN-907), from *bapto* (GSN-911), to dip (Luke 16:24; Rev. 19:13; John 13:26); to overwhelm with suffering (Matthew 20:22-23; Luke 12:50); to bury into (Romans 6:3-7; Col. 2:12), regardless of the element used. See Acts 8:38. The root meaning of "*baptize*" is to immerse so that what is dipped takes on the qualities of what it has been dipped in. Ritual purity was important in many instances and is mentioned through the Tenakh. What we call "baptism" was a mikveh (ritual bath) and is still used today.

Seven Baptisms in Scripture:

1. John's baptism in water (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; Luke 7:29-30; John 1:31-33; John 3:23-26; John 10:40; Acts 1:5; Acts 11:16; Acts 19:3)
2. Christ's baptism in water (John 3:22; John 4:1-2)
3. Baptism in suffering (Luke 12:50)
4. Baptism in the cloud and in the sea (1 Cor. 10:2)
5. Christian baptism in water (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38-41; Acts 8:12-16,36-38; Acts 9:18; Acts 10:47-48; Acts 16:15,33; Acts 18:8; Acts 19:5; Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 1:13-17; 1 Peter 3:21)

¹⁹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

6. Baptism into Christ and into His body (Romans 6:3-7; 1 Cor. 12:13; Galatians 3:27; Col. 2:12)
7. Baptism in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11,14; Matthew 20:22-23; Mark 1:8; Mark 10:38-39; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; John 7:37-39; Acts 1:5; Acts 11:16; Acts 19:2-3)

Three Baptisms for Believers:

1. Into Christ or into His body at repentance and the new birth (pt. 6, above). Called "one baptism" (Ephes. 4:5), because it is the only baptism that saves the soul and brings into the body of Christ.
2. Water baptism after one is saved (pt. 5, above and note, "Matthew 3:11).
3. Spirit baptism, the endowment of power for service. It can take place before water baptism (Acts 10:44-48) or after it (Acts 1:4-8; Acts 2:1-11; Acts 8:12-21; Acts 19:1-7).

The Holy Spirit is the agent to baptize into Christ and into His body (1 Cor. 12:13); Christ is the agent to baptize in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; John 1:31-33); and the minister is the agent to baptize into water (Matthew 28:19).

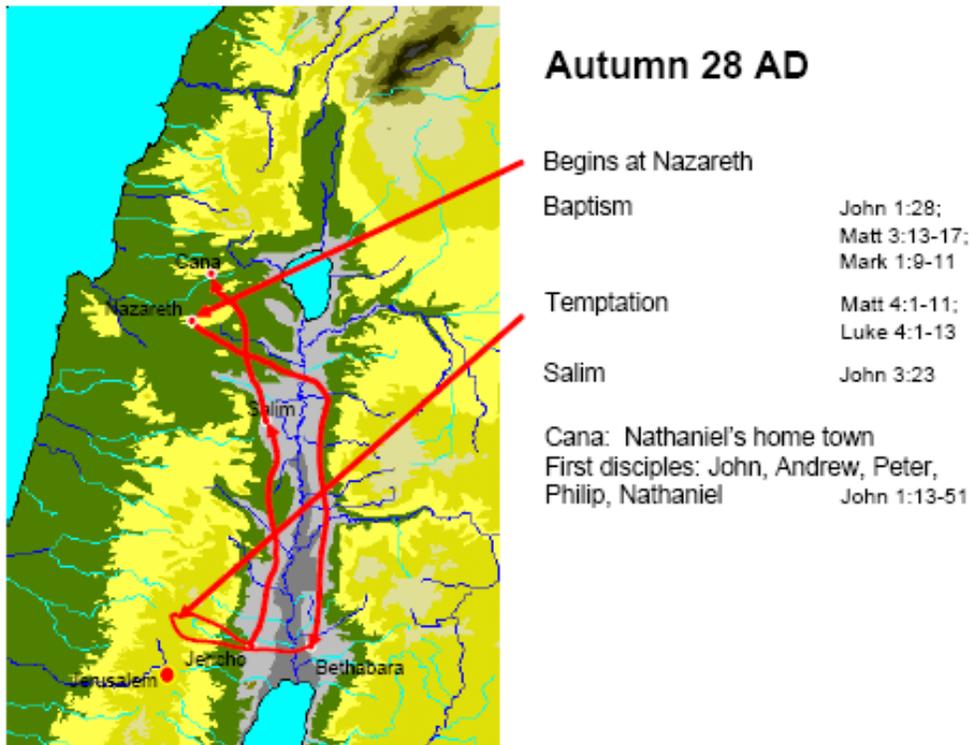
[were baptized] The word baptize signifies originally to *tinge*, to *dye*, to *stain*, as those who dye clothes. It here means to cleanse or wash anything by the application of water. Mark 7:4. Washing, or ablution, was much in use among the Jews, as one of the rites of their religion, Numbers 19:7, Hebrews 9:10. It was not customary, however, among them, to *baptize* those who were converted to the Jewish religion until after the Babylonish captivity. At the time of John, and for some time previous, they had been accustomed to administer a rite of *baptism*, or *washing*, to those who became proselytes to their religion; that is, who were converted from being Gentiles. This was done to signify that they renounced the errors and worship of the pagans, and as significant of their becoming pure by embracing a new religion. It was a solemn rite of *washing*, significant of cleansing from their former sins, and purifying them for the peculiar service of Jehovah. John found this custom in use; and as he was calling the Jews to a *new dispensation*, to a change in their form of religion, he administered this rite of baptism, or washing, to signify the cleansing from their sins, and adopting the new dispensation, or the fitness for the pure reign of the Messiah. They applied an old ordinance to a new purpose. As it was used by John it was a significant rite, or ceremony, intended to denote the putting away of impurity, and a purpose to be pure in heart and life. The Hebrew Word (*tabal*) which is rendered by the word baptize, occurs in the Old Testament in the following places, viz. :- Leviticus 4:6, 14:6,51, Numbers 19:18, Ruth 2:14, Exodus 12:22, Deuteronomy 33:24, Ezekiel 23:15 Job 9:31, Leviticus 9:9, 1 Samuel 14:27, 2 Kings 5:14, 8:15, Genesis 37:31, Josh 3:15.²⁰

²⁰ Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

Chronology (see graphic, below)

- Tiberius appointed: 14 A.D. (Augustus died August 19, 14 A.D.).
- (Within the) 15th year of Tiberius (Luke 3:1).
- Thus, ministry began in fall 28 A.D.
- 4th Passover: April 6, 32 A.D. [Sir Robert Anderson; other chronologies assume a Friday crucifixion.]

(Good scholars differ on the precise dating; many place it two years earlier to make the final Passover come out on a Friday; We believe it was on a Wednesday; we'll explain why in later sessions.) Also, there are a number of different attempts to harmonize the four gospels, and many good scholars have reconciled them differently; This is but one...Risto Santala, translated from the Finnish, 1992.)²¹



[Jordan] The river Jordan is the eastern boundary of Palestine or Judea. It rises in Mount Lebanon, on the north of Palestine, and runs in a southerly direction, *under ground*, for thirteen miles, and then bursts forth with a great noise at Cesarea Philippi. It then unites with two small streams, and runs some miles farther, and empties into the lake *Merom*. From this small lake it flows thirteen miles, and then falls into the lake Gennesareth, otherwise called the sea of Tiberias, or the sea of Galilee. Through the middle of this lake, which is fifteen miles long and from six to nine broad, it flows undisturbed, and preserves a southerly direction for about seventy miles, and then falls into the Dead Sea.

The Jordan, at its entrance into the Dead Sea, is about ninety feet wide. It flows in many places with great rapidity; and when swollen by rains, pours like an impetuous torrent. It formerly regularly overflowed its banks in time of harvest, that is in March, in

²¹ Chuck Missler, Commentary on Matthew, khouse.org

some places six hundred paces, Joshua 3:15, 1 Chronicles 12:15. These banks are covered with small trees and shrubs, and afford a convenient dwelling for wild beasts. Allusion is often made to these thickets in the sacred Scriptures, Jeremiah 49:19, 50:44,

John must have presented a strange image! Many people came to hear this preacher who wore odd clothes and ate unusual food. Some probably came simply out of curiosity and ended up repenting of their sins as they listened to his powerful message. People may be curious about your Christian life-style and values. You can use their simple curiosity as an opener to share how Christ makes a difference in you. This only works however if you are following a true Christian Life-style and values.

McGee: In other words, all of this denoted a *change* in the lives of these people. The very fact that they submitted to John's baptism was an indication that they were leaving their old lives and turning to new lives.²²

Pagans wanting to convert to Judaism would repent and be baptized, but John here treats Jewish people on the same terms as pagans²³

Jewish New Testament Commentary: Confessing their sins. Greek *exomologe*, "agree, admit, acknowledge, declare publicly, confess," literally, "say the same thing." In the case of confessing one's sins, one is saying the same thing about them that God says, acknowledging the deeds to be wrong, willing to declare publicly one's sorrow, guilt and resolution to change. On *Yom-Kippur* (the Day of Atonement) and other fast days, *s-lichot* (penitential prayers) are recited which can help people who say them with *kavvanah* (intention, devotion) to become more willing to admit their sins and agree with God's opinion of them. See Yn 1:9&N, Ya 5:16&N.

Sins. We live in an age when many people do not know what sin is. Sin is violation of *Torah* (1 Yn 3:4), transgression of the law God gave his people in order to help them live a life which would be in their own best interests as well as holy and pleasing to God. In the so-called Age of Enlightenment, two or three centuries ago, the notion of moral relativism began to gain a hold in Western societies. Under its sway people discarded the concept of sin as irrelevant. In this view there are no sins, only sicknesses, misfortunes, mistakes, or the outworking of one's environmental, hereditary and biological input

²²McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

repent **Repentance**. In the New Testament, this term does not merely mean "change of mind" (as some have gathered from the Greek term); it reflects the Old Testament and Jewish concept of "turning around" or "turning away" from sin. Jewish people were to repent whenever they sinned; the New Testament uses the term especially for the once-for-all turning a Gentile would undergo when converting to Judaism or any sinner would undergo when becoming a follower of Jesus.

baptized **Baptism**. The Old Testament and the ancient world emphasized ceremonial washings to remove various kinds of impurity; Judaism had developed these washings more fully by the time of Jesus, and some sects (particularly the community that authored the Dead Sea Scrolls) were especially scrupulous. One once-for-all ritual designed to purify Gentiles of pagan impurity when they converted to Judaism (attested in the rabbis, in Epictetus, and elsewhere) provided the most significant model for Christian baptism: it indicated an act of conversion, of turning from the old life to the new.

²³Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Mt 3:5). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

(western terminology) or of one's fate or karma (eastern). Alternatively, sin is acknowledged to exist, but only as defined in one's culture—cultural relativism thus negates the biblical concept of sin as absolute wrong.

Much of the Bible is concerned with explaining what sin is, what the penalty for sinning is, how we can avoid that penalty and have our sins forgiven, and how we can live a holy life free from the power of sin, pleasing to God and to ourselves. See the book of Romans and especially Ro 5:12–21N.²⁴

Confessing their sins

"Confessing sins" is saying the same thing about them as God says. Sin is defined as a violation of God's Torah, typically translated as, "transgressing the Law" (1 John 3:4). Unfortunately, "Law" is an incorrect translation of "Torah," yet is used in all Christian Bibles. A correct translation of Torah is "*revelation*" or "*instruction*" from God. Yeshua Himself said that none of the Torah is done away with (Matthew 5:17-21) as does Paul (Romans 3:31). We will cover this in detail in an upcoming section. Scripture also tells us that Yeshua and the Father's will are both one, that God does not change, and that Yeshua is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

If our trust is in God's provision for sin (Yeshua), then our sins are forgiven and the "curse of the Torah" is removed - it is "nailed to the cross" with Him. (This is what Paul talks about in several of his epistles - Our Romans study will cover this in detail.) The Torah's condemnation of us and its role as a "tutor" (or "guardian") comes to an end once we come to faith. However, the Torah (all of it) remains as our guideline to determine what sin is, and if we are "living right" with God. We shall discuss this as we go along in this study.²⁵

Matthew 3:7

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

[generation of vipers] To a Pharisee this refers to Gen 3:15, the seed of the serpent. He is calling them the sons of Satan!

[vipers] Poisonous asps or adders, not ordinary snakes. Common ones are about 4 inches long and no thicker than a wire. They lurk under stones, in the sand of the desert, or in cracks of old walls, and are very deadly and aggressive (Genesis 49:17; Job 20:16; Isaiah 59:5; Acts 28:3).

The Jews were divided into three great sects, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. In addition to these, some smaller sects are mentioned in the New Testament, and by Josephus: the Herodians, probably political friends of Herod; the Galileans, a

²⁴Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 3:6). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

²⁵ <http://www.yashanet.com/studies/matstudy/mat5c.htm>

branch of the Pharisees; and the Therapeutae, a branch of the Essenes, but converts from the Greeks. The principal of these sects are supposed to have originated about 150 years before Christ, as they are mentioned by Josephus at about that time in his history. Of course nothing is said of them in the Old Testament, as that was finished about 400 years before the Christian era.

[Pharisees] “separatists”; the legalists, the ritualists, out of them came the traditions of the Talmudic Jew. A sect of self-righteous and zealous Jews who held to the letter of their interpretations of the law and to their own traditions, regardless of whether they nullified the Word of God or not. They were Christ's bitterest enemies (Matthew 15:2; Matthew 23:1-33; Mark 7:8-13; Luke 11:42; Galatians 1:14; Phil. 3:4-6).

Barnes' Notes - The PHARISEES were the most numerous and wealthy sect of the Jews. They derived their name from the Hebrew word *Pharash*, which signifies to set apart, or to separate, because they *separated* themselves from the rest of their countrymen, and professedly devoted themselves to peculiar strictness in religion. Their leading tenets were the following:- that the world was governed by fate, or by a fixed decree of God; that the souls of men were immortal, and were either eternally happy or miserable beyond the grave; that the dead would be raised; that there were angels, good and bad; that God was under obligation to bestow peculiar favour on the Jews; and that they were justified by the merits of Abraham, or by their own conformity to the law. They were proud, haughty, self-righteous, and held the common people in great disrespect, John 7:49. They sought the offices of the state, and affected great dignity. They were ostentatious in their religious worship, praying in the corners of the streets, and seeking publicity in the bestowment of alms. They sought principally external cleanliness; and dealt much in ceremonial ablutions and washing.

Some of the laws of Moses they maintained very strictly. In addition to the written laws, they held to a multitude which they maintained had come down from Moses by tradition. These they felt themselves as much bound to observe as the written law. Under the influence of these laws, they washed themselves before meals with great scrupulousness; they fasted twice a week-on Thursday, when they supposed Moses ascended Mount Sinai, and on Monday, when he descended; they wore broad phylacteries, and enlarged the fringe or borders of their garments; they loved the chief rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues. They were in general a corrupt, hypocritical, office-seeking, haughty class of men. There are, however, some honourable exceptions recorded, Acts 5:34. Perhaps, also, Mark 15:43, Luke 2:25, 23:51, John 19:38.

[Sadducees] liberalists, rationalists, “reformed” (modernists, humanists) who denied the inspiration of the Word and didn't believe in the resurrection (so they were “sad, you see.”). A radical and rationalistic sect who denied the supernatural (angels, demons, and resurrections) held to, more or less, by the Pharisees (Mark 12:18; Acts 4:1; Acts 5:15-17; Acts 23:8).

Barnes' Notes - The SADDUCEES are supposed to have taken their name from Sadok, who flourished about 260 years before the Christian era. He was a pupil of Antigonus Sochaeus, president of the sanhedrim, or great council of the nation. He had taught the

duty of serving God *disinterestedly*, without the hope of reward, or the fear of punishment Sadok, not properly understanding the doctrine of his master drew the inference that there was no future state of rewards or punishments and on this belief he founded the sect. The other notions which they held, all to be traced to this leading doctrine, were:-

1st. That there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit, (Matthew 22:23, Acts 23:8) and that the soul of man perishes with the body.

2nd. They rejected the doctrine of fate.

3rd. They rejected all traditions, and professed to receive only the books of the Old Testament.

They were far less numerous than the Pharisees, but their want of numbers was compensated, in some degree, by their wealth and standing in society. Though they did not generally *seek* office, yet several of them were advanced to the high-priesthood.

[O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?]

Question 2. Next, Matthew 3:14.

Ancients thought that some kinds of vipers ate their way out of their mothers (see, e.g., Herodotus, Plutarch). It was bad enough to be called a viper, but to be called a viper's child was even worse—killing one's mother or father was the most hideous crime conceivable in antiquity.²⁶

Jewish New Testament Commentary; *P.rushim* and *Tz.dukim* (plural; singular *Parush*, *Tzadok*), “Pharisees and Sadducees.” These were the two main factions of the religious establishment in Yeshua's time. In 586 B.C.E. Babylon conquered Judea and Jerusalem, laid waste the First Temple, which King Solomon had built, and deported the ruling classes to Babylon. With the Temple, the sacrifices and the *cohanim* no longer functioning, the Jews in exile and after their return seventy years later sought another organizing principle on which to center their communal life. They found it in the *Torah* (the “Law”; see 5:17N), as can be seen already in the report of the reading of the *Torah* by Ezra (Nehemiah 8). The earliest students, developers and upholders of the *Torah* seem to have been of the hereditary priestly caste—Ezra himself was both a *cohen* and a *sofer* (“scribe”). But later, as the *cohanim* were drawn back into caring for the sacrificial system as it developed during the Second Temple period, a lay movement which supported the *Torah* and favored its adaptation to the needs of the people arose and began to challenge the authority of the *cohanim*. The *cohanim* and their backers in the first century C.E. were known as *Tz.dukim*, after the *cohen gadol* appointed by King Solomon, Tzadok (his name means “righteous”; compare 6:1–4&N, 13:17&N).

Meanwhile, under the Maccabees in the second century B.C.E. those whose main concern was not the sacrifices but the *Torah* were called *Hasidim*. (Except for the name, which means “pious ones,” there is no connection between these and the various Orthodox Jewish communities that follow the teachings spread by the *talmidim* of the

Plutarch **Plutarch**. A Greek biographer and moralist whose writings illustrate many of the views prevalent in the first and second centuries A.D.

²⁶Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Mt 3:7). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

seventeenth-century Eastern European teacher and mystic known as the *Baal Shem Tov*.) The successors to the *Hasidim* were known as *P.rushim*, which means “separated ones,” because they separated themselves from worldly ways and worldly people. These *P.rushim* not only took the *Tanakh* to be God’s word to man, but also considered the accumulated tradition handed down over the centuries by the sages and teachers to be God’s word as well—the Oral *Torah*—so that a system for living developed which touched on every aspect of life.

In Yeshua’s day the *Tz.dukim* tended to be richer, more skeptical, more worldly, and more willing to cooperate with the Roman rulers than the *P.rushim*. However, the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. ended the viability of the *Tz.dukim* by destroying the venue of their chief responsibility; and whatever tradition they may have developed has for the most part been lost. See Ac 23:6&N.

The *P.rushim* and their successors were then free to develop further their own received tradition and make it the center of gravity for Jewish life everywhere. Eventually, due to the dispersion of the Jewish people, which separated many from the living flow of tradition, these oral materials were collected and written down in the Mishna (220 C.E.), under the editorship of Y’hudah HaNasi (“Judah the Prince”). The rabbis’ discussions about the Mishna during the following two or three centuries in the Land of Israel and in Babylon were collected to form the Jerusalem and Babylonian Gemaras. Combined with the Mishna these constitute the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds.

Centuries of Christian preaching have made the English word “Pharisee” virtually a synonym for “hypocrite” and “stubborn legalist”—witness the entry for “pharisaical” in Webster’s Third New International Dictionary:

“Resembling the Pharisees especially in strictness of doctrine and in rigid observance of forms and ceremonies; making an outward show of piety and morality but lacking the inward spirit; censorious of others’ morals or practices; formal, sanctimonious, self-righteous, hypocritical.”

While it is true that Yeshua himself lambasted “you hypocritical *Torah*-teachers and *P.rushim*” for having many of these traits (see chapter 23 and 23:13N), Christians often forget that his hard words were delivered in a family context—as a Jew criticizing some of his fellow Jews. A glance at any modern Jewish community newspaper will show that Jews are still critical of each other and willing to endure such criticism—reproof and rebuke are normal and acceptable behaviors in many Jewish settings. However, Yeshua does not take his fellow Jews to task for being Pharisees but for being hypocrites—the former does not imply the latter. Moreover, Yeshua’s criticism was not of all *P.rushim* but only of those who were hypocritical. While some Pharisees were insincere or overly concerned with externals, others were “not far from the Kingdom of God” (Mk 12:34), and some entered it and became followers of Yeshua without ceasing to be *P.rushim* (Ac 15:5). In fact Sha’ul said before the *Sanhedrin*, “Brothers, I myself am a *Parush*”—“am,” not “was” (Ac 23:6).

Because of the subconscious negative associations most people have with the English word “Pharisee,” the *JNT* text uses the original Hebrew words “*Parush*” (singular) and “*P.rushim*” (plural), and for the sake of parallelism substitutes “*Tzadok/Tz.dukim*” for “Sadducee/Sadducees.”

You snakes! Yochanan discerned that these particular Pharisees and Sadducees (see above paragraphs) were insincere. Whether they were dilettantes sampling the latest religious fad or envoys from Jerusalem investigating Yochanan's activities is unclear. Luke 7:28–32 suggests the former, Mt 21:23–27 the latter. In any case, in the end the religious establishment did not accept Yochanan's ministry.

The coming punishment, literally, “the wrath to come.” God's wrath is spoken of here and frequently in the New Testament as *the* wrath, emphasizing how certainly—one might even say how automatically—God's wrath must follow sin. Just as God's physical law of gravity makes it certain that the automatic consequence of jumping from a tall building is physical destruction, so God's moral law of sin makes it certain that the automatic consequence of persisting in sins is eternal spiritual destruction in God's wrath.²⁷

Matthew 3:8

Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

Proof was required in genuine repentance to discourage mere profession and outward show (Luke 3:8-14; Luke 19:8; 2 Cor. 5:17; 2 Cor. 7:9-11).

That is, the proper fruits of reformation, the proper evidence that you are sincere. Do not bring your cunning and dissimulation to this work; carry not your hypocrisy into your professed repentance; but evince your sincerity by forsaking sins, and thus give evidence that this crowding to Jordan Is not some act of dissimulation. No discourse could have been more appropriate or more cutting.

Fruits Conduct. See Matthew 7:16-19.

Meet for repentance, Fit for repentance; appropriate to it—the proper expression of repentance.

Life Application: John the Baptist called people to more than words or ritual; he told them to change their behavior. “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” means that God looks beyond our words and religious activities to see if our conduct backs up what we say, and he judges our words by the actions that accompany them. Do your actions match your words?

McGee: Now see who is coming! Listen to the way he greets these dignified visitors. Suppose your preacher got up next Sunday morning and said, “O generation of vipers”! I imagine that the deacons would be looking for another preacher! This is really strong language. He's talking to the dignified Pharisees and Sadducees and is telling them,

²⁷ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 3:7). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

“There must be evidence of this new life. You can’t just go through the *act* of baptism. There must be fruit in your life.”²⁸

Matthew 3:9

And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Which stones? Cf. Joshua 3, the stone monuments as a memorial for the crossing of the Jordan River.

And think not to say, They regarded it, as sufficient righteousness that they were descended from so holy a man as Abraham. They deemed it as such an honour that it would go far to justify all his descendants, John 8:33-37, 53. John assured them that this was a matter of small consequence in the sight of God. Of the very stones of the Jordan he could raise up children to Abraham. The meaning seems to be this: God, from these stones, could more easily raise up those who should be *worthy* children of Abraham, or be *like him*, than simply because you are descendants of Abraham make you, who are proud and hypocritical, subjects of the Messiah's kingdom. Or, mere *nativity*, or the privileges of birth, avail nothing where there is not righteousness of life. Some have supposed, however, that by these stones he meant the Roman soldiers, or the heathen, who might also have attended on his ministry; and that God could of them raise up children to Abraham.²⁹

Jewish people commonly believed that they were saved as a people by virtue of their descent from Abraham. The idea of God raising up people from stones would have sounded to John the Baptist’s Jewish hearers more like pagan mythology (the Greeks had such a story) than reality, but these words emphasized that God did not need Israel to fulfill his purpose (as in Amos 9:7; cf. Genesis 1:24; Genesis 2:9). Some scholars have also suggested a wordplay on “children” and “stones” in Aramaic.³⁰

Jewish New Testament Commentary: Don’t suppose you can comfort yourselves by saying, “Avraham is our father”! The Messianic Jewish scholar Alfred Edersheim wrote,

“[D]id they imagine that, according to the common notion of the time, the vials of wrath were to be poured out only on the Gentiles, while they, as Abraham’s children, were sure of escape—in the words of the Talmud, that ‘the night’ ([Isaiah 21:12](#)) was ‘only to the nations of the world, but the morning to Israel’ (Jer. Ta’anit 64a)?

“For, no principle was more fully established in the popular conviction than that all Israel had part in the world to come (Sanhedrin 10:1 [quoted in Ro 11:26aN]), and this specifically because of their connection with

²⁸ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²⁹ Barne’s Notes on the New Testament

³⁰ Bible Background Commentary

Abraham.” (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Company, 2nd edition [1884], Volume I, p. 271)

God can raise up for Avraham sons from these stones, even as he raised up Isaac from the stone altar in figurative resurrection; compare MJ 11:19&N. The English phrase, “**sons from these stones**” is an attempt to preserve by alliteration the Hebrew wordplay which the Greek text ignores. “Sons” in Hebrew is *banim*, “stones” is written *abanim* (pronounced *avanim*). A less likely possibility is that “from these stones” means “from these clods, these *am-ha-aretz*” (see Yn 7:49N, Ac 4:13N). Wordplay has been common in Jewish speech from ancient times to the present, with many examples in the *Tanakh* itself; see 2:23N.³¹

Matthew 3:10

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

[**And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees ...**] The 3rd New Testament prophecy in Matthew (Matthew 3:10-12). Next, “Matthew 5:3. Threefold: judgment (Matthew 3:10; Matthew 7:15-23); Spirit baptism (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:4-8; Acts 2:1-39; Acts 11:14-18); and second coming (Matthew 3:12; Matthew 13:30,39-43,49-50; Matthew 25:31-46).

The axe is laid unto the root of the trees. Laying the axe at the root of a tree is intended to denote that the tree is to be cut down. It was not merely to be *trimmed*, to be cut *about the limbs*, but the very *tree* itself was to be struck. That is, a searching, trying kind of preaching has been commenced. A kingdom of justice is to be set, up. Principles and conduct are to be investigated. No art, no dissimulations, are to be successful. Men are to be tried by their lives, not by birth, or profession. They who are not found to bear this test, are to be rejected. The very *root* shall feel the blow, and the fruitless tree shall fall. This is a beautiful and very striking figure of speech, and a very direct threatening of future wrath. John regarded them as making a fair and promising profession, as trees do in *blossom*. But he told them, also, that they should bear *fruit* as well as *flowers*. Their *professions* of repentance were not enough. They should show, by a holy life, that their profession was genuine.³²

Life Application: Just as a fruit tree is expected to bear fruit, God’s people should produce a crop of good deeds. God has no use for people who call themselves Christians but do nothing about it. Like many people in John’s day who were God’s people in name only, we are of no value if we are Christians in name only. If others can’t see our faith in the way we treat them, we may not be God’s people at all.

God’s message hasn’t changed since the Old Testament—people will be judged for their unproductive lives. God calls us to be *active* in our obedience. John compared

³¹ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 3:9). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

³² Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament

people who claim they believe God but don't live for God to unproductive trees that will be cut down. To be productive for God, we must obey his teachings, resist temptation, actively serve and help others, and share our faith. How productive are you for God?

McGee: A great deal is said in the New Testament about fruit bearing. Fruit bearing is the result of having the right kind of tree. Only a fruit tree can produce fruit. He talks here about the axe being laid to the root of the tree, and the reason is that the tree is not bearing fruit. An apple tree will bear apples, and a plum tree will bear plums. But when a tree bears thorns, it is not an apple tree, and it must be cut down. The root and the fruit go together, by the way, and a tree must have the right kind of root to bear the right kind of fruit. That is exactly what John the Baptist is saying to them here. He is telling them that the wrong kind of tree is going to be taken down and cast into the fire.³³

therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire—Language so personal and individual as this can scarcely be understood of any national judgment like the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, with the breaking up of the Jewish polity and the extrusion of the chosen people from their peculiar privileges which followed it; though this would serve as the dark shadow, cast before, of a more terrible retribution to come. The “fire,” which in another verse is called “unquenchable,” can be no other than that future “torment” of the impenitent whose “smoke ascendeth up for ever and ever,” and which by the Judge Himself is styled “everlasting punishment” (Mt 25:46). What a strength, too, of just indignation is in that word “cast” or “flung into the fire!”³⁴

The third Gospel here adds the following important particulars in Lu 3:10–16.

Lu 3:10:

And the people—the multitudes.

asked him, saying, What shall we do then?—that is, to show the sincerity of our repentance.

Lu 3:11:

He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat—provisions, victuals.

let him do likewise—This is directed against the reigning avarice and selfishness. (Compare the corresponding precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5:40–42).

Lu 3:12:

Then came also the publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master—Teacher. *what shall we do?*—In what special way is the genuineness of our repentance to be manifested?

Lu 3:13:

And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you—This is directed against that extortion which made the publicans a byword. (See on Mt 5:46; Lu 15:1).

³³ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³⁴ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Mt 3:10). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Lu 3:14:

And the soldiers—rather, “And soldiers”—the word means “soldiers on active duty.” *likewise demanded*—asked.

of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man—Intimidate. The word signifies to “shake thoroughly,” and refers probably to the extorting of money or other property.

neither accuse any falsely—by acting as informers vexatiously on frivolous or false pretexts.

and be content with your wages—or “rations.” We may take this, say WEBSTER and WILKINSON, as a warning against mutiny, which the officers attempted to suppress by largesses and donations. And thus the “fruits” which would evidence their repentance were just resistance to the reigning sins—particularly of the *class* to which the penitent belonged—and the manifestation of an opposite spirit.

Lu 3:15:

And as the people were in expectation—in a state of excitement, looking for something new

and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not—rather, “whether he himself might be the Christ.” The structure of this clause implies that they could hardly think it, but yet could not help asking themselves whether it might not be; showing both how successful he had been in awakening the expectation of Messiah’s immediate appearing, and the high estimation and even reverence, which his own character commanded.

Lu 3:16:

John answered—either to that deputation from Jerusalem, of which we read in Jn 1:19, &c., or on some other occasion, to remove impressions derogatory to his blessed Master, which he knew to be taking hold of the popular mind.

saying unto them all—in solemn protestation.³⁵

Matthew 3:11

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

God’s promise to Noah was that never again would He flood the entire earth (2 Pet 3:10 notes that next time it’s not with water, it’s with fire). “Baptize the world with fire” may have a double meaning, maybe meaning Pentecost. Fire also idiomatically speaks of judgment, so fire might also refer to the Second Coming and the climax of the end times (a different type of baptism).³⁶

[water unto repentance] Ten reasons forgiveness is not by water; (Dake)

³⁵Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Mt 3:10). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³⁶Chuck Missler, Commentary on Matthew, khouse.org

1. The word "unto" is Greek: eis (GSN-1519), a preposition translated "for" (because of, by reason of, on account of) in Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38. Eis is translated "for" (because of) 140 times; "on" 58 times; and "upon" 25 times. It appears in "for this same purpose" (Romans 9:17; Col. 4:8); "for this cause" (John 18:37; 1 Peter 4:6); "for this purpose" (Acts 26:16; 1 John 3:8); and "for that intent" (Acts 9:21).
2. On all occasions confession of sins was required and was made before baptism (Matthew 3:8,11; Mark 1:5; Luke 3:8-14).
3. Only believers were baptized after repentance and faith in Christ (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:28,41; Acts 8:12-13,37; Acts 16:14-15,31-33; Acts 18:8; Acts 19:1-7), and, in some cases, after receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17-18; Acts 10:44-48).
4. Christ who knew no sin was baptized. Christ submitted to baptism for two reasons:
 - (1) To fulfill righteousness (Matthew 3:15)
 - (2) To be manifest to Israel (John 1:31)
5. Baptism is only a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Peter 3:21).
6. It's not essential to salvation (2 Cor. 1:13-21).
7. Faith in the blood of Christ brings remission of sins (Matthew 26:28; Romans 3:24-25; Romans 4:1-25; Romans 5:1-11; Romans 8:2; Romans 10:4-10; 1 Cor. 15:1-5; Ephes. 1:7; Ephes. 2:8-9; Galatians 3:19-29; John 3:16; Acts 10:43; Acts 13:38-39; 1 Cor. 1:18-21; 1 John 1:9; 1 John 5:1).
8. Old Testament saints, including John and all in Luke 1:15,41,46,67; Luke 2:25-38 who were filled with the Spirit, were saved without water baptism.
9. Christ forgave sins without baptism (Matthew 9:1-7; Luke 7:36-50; Luke 18:9-14; Luke 19:1-9; Luke 23:43; John 4:49-53; John 7:31; John 8:30-31; John 11:45; John 12:11,42; Acts 3:1-11,16; Acts 4:10-12; etc.).
10. It does not put away the filth of the flesh (□ 1 Peter 3:21, note; see Baptism Did Not Remit Paul's Sin).³⁷

Shall baptize you. Shall send upon you the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is frequently represented as being poured out upon his people, Proverbs 1:23, Isaiah 44:3, Joel 2:28,29, Acts 2:17,18. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the same, therefore, as the sending of his influences to convert, purify, and guide the soul.

The Holy Ghost: The Third Person of the adorable Trinity, whose office it is to enlighten, renew, sanctify, and comfort the soul. He was promised by the Saviour to convince of sin, John 16:8. To enlighten or teach the disciples, John 14:26, 16:13. To comfort them in the absence of the Saviour, John 14:18, 16:7. To change the heart, Titus 3:5. To be baptized with the Holy Ghost means, that the Messiah would send upon the world a far more powerful and mighty influence than had attended the preaching of John. Many more would be converted. A mighty change would take place. His ministry would not affect the external life only, but *the heart, the motives, the soul*; and produce rapid and permanent changes in the lives of men. See Acts 2:17,18.

³⁷ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

Life Application: John baptized people as a sign that they had asked God to forgive their sins and had decided to live as he wanted them to live. Baptism was an *outward* sign of commitment. To be effective, it had to be accompanied by an *inward* change of attitude leading to a changed life—the work of the Holy Spirit. John said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. This looked ahead to Pentecost (Acts 2), when the Holy Spirit would be sent by Jesus in the form of tongues of fire, empowering his followers to preach the gospel. John’s statement also symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing God’s judgment on those who refuse to repent. Everyone will one day be baptized—either now by God’s Holy Spirit, or later by the fire of his judgment.

McGee: John is saying, “I baptize with water. But He is coming, and when He comes, He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost, *and* with fire”—that final “and” is already over nineteen hundred years long. You and I are living in the age of the Holy Spirit. Christ Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit in this present age. He will baptize with fire when He comes the second time, and fire means judgment. This distinction needs to be made.

Somebody will say, “I thought that on the Day of Pentecost, the believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire, because it says that tongues of fire sat upon each of them.” Oh, my friend, you ought to read Acts 2:2–3 again. The record is this: “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven *as* of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues *like* as of fire, and it sat upon each of them” (italics mine). It wasn’t wind and it wasn’t fire; it was the coming of the Holy Spirit. But there was something to appeal to the eye-gate and to the ear-gate. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit came, there was not the fulfillment of the baptism of fire. Let me repeat that, the baptism of fire will take place at the *second* coming of Christ. In the present age of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit comes upon every believer. Not just *some*, but *every* believer is baptized by the Holy Spirit, which means that the believer is identified with the body of Christ; that is, he becomes part of the body of Christ. This is one of the great truths in the Word of God.

John continues to speak of Christ’s second coming—³⁸

Matthew 3:12

Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

His floor. The threshing-floor was an open space, or area, in the field, usually on an elevated part of the land, Genesis 1:10. It had no covering or walls. It was a space of ground thirty or forty paces in diameter, and made smooth by rolling it, or treading it hard. A high place was selected for rite purpose of keeping it dry, and for the convenience of winnowing the grain by the wind. The grain was usually trodden out by oxen. Sometimes it was beaten with flails, as with us; and sometimes with a sharp threshing instrument, made to roll over the grain, and to cut the straw at the same time, Isaiah 41:15. After being threshed it was winnowed. The grain was then separated from

³⁸McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

the dirt and coarse chaff by a sieve, and then still farther cleansed by a fan, an instrument to produce an artificial wind. This method is still practiced in eastern nations.

A winnowing fork is a pitchfork used to toss wheat in the air to separate wheat from chaff. The wheat is the part of the plant that is useful; chaff is the worthless outer shell. Because it is useless, chaff is burned; wheat, however, is gathered. “Winnowing” is often used as a picture of God’s judgment. Unrepentant people will be judged and discarded because they are worthless in doing God’s work; those who repent and believe will be saved and used by God.

He will immerse you in the *Ruach HaKodesh*, the “Holy Spirit,” the Spirit of God. A promise made by Yeshua himself (Lk 24:49; Yn 15:26, 16:13–14; Ac 1:8); its fulfillment begins at Ac 2:1ff.³⁹

Matthew 3:13

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

Matthew 3:14

But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

[I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?] Question 3. Next, Matthew 5:13. John desired the Spirit baptism Christ came to give (John 1:31-34). John was filled (Luke 1:15), but never baptized with the Spirit, which was not given until Christ was glorified (John 7:37-39; Acts 1:4-8; Acts 2:33-34; Acts 11:16).

saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?—(How John came to recognize Him, when he says he knew Him not, see Jn 1:31–34). The emphasis of this most remarkable speech lies all in the pronouns: “What! Shall the Master come for baptism to the servant—the sinless Saviour to a sinner?” That thus much is in the Baptist’s words will be clearly seen if it be observed that he evidently regarded Jesus as *Himself needing no purification* but rather *qualified to impart it to those who did*. And do not all his other testimonies to Christ fully bear out this sense of the words? But it were a pity if, in the glory of this testimony to Christ, we should miss the beautiful spirit in which it was borne—“Lord, must *I* baptize *Thee*? Can I bring myself to do such a thing?”—reminding us of Peter’s exclamation at the supper table, “Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?” while it has nothing of the false humility and presumption which dictated Peter’s next speech. “Thou shall never wash my feet” (Jn 13:6, 8).⁴⁰

³⁹Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 3:11). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

⁴⁰Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Mt 3:14). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Matthew 3:15

And Jesus answering said unto him, *Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.* Then he suffered him.

[us to fulfil all righteousness] Both were sent by God and had to fulfill what they were sent to do.

Suffer = permit

All righteousness. There was no particular precept in the Old Testament requiring this, but he chose to give the sanction of his example to the baptism of John, as to a Divine ordinance. The phrase "all righteousness," here, is the same as *a righteous institution or appointment*. Jesus had no sin. But he was about to enter on his great work. It was proper that he should be set apart by his forerunner, and show his connection with him, and give his approbation to what John had done. Also, he was baptized that occasion might be taken, at the commencement of his work, for God publicly to declare his approbation of him, and his solemn appointment to the office of Messiah.

McGee: Why was Jesus baptized? There may be several answers, but the primary reason is stated right here: "For thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." Jesus is identifying Himself *completely* with sinful mankind. Isaiah had prophesied that He would be numbered with the transgressors (see Isa. 53:12). Here is a King who identifies Himself with His subjects. Actually, baptism means identification, and I believe identification was the primary purpose for the baptism of the Lord Jesus. Again, the reason Jesus was baptized was not to set an example for us. It was not a pattern for us to follow. Christ was holy—He did not need to repent. You and I do need to repent. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. He was baptized to completely identify Himself with humanity.

There was a second reason Jesus was baptized. Water baptism is symbolic of death. His death was a baptism. You remember that He said to James and John when they wanted to be seated on His right hand and on His left hand in the kingdom, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Matt. 20:22). You see, Christ's death was a baptism. He entered into death for you and for me.

There is a third reason for the baptism of Jesus. At this time He was set aside for His office of priest. The Holy Spirit came upon Him for this priestly ministry. Everything that Jesus did, His every act, was done by the power of the Holy Spirit. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). There was sin *on* Him, but there was no sin *in* Him. My sin was put *on* Him, not *in* Him. That is an important distinction. Therefore, you and I are saved by being identified with Him. He identified Himself with us in baptism. And Peter says that we are saved by baptism (see 1 Pet. 3:21). In what way? By being identified with the Lord Jesus. To be saved is to be in Christ. How do we get into Christ? By the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I believe in water baptism because by it we declare that we are identified with Christ. The Lord Jesus said, "... him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). We must recognize that we have to be identified with Christ, and that is

accomplished by the Holy Spirit. Our water baptism is a testimony to this. One time an old salt said to a young sailor in trying to get him to accept Christ and be baptized, “Young man it is *duty* or *mutiny!*” And when you come to Christ, my friend, you are to be baptized because it is a duty. If you are not, it is mutiny.

This subject of baptism needs to be lifted out of the realm of argument to the high and lofty plane of standing for Christ. How we need to come out and stand for Christ!

Let me repeat verse 15: “And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him”—that is, John baptized Him.⁴¹

Matthew 3:16

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

“...like a dove”: Lk 16:16; Mt 11:11: The Law and the prophets were until John the Baptist. John is the last of the Old Testament prophets.

[out of the water] Would such statements as "out of the water" (Mark 1:10), "they went down both into the water ... they were come up out of the water" (Acts 8:38-39), and others express baptism by burial or by sprinkling?

The Spirit of God. See Matthew 3:11. This was the Third Person of the Trinity, descending upon him in the form of a dove, Luke 3:22. The *dove*, among the Jews, was the symbol of purity or harmlessness, (Matthew 10:16) and of softness, (Psalms 55:7.) The form chosen here was doubtless an emblem of the innocence, meekness, and tenderness of the Saviour. The gift of the Holy Spirit, in this manner, was the public approbation of Jesus, (John 1:33,) and a sign of his being set apart to the office of the Messiah. We are not to suppose that there was any change wrought in the moral character of Jesus, but only that he was publicly set apart to his work, and solemnly approved by God in the office to which he was appointed.

Matthew 3:17

And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

[This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased] God claims Jesus as His own Son (cp. Matthew 17:5; John 12:28; Hebrews 1:1-4).

⁴¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The last time a voice from heaven was heard was at Mt Sinai when the Law was given. How interesting it is that the same voice which gave the law, is now announcing the remedy for breaking the law, namely, His Son.

Life Application: The doctrine of the Trinity means that God is three persons and yet one in essence. In this passage, all three persons of the Trinity are present and active. God the Father speaks; God the Son is baptized; God the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus. God is one, yet in three persons at the same time. This is one of God's incomprehensible mysteries. Other Bible references that speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are Matthew 28:19; John 15:26; 1 Cor. 12:4-13; 2 Cor. 13:14; Ephes. 2:18; 1 Thes. 1:2-5; and 1 Peter 1:2.⁴²

my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased—The verb is put in the aorist to express absolute complacency, once and for ever felt towards Him. The English here, at least to modern ears, is scarcely strong enough. “I delight” comes the nearest, perhaps, to that ineffable *complacency* which is manifestly intended; and this is the rather to be preferred, as it would immediately carry the thoughts back to that august Messianic prophecy to which the voice from heaven plainly alluded (Is 42:1), “Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine Elect, IN WHOM MY SOUL DELIGHTETH.” Nor are the words which follow to be overlooked, “I have put My Spirit upon Him; He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.” (The *Septuagint* perverts this, as it does most of the Messianic predictions, interpolating the word “Jacob,” and applying it to the Jews). Was this voice heard by the by-standers? From Matthew's form of it, one might suppose it so designed; but it would appear that it was not, and probably John only heard and saw anything peculiar about that great baptism. Accordingly, the words, “Hear ye Him,” are not added, as at the Transfiguration.⁴³

Jewish New Testament Commentary: Voice from heaven or *bat-kol*; see Yn 12:28&N, Ac 9:4N. “Heaven” here has a dual meaning—(1) the sky, (2) God; see v. 2N.

This is my beloved son. While it is true that everyone is in a sense God's son, Yeshua is so in a unique way—his “only” (or “only-begotten”) son (Yn 1:18&N). Two other passages come to mind: one in which Adam is referred to as God's son (Lk 3:23), and Psalm 2:7, “*Adonai* said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have become your father.’” Combined with 1C 15:45, in which Yeshua is called “the last Adam,” and Ro 5:12–21, where Yeshua and Adam are further compared, these texts show us that in thinking about Yeshua's person and ministry one must keep Adam in mind. This is especially important in the verses immediately following, in which Yeshua, like Adam, is tempted by the Adversary, Satan. See also v. 15N.

In whom I am well pleased. The language is reminiscent of Isaiah 42:1, one of the “Servant” passages; Isaiah 42:1–4 is quoted below (12:18–21); see also 17:5. The “Servant” passages sometimes refer to the people of Israel and sometimes to the Messiah,

⁴² Life Application Notes

⁴³ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Mt 3:17). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

a fact which strengthens the point made in 2:15N that Yeshua the Messiah represents and stands for the whole Jewish people.⁴⁴

Parallel Text - John 1:6-51:

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. ⁸He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. ⁹That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. ¹¹He came unto his own, and his own received him not. ¹²But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: ¹³Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

¹⁵John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. ¹⁶And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. ¹⁷For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

¹⁹And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? ²⁰And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. ²¹And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. ²²Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? ²³He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. ²⁴And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. ²⁵And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? ²⁶John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; ²⁷He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. ²⁸These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. ³⁰This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. ³¹And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. ³²And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. ³³And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. ³⁴And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. ³⁵Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; ³⁶And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

⁴⁴Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 3:17). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

³⁷And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, *What seek ye?* They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? ³⁹He saith unto them, *Come and see.* They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. ⁴²And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, *Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas,* which is by interpretation, A stone.

⁴³The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, *Follow me.* ⁴⁴Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. ⁴⁶And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. ⁴⁷Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!* ⁴⁸Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, *Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.* ⁴⁹Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. ⁵⁰Jesus answered and said unto him, *Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.* ⁵¹And he saith unto him, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.*

Three Anticipated

- Judaism is expecting three different people:
 - The Messiah (in a generic sense);
 - Elijah (prophesied to return; Mal 4:5,6);
 - The Prophet of Moses: “that prophet” (Deut 18);
 - John denies being any of the three expected. He quotes from Isa 40:3-5 in reference to who he is.
- Mt 17 shows that Elijah and Moses have a peculiar role beyond their earthly ministry... are they the Two Witnesses of Rev 11?

Shoes

- Moses at the burning bush was told to take off his shoes.
- Tabernacle covered in badger/porpoise skins, which is what they were shod with during the 40 years in the wilderness (that never wore out!).
- Boaz redeems the land to Naomi and takes a Gentile bride to wife; the symbol of the contract is a shoe.
- John comments of the Messiah, “his shoes I’m not worthy to unloose...”

Baptism

- Why did Jesus insist upon being baptized? Did Jesus have any sins to confess? He was sinless (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 Jn 3:5; Jn 14:3; Isa 53:12).
- At John’s baptism, Jesus is declaring publicly His *identity with* the sinner.

- This is His formal opening for His ministry: This event is commemorated by the trinity: The Father, through the voice; The Holy Spirit, descending dove-like; The Son being baptized.

The Lamb of God

- Lamb of God Jn 1:29
- Abel Gen 4
- Isaac Gen 22
- Offered: Passover Ex 12
- Person Isa 53
- Kinsman-Redeemer Rev 5
- Glorified Rev 22:1

CHART: PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the two major religious groups in Israel at the time of Christ. The Pharisees were more religiously minded, while the Sadducees were more politically minded. Although the groups disliked and distrusted each other, they became allies in their common hatred for Jesus.

Positive Characteristics

PHARISEES

- Were committed to obeying all of God’s commands
- Were admired by the common people for their apparent piety
- Believed in a bodily resurrection and eternal life
- Believed in angels and demons

Negative Characteristics

PHARISEES

- Behaved as though their own religious rules were just as important as God’s rules for living
- Their piety was often hypocritical and their efforts often forced others to try to live up to standards they themselves could not live up to
- Believed that salvation came from perfect obedience to the law and was not based on forgiveness of sins
- Became so obsessed with obeying their legal interpretations in every detail that they completely ignored

God's message of mercy and grace

- Were more concerned with appearing to be good than obeying God

SADDUCEES

- Believed strongly in the Mosaic law and in Levitical purity
- Were more practically minded than the Pharisees

SADDUCEES

- Relied on logic while placing little importance on faith
- Did not believe all the Old Testament was God's Word
- Did not believe in a bodily resurrection or eternal life
- Did not believe in angels or demons
- Were often willing to compromise their values with the Romans and others in order to maintain their status and influential positions