

Matthew 3

Matthew 3

1-4, Introduction to John

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.--We should pay special attention to his message, for it is the same one that our Lord preached:

Mat 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

It is the same message that our Lord commanded his followers to preach:

Luk 24:47 repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Throughout the book of Acts, the apostles command people to repent, and enjoy the blessings that the prophets promised would be associated with the kingdom of God.

Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, **Repent**, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the **remission of sins**,

Act 3:19 **Repent** ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the **times of refreshing** shall come from the presence of the Lord;

Act 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give **repentance** to Israel, and **forgiveness** of sins.

These instances were to the Jews, but Paul preached the same message to the gentiles:

Act 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to **repent**: 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will **judge** the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained;

Act 20:21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, **repentance** toward God, and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Act 26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: 20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should **repent** and turn to God, and **do works** meet for repentance.

Application: This morning's study has one main application. The message that John preached, and that our Lord preached, is the same one that we are to carry. Our responsibility is to command people to repent of their sin, because the kingdom of God is at hand. Our focus in this study is to understand this message so that we can carry it more accurately and effectively.

The message has two parts: a command, and a motivation for that command.

Repent ye:--The word means literally "to change one's mind," but in usage it refers to more than just a change of opinion. We can see this in an old testament episode that our Lord describes as repentance: the result of Jonah's mission to Nineveh.

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Mat 12:41 The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they **repented** at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here.

The OT describes their action as believing God's message and turning from their old life style.

Jon 3:4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. 5 So the people of Nineveh **believed** God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. 6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them **turn** every one from his evil way, and from the violence that *is* in their hands. ... 10 And God saw their works, that they **turned** from their evil way; ...

As John and our Lord use the verb, to "repent" is not only to change our mind about God, but also to abandon our sinful desires. Isaiah describes this kind of change in these words:

Isa 55:6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him (re)**turn** unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Some will protest that this is "works salvation," contrary to the NT standard of Eph 2:8,9, which says that salvation is "not of works." In response, we should note two things:

1. Repentance is a consistent part of the apostolic preaching in Acts. Whatever Paul means in Eph 2, he would not be condemning the very form of message that he and the other apostles proclaimed.
2. While the gospel message calls on men to repent, it does not claim that they are able to do so in their own strength. Those who do repent, who do turn from their wickedness, thereby give evidence of God's work in them according to Eph 2:10.

So the first part of John's message confronts people with their sin and demands, on the authority of God's law, that they forsake it. How different this is from the "Four Laws" type of gospel that dominates the modern church. The NT nowhere instructs us to start with "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." Instead, it teaches us to confront people with the law of God and how they have violated it, and demand that they turn from their wicked way to avoid his wrath.

for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.--The second part of the message concerns the arrival of God's rule on earth, a theme that we saw repeatedly in Isaiah. Notice each word of this clause.

First, it concerns a **kingdom**. At first glance, it looks as though the apostles' call to repent is different, since it does not mention the kingdom. We can see that this is wrong, in two ways.

1. Luke's summary of John's message (3:3) doesn't mention the kingdom, either: "[John] came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." This sounds just like the verses we have seen in Acts. Yet we know from Matthew and Mark that John *did* mention the kingdom.
2. In fact, the apostles *do* preach the kingdom.

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- In Samaria, “Philip preach[ed] the things concerning **the kingdom of God**, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).
- On the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas “Confirm[ed] the souls of the disciples, *and* exhort[ed] them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into **the kingdom of God**” (Act 14:22).
- In Ephesus, Paul “went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning **the kingdom of God**” (Act 19:8).
- Paul summarized his ministry to the elders in Ephesus, “And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching **the kingdom of God**, shall see my face no more” (Act 20:25).
- In Rome, to the Jewish elders, “he expounded and testified **the kingdom of God**” (Act 28:23).
- This was not just a Jewish message, for Luke summarizes his overall ministry in Rome, “And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,³¹ Preaching **the kingdom of God**, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Act 28:30-31).

We can appreciate the apostolic preaching of the kingdom if we realize that the term can have two meanings. In English, its primary meaning is a piece of real estate: “the kingdom of Jordan,” “the kingdom of Great Britain.” But in the NT the emphasis is first of all on the rule that is exercised. The word means “reign” more than “realm.” This is perhaps clearest in Rev 17:18,

Rev 17:18 And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth [“hath kingdom”] over the kings of the earth.

When the apostles call people to repent, they regularly remind them of various aspects of the rule of God as promised through the OT prophets. We can illustrate with promises from Isaiah.

- God’s kingdom, or rule, includes judging sin, Acts 17:30, anticipated in the appearance of the bloody redeemer in Isa 63:3-4.
- God’s kingdom includes forgiving the sin of those who repent. This is prominent in many versions of the “repent” message, including Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31, and is anticipated in Isa 55:7.
- God’s kingdom includes restoring the earth to its edenic condition, Acts 3:19, as anticipated in Isaiah 35.

Acts 3:19 includes two of these, the forgiveness of sin and the restoration of the earth.

Second, this rule is exercised by “heaven.” At one level, this is simply a Jewish euphemism for “God.” Mark and Luke, reporting this same message for Gentile audiences, uniformly speak of “the kingdom of God.” Matthew, the most Jewish of the gospels, is the only one to speak of “the kingdom of heaven,” which he does 32 times. But Matthew also uses “kingdom of God” (5x). His preference for “heaven” may anticipate the conclusion of his book, in which the Lord declares that he has “all authority ... in heaven and on earth,” 28:18 (Greek). “Kingdom of God” might suggest the rule only of the Father. Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is the anointed king, and the kingdom is his as well.

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Third, this rule is “at hand.” The verb ηγγικεν is perfect tense, describing something that has already happened. The kingdom has drawn near. It is in the wings, ready to begin, the next thing we are to expect. The king has come, and is about to demonstrate his power and authority. And in fact, the miracles of his earthly ministry are meant to show that the promised time has come:

Isa 35:5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. 6 Then shall the lame *man* leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing:

This is the confirmation our Lord offered John in prison, when he began to doubt his message:

Mat 11:1 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, 3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? 4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: 5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. 6 And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

At the same time, the Lord often describes the kingdom as something in the future, associated with a second coming of the Lord. For example,

Mat 25:31 When the Son of man shall come **in his glory**, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, **inherit the kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

Peter’s proclamation in Acts 3 includes both present and future aspects of the kingdom:

Act 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, ~~when~~ so that the **times of refreshing** shall come from the presence of the Lord;

As we have often seen in Isaiah, the promises of restoration are a key example of manifold fulfillment. The ultimate realization is in the millennial kingdom yet to come, but we can now experience certain aspects of God’s rule, including the forgiveness of sin and the power of God’s spirit in our lives. We have already “tasted ... the powers of the world to come,” Heb 6:5, and yet look forward to further blessings. And in the light of this kingdom of God, already begun in the birth of our Savior and yet to be fully realized in his earthly rule, we are to command those around us to repent.

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.--Once again, Matthew calls our attention to the fulfillment of OT prophecies. The reference is to Isa 40:3. But when we studied this passage in Isaiah, we saw that John does not completely fulfill it.

Observe first the references in all four gospels to prophecies about John (Table 1).

- All four quote Isa 40:3.
- Luke goes on to quote later verses from Isa 40, and brings in Isa 52:10.

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Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
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.	1:3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.	3:4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.	1:23 He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.
		5 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;6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.	
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.		3:17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.	
11:10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.	1:2 As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.	7:27 This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.	
11:14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.			

Table 1: Gospel Descriptions of John's ministry

- Matthew and Luke talk about the coming judgment that the Messiah will bring.
- Later in Matthew and Luke, our Lord quotes a conflation of Mal 3:1 and Exod 23:20, 23, which Mark also quotes, but in his original introduction of John.
- Finally, in Matthew, the Lord identifies John with Elijah, whose return is promised in Mal 4:5.

Now let's look at the OT passages (Table 2):¹

- All four gospels identify John as the one giving the **command** to prepare the way of the Lord.
- The **statement** (in contrast with the previous command) about mountains and valleys is mentioned only in Luke, and not related to John's activities

1 See notes on Isa 40 for a more detailed analysis of the correspondences among these texts.

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- Likewise, the **appearance to all flesh** is only in Luke, who also brings in Isa 52:10 to talk about “the salvation of our God.”
- Though none of the gospels quotes the part of the message about all flesh being like grass, Matt and Luke do

Feature	Mt 3	Mk 1	Lk 3	Jn 1
Isa 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.	3	3	4	22
Isa 40:4 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:			5	
Isa 40:5 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. 52:10 and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.			6	
Isa 40:6 All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: 7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. 8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth:	11-12?		16-17?	
Exo 23:20 Behold, I send an Angel מלאך before thy face , to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. ... 23 For mine Angel מלאכי shall go before thee Mal 3:1 Behold, I send my messenger מלאכי , and he shall prepare the way before me: Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:	11:10-14	2	7:27	

Table 2: OT Prophecies about John the Baptist

report John's warning of a future **judgment by fire** on the chaff, which might be suggested by this part of Isaiah's prophecy.

- Mark conflates Isa 40 with Mal 3:1, the promised messenger, identified in Mal 4:5 as Elijah, and with Exod 23:20, 23 (the source of “before thee” rather than “before me” as in Malachi). While the other gospels do not conflate the verses this way, Matt 11:10-14 and Luke 7:27 report our Lord's use of Mal 3:1 (and 4:5 in Matt) of the Baptist.

The identification with Elijah merits further attention. Why should Malachi choose him as an example of a forerunner? Elijah’s history is closely tied to that of Elisha, his successor. If Elijah is forerunner to anybody, he is forerunner to Elisha. But in that case, we should expect to see in Elisha’s ministry things that suggest the Lord Jesus. And if we look closely, in fact we do.²

- Start with Elisha’s name. It means, “God is salvation,” and (with the generic noun “God” for the proper name YHWH) is formed on the same pattern as Joshua, Isaiah, and Jesus.
- Elijah, like John the Baptist, warns the people of coming judgment. His great miracle is the three-year drought (1 K 17), a judgment on the land for its sin. Elisha’s miracles tend to reverse the state of fallen nature: He heals the bitter water of Jericho (2 K 2), multiplies oil for a widow (2 K 4), and causes an ax head to float (2 K 6). Like our Lord, he presides over a reversal of the curse.
- Elijah rebukes the apostate rulers of Israel (Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram), just as John rebukes Herod. Like John, he is opposed by the wife of a wicked king (Jezebel vs. Herodias), and suffers an episode of self-doubt because of this opposition. Elisha is consulted by and anoints the kings of Israel, and predicts victories over Israel’s enemies, Syria and Moab, just as our Lord will preside over Israel and lead her in victory over her enemies.

2 For further parallels between Elisha and Jesus, see Waltke’s article at <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/meditating-scripture/> and <http://www.friktech.com/rel/ElisJesus.htm>

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- The culmination of Elijah's ministry is the coming of God's Spirit on Elisha by the Jordan river (2 Kings 2), just as the culmination of John's ministry is the coming of the Spirit on Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan.
- Elisha's ministry is marked by frequent interaction with "the sons of the prophets," just as our Lord's ministry concentrates on his disciples.
- When Elisha dies, his dead body is the means by which a dead man is raised to life (2 Kings 13), anticipating how our Lord's death (and resurrection) brings life to his people.

So Elijah is a forerunner of one who reminds us that "God is salvation." Not only does his ministry of rebuking Israel's sin and warning of judgment anticipate John's ministry, but the one whom he introduces illustrates in his ministry the blessings of the coming kingdom. Our Lord cites these two prophets explicitly in explaining his ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth:

Luk 4:25 But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; 26 But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, *a city* of Sidon, unto a woman *that was* a widow. 27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.

Malachi may well have had this example in mind when the Spirit of God moved him to prophesy of the ultimate forerunner.

When we studied Isa 40, we saw that this promise was only partly fulfilled in John. Other elements point to future details of the day of the Lord, giving us another example of manifold fulfillment.

- God promised to send his angel (messenger) before Moses as Moses led the people into the promised land. The full promise includes the ministry of this angel to warn the people of their sin. Though the nation did enter the land under Joshua, their tenure was always challenged, and ended with their exclusion. The full promise has yet to be fulfilled.
- Historically, the next element in the chain is Elijah, who introduces Elisha, "My God is salvation," just as John introduces Jesus, "Jehovah is salvation."
- Next is Isaiah's promise of the voice in the wilderness, which includes the announcement of physical changes to the earth, revelation of God's glory to all flesh, and coming judgment.
- After the return from Babylon, Malachi repeats the promise of the messenger from Exodus, and links it to the return of Elijah.
- Next is the appearance of John the Baptist, which we are currently considering. In Matt 11:14, our Lord says of John, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias [Elijah], which was for to come." Had the nation received him, John would have been the final instance of the promised forerunner.
- Moses and Elijah (both mentioned in the promise of Mal 4:4-5) appear with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration, speaking of his coming sacrifice.

We have seen that each instance of manifold fulfillment points to some ultimate fulfillment. The best candidate that I have been able to find for this chain of promises about the forerunner is in Rev 11. There, the Lord promises two witnesses:

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Rev 11:3 And I will give *power* unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

The signs with which they are associated in v. 6 recall Elijah and Moses, respectively:

Rev 11:6 These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy [Elijah]: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues [Moses], as often as they will.

The period of time of their ministry (v. 3), 1260 days or three and a half years, is, according to a Jewish tradition sanctioned by the Lord (Luke 4:25) and James (5:17), the duration of Elijah's ministry. Here, I think, is the ultimate fulfillment of the promised messenger.

But once we recognize the principle of a chain of pointers looking forward to the great fulfillment, we open the door to a more immediate application. Peter exhorts us that we should be

2Pe 3:12 Looking for and ~~hasting unto~~ **hastening** the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Application: Like John, we know that the Lord is coming. We, too, should obey the voice to cry out, warning people of the judgment to come and inviting them to repent, for the coming of the Lord draws near. That will make us different from the world around us, but this has always been the portion of those who are faithful to the Lord's message.

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins;--We've already seen that Malachi identifies the coming messenger with the prophet Elijah. John's appearance recalls Elijah, who appeared to the messengers of King Ahaziah of Israel in 2 Kings 1,

2Ki 1:8 And they answered him, *He was* an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, *It is* Elijah the Tishbite.

Another similarity with Elijah is that John appears suddenly, without introduction. Recall how Elijah appears in 1 Kings:

1Ki 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, *As* the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

Our Lord identifies John as the promised Elijah:

Mat 11:14 if ye will receive *it*, this is Elias, which was for to come.

The condition, "If ye will receive it," reflects the decision that faced Israel at our Lord's first advent. He presented himself as the promised Messiah. They rejected him (as prophesied in the OT), deferring the full realization of the kingdom to his second advent, and opening the need for yet another "Elijah" before that return. But had they received our Lord, John would have counted as the final Elijah.

and his meat was locusts and wild honey.--These elements could be obtained in the wilderness, without the need to engage civilized society. Verse 1 tells us that John preached "in the wilderness of Judaea," and his life style avoided villages and cities.

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5-12, John's Preaching

5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,-- Because John would not come into the villages, the people had to go out to him, reflecting the prophecy of Ezekiel 20. The Lord recalls how he tested Israel in the wilderness after the Egyptian bondage. Then he promises the exiles from Assyria and Babylon,

Eze 20:34 I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out.35 And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face.36 Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD.37 And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant:38 And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.

John's wilderness ministry does not completely fulfill Ezek 20, in that it does not result in a complete purging of the nation. But like many of the events we have seen, it is a step in a pattern of manifold fulfillment that points to the ultimate restoration of the nation in the land when the Lord returns.

6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.--This was the purpose of his baptism: Luke terms it "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (3:3).

What is the origin of John's baptism? Some people trace it to Jewish ritual baptism, but this is always done in a prepared pool (Figure 1). It's more likely that the symbolism comes from the story of Naaman.

The Greek word "baptize" appears only twice in the LXX of the canonical books. Once (Isa 21:4) it is metaphorical: "transgression overwhelms me." The other is in 2 Kings 5. Naaman, a Syrian general, comes to Elisha to be cleansed of his leprosy. Elisha commands him,

2Ki 5:10 Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

After some initial hesitation, Naaman obeys. The historian records,

2Ki 5:14 Then went he down, and dipped [LXX βαπτίζω] himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.



Figure 1: Pools for Jewish ritual baptism in Jerusalem (top) and Qumran (bottom)

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Consider the similarities:

- Naaman came because he recognized his problem; John requires people to “repent.”
- Dipping in the river is how Naaman obeyed the command to “wash,” and had the effect of cleansing him. Similarly, John offered “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4).
- Naaman’s status as a Gentile corresponds to John’s minimization of the significance of Jewish descent.³

John’s baptism and Christian baptism are different. The idea that the one being baptized acknowledges sin and seeks to be free from it is appropriate to both. But they are distinct rituals. In Acts 19, Paul insisted on rebaptizing those who had already received John’s baptism:

Act 19:3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.⁴ Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.⁵ When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

There are at least two reasons for this: the *authority* for the baptism, and its *symbolism*.

First, John’s baptism was on the *authority* of the Father. John told his audience that the one who sent him to baptize is distinct from the Messiah whom he came to introduce,

Joh 1:33 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.

In contrast, it is our Lord who commanded his disciples to baptize:

Mat 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Second, Paul in Rom 6 shows that Christian baptism has additional *significance*, focusing on our identity with the Lord in death and resurrection.

Rom 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?⁴ Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.⁵ For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of his resurrection:

Application: In our day, there is a tendency to diminish the importance of baptism. Even Baptist churches will admit unbaptized people to the Lord’s Table. Both our Lord’s command, and the consistent example of the early church, show that it is vitally important, the first step for a new Christian after confessing faith in Christ.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to⁴ his baptism,--These two groups were usually opposed to each other:

- 3 Certainly, John may have drawn from Jewish traditions of ceremonial washings; one thinks of the brazen sea before the temple, and the baths of Qumran. But the example of Naaman is both accessible within the Canon, and well aligned with John’s emphasis on the inadequacy of Jewish descent.
- 4 Ερχομαι επι, standard idiom for “arrive at.” There is no need to take επι in an antagonistic sense, but there is also no implication of approval.

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- Nicodemus’s coming in John 3 is motivated by the Lord’s attack on the temple markets, controlled by the Sadducees.
- The two groups were in competition in their shared objective to discredit the Lord:

Mat 22:34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence [with their trick question about the resurrection and the woman with seven husbands], they were gathered together [and asked him which was the greatest commandment in the law].

- Paul leveraged this difference when he was examined before the Sanhedrin:

Act 23:6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.⁷ And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.⁹ And there arose a great cry: and the scribes *that were* of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.¹⁰ And when there arose a great dissension,

Why would these adversaries come together to John? Perhaps they have come in an oversight capacity, to see what was going on. We know from the fourth gospel that the temple hierarchy did examine him:

Joh 1:19 And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

Each group wanted to assert its right of approval over John, and perhaps (as Nicodemus did in John 3) try to recruit him to its ranks against the other side.

he said unto them,--John does not seek their approval. Quite the contrary, he focuses on them as particularly in need of his message. Similarly, when Nicodemus comes in John 3 to offer the Lord encouragement from the Pharisees after he condemned the Sadducean temple market, the Lord does not cultivate this political support, but declares openly, “Ye must be born again.”

O generation of vipers,--

The word “generation” γεννημα means “offspring.” Note the contrast with their claimed descent from Abraham in v. 9, and compare our Lord’s discussion with the Jewish leaders in John 8 (Table 3). They claimed,

	Matt 3	John 8
True ancestry	v. 7 generation of vipers	v. 41 Ye do the deeds of your father. v. 44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.
Claimed ancestry	v. 9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father:	v. 33 We be Abraham's seed v. 39 Abraham is our father. v. 41 we have one Father, even God

Table 3: Pharisees as serpents

Joh 8:33 We be Abraham's seed. ... 39 Abraham is our father.

To which our Lord replied,

Joh 8:44 Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.

The Lord articulates this contrast only after opposition has matured, but its roots are in John’s

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teaching.

who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?--We saw from Paul's formulation of John's message that the coming "kingdom of God" involves, among other things, judgment:

Act 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to **repent**: 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will **judge** the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained;

We must not soft-pedal this motive for the gospel. Isaiah taught long ago that awareness of God's judgment is a prime incentive for sinful people to turn:

Isa 26:9 when thy judgments *are* in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

Noah is commended for being motivated by fear of God's judgments:

Heb 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Application: We must not be shy about confronting people with the consequences of their sin. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb 9:27). "It is appointed," unavoidable, inevitable. This is the one thing that people can count on happening. The examples of both John and our Savior urge us to confront people with it and help them prepare for it.

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:--Verses 8-10 are chiasmic (Table 4), making three points:

1. The need for fruitfulness in our relation to God.
2. The inadequacy of physical descent.
3. The ultimate source of spiritual life.

Need for Fruit	8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:	therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
Inadequacy of Descent	9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father:	10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees:
True Source of Life	for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.	

Table 4: Chiasm in 3:8-10

The correspondence for the second element will become clear as we progress.

The outer elements both deal with the fruit that God expects from his true children. John's image comes from Isaiah's song of the vineyard, where God's people are expected to show the results of their relation with him, and those who do not suffer his wrath:

Isa 5:1 My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. ... 5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; *and* break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down:6 And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they

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rain no rain upon it.

Our Savior in turn picks up this image in the upper room:

Joh 15:1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. 2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.⁵

Paul echoes command this in one of his “repentance” passages, showing again that he is following John’s (and the Lord’s) example:

Act 26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: 20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should **repent** and turn to God, and **do works** meet for repentance.

Application: There are two lessons for us in this metaphor that persists throughout Scripture.

1. Paul’s statement shows again that the apostles preached the same message of repentance and the coming of the kingdom that John did. We should continue this message today. We can explain to people, as he could not, how the death and resurrection of Christ makes it possible for repentance to bear fruit. But we must not omit the basic command to repent and the motive of God’s rule.
2. We must not be deceived that true faith can exist without changing our lives. Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). God’s sovereign preordination of us to salvation includes not only forgiveness of our sins, but also walking in good works (Eph 2:10).

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father:--As we have seen, the heart of their claim, the ground of their confidence, was racial, their descent from Abraham. John dismisses this confidence.

for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.--The image of stones bearing children comes from Isaiah:⁶

Isa 51:1 Harken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: **look unto the rock** whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. 2 **Look unto Abraham** your father, and unto Sarah *that* bare you:

The Jews were counting on their natural descent from Abraham. But in the natural processes of life, Abraham was no more productive than a rock. He bore Isaac only because God supernaturally intervened. And God can intervene again, bringing more “children of Abraham” from unlikely sources.

Perhaps the words of Isaiah and John are why the apostles speak of believers as stones:

1Pe 2:5 **Ye also, as lively stones**, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.⁶ Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

5 See notes on John 15 for detailed discussion showing that in v. 2, “in me” is adverbial, not adjectival, modifying the verb “bear fruit,” and the “taking away” is destruction.

6 The insight is due to J. Jeremias, TDNT 4.268, 270. More commonly, commentators suggest a Semitic pun between בנים and אבנים, but this suggestion falls on the observation that the Peshitta renders λιθος in Matt 3:9 by כאפא, not אבן, a correspondence that (Jeremias) holds throughout the Syriac NT.

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10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees:--I have suggested that this clause corresponds to John's rejection of Abrahamic descent. To see why this is the case, consider the use of the imagery of the heavenly lumberjack in the prophets.

In Isaiah 10, Assyria boasts of her conquest of the nations of the Levant, thinking that she is in control. Isaiah rebukes this haughtiness:

Isa 10:15 Shall the **axe** boast itself against him that heweth therewith? *or* shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake *itself* against them that lift it up, *or* as if the staff should lift up *itself*, as if it were no wood.

Later (and in Ezek 31) he uses the metaphor of the woodsman to describe the fall of Assyria itself :

Isa 10:33 Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, shall **lop** the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature *shall be* hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled.³⁴ And he shall **cut down** the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.

In Daniel 4, the image is extended to another pagan power, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Dan 4:10 I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof *was* great....¹³ I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven;¹⁴ He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches:

In the OT, the heavenly lumberjack attacks pagan kings. By describing Israel as under the axe, John is implying that it has no advantage before God over Assyria and Babylon. "Think not to say: we have Abraham to our father."

therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.--He returns to the image of fruit from v. 8, and thus to Isaiah's parable of the vineyard, now setting forth the consequence of fruitlessness.

The Jews who heard Paul speak are proud that they are descendants of the restoration, under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the righteous remnant, not like those wicked Israelite who were cast out of the land. Now John accuses them of being no better than that earlier fruitless generation.

Application: Israel is not alone in depending on physical descent for salvation. It is a great blessing for children to grow up in a believing home, but it brings the risk that children may piggy-back on their parents' faith without themselves experiencing true repentance and conversion. The problem is even worse in the paedobaptist tradition. We should be constantly in prayer for our children, that they would understand the gospel themselves and be personally saved.

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance:--The preposition "unto" εἰς here indicates the subject with reference to which the baptism takes place.⁷

but he that cometh after me—The preposition "after" ὀπίσω almost always indicates position rather than time, and frequently describes the place of a disciple with respect to his master.⁸

⁷ See notes for further discussion.

⁸ France; Grobel, JBL 60:4 (1941) 397ff.

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Mat 4:19 And he saith unto them, Follow [**after**] me, and I will make you fishers of men.

Mat 10:38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth **after** me, is not worthy of me.

Mat 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come **after** me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

If it has this sense here, it indicates two things that we might not otherwise know.

1. Jesus humbly associated himself with his older cousin as one of his disciples. So did his Old Testament eponyms to their forerunners: Joshua to Moses, and Elisha to Elijah [chart].
2. John knows that the Messiah will arise from among his disciples. He does not know which of them it is (John 1:31; the article in Matt 3:11 must be generic, not identifying), but the sign that God has given him (John 1:33, descent of the Spirit) suggests that John recognizes that it will be someone with whom he is acquainted.

A disciple often imitates, sometimes unconsciously, the methods and message of his teacher. In fact, one reason to become a disciple is to learn the teacher's message and methods. This relation between John and Jesus would explain the frequent similarities between their ministries:

- Both are itinerants (Compare Matt 3:1; John 1:28; 3:23 with Matt 9:35)
- Both gather disciples around themselves.
- Both preach the same message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2; 4:17)
- Both use baptism to communicate this message (Matt 3:6; John 3:22)
- Both distinguish the satanic origin of Jewish leaders with true descent from Abraham (Matt 3:7-9; John 3:22)
- Both refuse to accept partisan support in the struggle of Pharisee vs. Sadducee, and instead confront those who seek to endorse them with their own need (Matt 3:7; John 3:1-3)

is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear:--John knew that he was a forerunner; that the kingdom he proclaimed had its appointed king.

Application: Our Savior's willingness to begin his ministry as a disciple of John is a striking example of humility. Though far superior to John, he did what a godly Jew would do, responding appropriately to the message of God's prophet, until God clearly indicated he should begin his own ministry. We should not chafe under the leadership of those whom God has sent before us, but eagerly learn what they have to teach us, and allow the Lord to develop our individual ministries in his own time.

We should also note the importance of the process of discipleship itself (Table 5). We see it in the case of Moses (with Joshua and the other eleven), Elijah (with Elisha and the sons of the prophets), John, our Lord, and Paul (with John Mark, Luke, Timothy, Demas, and others). In our age, we focus on institutions (such as seminary) and emphasize the individual initiative of the learner. The biblical pattern is for younger believers to apprentice to older ones until God passes the torch to them.

he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with fire*⁹:--The same people receive the

- 9 The majority reading omits the reference to fire, which appears only in Luke. Luke probably preserved it because of the parallel with the events of Acts 2. But it certainly is part of John's message, and Matthew does preserve

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baptism of the Spirit and of fire. We can see this in four ways.

First, the verse promises the two aspects to the same “you.” The second “with” is italicized. John is describing a single baptism with two components, the

Holy Ghost and Fire. The overall picture is that the Spirit guides us into righteousness, while the fire purges away that which is without value.

Second, the Old Testament promises just such a purging work in connection with Messiah’s coming. In this promise, the purpose of the fire is not punishing unbelievers, but purging those who serve the Lord so that they can serve him better:

Mal 3:1 the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, ...2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he *is* like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:3 And he shall sit *as* a refiner and purifier of silver: and **he shall purify** the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, **that they may offer** unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

The third evidence that the same people receive both aspects of the baptism is in the imagery of v. 12.

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.--Contrast the agricultural imagery here with that in the parable of the tares, where the fire clearly is directed against unbelievers:

Mat 13:30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Wheat and tares are different plants, one good and one bad. But chaff is part of the same plant as wheat. It is the outer hull that must be discarded to enjoy the goodness of the wheat berry. The fire of Matt 3:11 purges away this worthless hull, leaving that which is of value.

The fourth evidence is the promise given by Paul in 1 Cor 3,

1Co 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Application: God’s purpose in saving us is not just delivering us from hell, but making us positively righteous. He does this in two ways. First, the promise of the New Covenant is that

the “wheat-chaff” imagery that explains both facets of the promised baptism.

	Joshua	Elisha	Our Lord
Name	Jehovah is Salvation	God is Salvation	Jehovah is Salvation
Forerunner and Teacher	Moses	Elijah	John
Marked by the Spirit	Num 27:8 Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit,	2Ki 2:15they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.	Matt 3:16 and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him

Table 5: Thee men named “Jesus”

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God's Spirit will "cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezek 36:27). The Spirit in our hearts leads us daily into fuller obedience. Second, he purges away things that are not pleasing to him. This is the twofold baptism that our Savior came to bring: of the Spirit and of fire. When we appreciate that all that is of the flesh will be burned up, we will be eager to focus our efforts on the things that remain.

13-17, The Baptism of Jesus

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.--Apparently our Lord does not travel with John, but associates with him while he is in Galilee. This apparently was the case with Andrew and John as well, the two disciples of John whom we meet in John 1, since they are actively pursuing their work as fishermen when the Lord calls them in Matt 4:19, 21. But he makes a special trip to visit John's ministry in Judaea in order to receive baptism. Perhaps he is reinforcing the parallel between himself and Elisha, who received the Spirit near Jericho.

14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?--John recognizes Jesus, which is not surprising. His parents no doubt told him the story of his cousin's birth. It would be likely that the two related families would have met at the pilgrimage feasts each year. And we have seen (v. 11) that Jesus was probably already among the disciples of John.

John recognizes that Jesus is different from the sinful Jews who are the object of his warnings in the previous verses. This does not mean that he knows Jesus as the Messiah. The fourth gospel indicates (John 1:33) that John did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah until the Spirit came on him. But he knows the piety and seriousness of his cousin, and recognizes that this is the last person who needs to repent. Compared with his disciple's godliness, John is himself aware of his sin; Jesus should baptize him unto repentance.

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.--The merit of baptism was as an outward sign of a repentant heart. How does it fulfill righteousness for someone with no sin to be baptized unto repentance?

The answer may lie in our Lord's role as sin-bearer. Isaiah calls the servant of the Lord "righteous" in connection with his work as sin-bearer:

Isa 53:11 by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

The Lord has completely identified with the sinful people whom he has come to save. He is conscious that he is bearing their sin, and is beginning the process of taking their place in dealing with that sin. This process includes repenting of that sin, and will culminate in bearing the penalty for it when he dies on Calvary.

After John recognized him as the Messiah, he identified him to his other disciples, not as "the king of Israel" (Nathanael's perspective, John 1:49), but as "the lamb of God, which taketh away [beareth] the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Was the Messiah's role as sin-bearer reinforced in John's mind by our Lord's submission to the baptism of repentance?

Then he suffered him. 16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him,--The "straightway" indicates that there is

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no separation between the two events. The heavenly attestation directly follows the baptism.¹⁰

and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:--Likely the first “him” refers to John, as at the end of v. 15. This event provides the confirmation to John that the baptism was indeed appropriate.

The Spirit as qualification of the promised Messiah is taught by the OT both typically and prophetically.

Typically, recall the examples of Moses-Joshua and Elijah-Elisha, the two cases of forerunners followed by disciples whose names mean the same as “Jesus.”

In Num 27, God tells Moses (vv. 12-14) that he must die and not enter the land. Moses replies (15-17) that the people need a shepherd, and the Lord responds,

Num 27:18 And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom *is* the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him;

Note the qualification for Moses’ successor: “a man in whom is the Spirit.”

In 1 Kings 19, on Mount Horeb, God tells Elijah to appoint Elisha as his successor:

1Ki 19:16 Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint *to be* prophet in thy room.

When the time comes for Elijah’s ministry to end,

2Ki 2:9 Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

Elijah tells him that this will be the case if he sees Elijah depart. He does see the chariots take Elijah away, and when he returns to the sons of the prophets,

2Ki 2:15 they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.

Prophetically, the Servant of the Lord as depicted in Isaiah is marked by the Spirit. Early in the book, Isaiah prophesies,

Isa 11:1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;

Later, in the second servant song, he records the Lord’s words,

Isa 42:1 Behold [Jacob] my servant, whom I uphold; [Israel] mine elect, *in whom* my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

The additions are from the LXX. This song is quoted of both the Messiah and the church in the NT, but the additions reflect the first servant song

Isa 41:8 But thou, Israel, *art* my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.

The idea that the anointed Servant is the personification of Israel will become important in a moment.

¹⁰ So Alford, “the moment that Jesus was gone up out of the water, behold...”

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A third reference to the Spirit's presence on the promised Servant is in his self-introduction, quoted by our Lord in the synagogue of Nazareth,

Isa 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are* bound;2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, ...

The Lord had told John,

Joh 1:33 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.

Now that sign appears.

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.--The title "son of God" is central to Matthew's presentation of the Lord Jesus. So far, we have seen it only once, in the quotation of Hos 11:1 in 2:15 ("out of Egypt have I called my son"). Now the Father directly applies the title to Jesus. So we should pause to understand this title better.

The notion of God's son appears in two different senses in the OT:

1. God refers to the **nation** as his son: Exo 4:22 And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn:
2. The promised **Messiah** is also called "God's son":

Psa 2:7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

2Sa 7:14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son.

We have seen how Isaiah weaves these two strands together in the notion of the Servant of the Lord. We described this notion as an "hourglass" (Figure 2): the title is first applied to the nation, then restricted to the Messiah, but finally broadened back out to God's people in the coming kingdom.

So each time we encounter the title "Son of God" in Matthew, we do well to ask where it fits on the Servant hourglass.

In the early chapters of Matthew, the focus appears to be on the nation as God's son. This was certainly the case when Matthew applied Hos 11:1 to the flight into Egypt:

Mat 2:14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, **Out of Egypt have I called my son.**

How about our current passage? The Father calls Jesus, not just "my son," but "my beloved son" ο υιος μου ο αγαπητος. This title appears only once in the Greek OT, in Jeremiah 31. This is the chapter in which God promises the New Covenant, so it would be of great interest to early believers. Matthew has already quoted this chapter in 2:17-18, citing the verse 15 about "Rachel

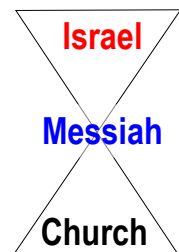


Figure 2:
Isaiah's
Servant
Hourglass

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weeping for her children” to describe the slaughter of the innocents. It is also the only place that God talks about his “beloved son”:

Jer 31:20 **Is Ephraim my dear son** υιος αγαπητος εμοι? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD.

So far, in the early chapters of Matthew, the divine sonship of the Lord Jesus focuses on his identity with Israel. He is the perfect Israelite, the representative of the nation, developing the line of Exod 4:22. But before we finish the book, we will see him recognized as the kingly Son of God:

Mat 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art **the Christ, the Son of the living God.**

And along the way, we will find that he teaches us to view ourselves as “sons of God,” members of his body who continue his work in the world.

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Notes

The Wilderness of Judaea (v. 1)

This reference fixes the point of our Lord's baptism in the general vicinity of Jericho, in the southern Jordan valley. This location aligns well with the emphasis on the participation of people from Jerusalem and Judaea. However, John's gospel (1:28) speaks of John's activity in "Bethany" (the most common as well as the most ancient reading; AV's "Bethabara" comes from a minority tradition apparently originated by Origen because of the lack of a "Bethany beyond Jordan" in the south). Recently (see Carson on John 1:28 and Rainey and Notley, *The Sacred Bridge*, 350-351, drawing on 19th century suggestions of Lightfoot and Conder) a good case has been made that "Bethany" corresponds orthographically to Batanea, a name for Bashan, the region north-east of the Sea of Galilee, which in turn would make sense in terms of the disciples whom John attracts there, fishermen from the Sea of Galilee. But does this then mean that the Lord's journey "from Galilee to Jordan" (3:13) is actually to Bashan, as Rainey and Notley propose, discarding Matt 3:1 (map, p. 351)?

Rainey and Notley themselves note that John appears to move among different locations (compare John 1:28 and 3:23, and the mobility implicit in Luke 3:3). It is important to observe that while Matthew describes the actual baptism of our Lord at a location in the wilderness of Judaea, the Baptist in John's gospel, in identifying Jesus to his disciples, is looking back at what happened at some previous time when he baptized Jesus. John does not state that Jesus was baptized at Bethany beyond Jordan, only that he was there introduced to his disciples, subsequent to an earlier baptism. So the order of events is:

1. Jesus comes from Galilee to a location on the lower Jordan river and is baptized there by John (Matt 3:13).
2. "Immediately" (Mark 1:12) he goes into the wilderness (of Judaea) to be tempted of the Devil.
3. He later returns to Galilee.
4. There John introduces Jesus to some of John's disciples, who become the Lord's disciples (John 1).

How does #3 fit into the gospel record? Matt 4:12 records that after the temptation, the Lord returns to Galilee, but only "when he had heard that John was cast into prison." Yet in John 1, the Baptist is still ministering openly. Comparing the Synoptics and John, we recognize that no one gospel gives a complete record of the Lord's various trips back and forth between Judaea and Galilee. Most likely, the Lord's ministry in Judaea recorded in John 1-3 takes place between Matt 4:11 and 4:12, and that 4:12 records a transfer of his base of operations to Galilee.

Generation of Vipers

Carson notes Jewish parallels:

אמר אל עליהם חמת תנינים יינם וראש פתנים CD 19:22 (QST in BW) A00 17:22-24
אכזר . התנינים 23 מלכי העמים ויינם הוא דרכיהם וראש פתנים הוא ראש 24 מלכי יון הבא

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עליהם לנקם נקמה

Concerning them has God said: 'Their wine shall prove the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of asps' [Deut 32.33]. The 'wine' in question is their conduct; the 'serpents' are the kings of the nations; and the 'venom [Heb. *ro'sh*] of asps' is the chief [Heb. *ro'sh*] of the Grecian kings who will come to wreak vengeance upon them.

[<http://www.essene.com/History&Essenes/cd.htm>]

In Isa:

Isa 14:29 Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit *shall be* a fiery flying serpent.

Isa 30:6 The burden of the beasts of the south: into the land of trouble and anguish, from whence *come* the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they will carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people *that* shall not profit *them*.

We should not miss the possible allusion to the serpent in the Garden. Compare our Lord's reference to the Jewish leaders in John, "Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (Joh 8:44). This line of thought, and the plural, envisions many generations of descent from the edenic serpent."

The expression actually appears in one of Aesop's fables (Syntipas 57),

Ὅρνις τις εὐροῦσα ᾧ ὄφεως ἐσχόλαζε τῇ τούτων διατριβῇ, καὶ ταῦτα ἐπιάζουσα ἐπεκάθητο. χελιδῶν δέ τις αὐτὴν θεασαμένη, "ὦ μωρὰ καὶ ἀναίσθητε," ἔφη, "τίνος χάριν ὄφεως περιέπεις **γεννήματα**; εἰ γὰρ ἀύξηθῶσι, σοὶ πρότερον ἐμποιήσουσι τὸν ὄλεθρον, καὶ μετέπειτα ἑτέροις." <http://greekaesop.pbworks.com/w/page/15660911/syntipas57>

A hen finding the eggs of a viper and carefully keeping them warm, nourished them into life. A Swallow, observing what she had done, said, 'You silly creature! why have you hatched these vipers which, when they shall have grown, will inflict injury on all, beginning with yourself?' <http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica/townsend/275.htm>

Aesop is thought to have lived around 600 BC, though it is difficult to know which of the fables attributed to him he might actually have authored, and dating individual fables is difficult.

Μετανοεω

24x in LXX, of which 15 are נָחַם and only one is שׁוּב. So μετανοεω is devoted to נָחַם.

נָחַם is 58x παρακαλεω, 24x μετανοεω, 3x παρακλησις, 6x μεταμελομαι, 1x μεταμελω. So μετανοεω is not the dominant translation of נָחַם.

It is remarkable that while our Lord describes the action of the Ninevites using μετανοεω, that verb appears in the LXX of Jonah only of God's attitude (3:9, 10; 4:2), corresponding to נָחַם. The action of the Ninevites is described by שׁוּב:

Jon 3:8 yea, let them **turn** every one from his evil way, and from the violence that *is* in their hands. ... Jon 3:10 And God saw their works, that they **turned** from their evil way;

This appears to be a case where the meaning of the word in the NT goes beyond the LXX usage.

Matthew 3

Elijah and Elisha

Elijah's ministry focuses on proclaiming judgment (the drought) and rebuking sin in Israel. He is opposed by Ahab and Jezebel for rebuking their sin, and experiences doubt, but God encourages him.

Elisha's ministry focuses on judgment on the enemies of Israel, and reversing the corruptions of the natural order. When he dies, his dead body restores a dead man.

Note also that Elisha's name, like Joshua and Isaiah, anticipates the name of our Lord, Jesus.

Thus the story of Elijah and Elisha acts out the "forerunner" relation of John and our Lord. Here's a timeline:

Ref in Kings	Elijah	Elisha
I.17	Proclaims drought	
I.17.8	Feeds widow of Zarephath	
I.17.17	Revives widow's son	
I.18	Meets Ahab, summons prophets to Carmel	
I.18.20	Triumph over prophets of Baal	
I.18.41	Drought ends	
I.19	Doubts; Flees Jezebel	
I.19.11	Meets God at Horeb	
I.19.19	Recruits Elisha	Joins Elijah
I.21.17	Rebukes Ahab for Naboth	
II.1	Rebukes Ahaziah for inquiring after Baalzebub	
II Ch 21:12	Rebukes Jehoram of Judah	
II.2	Ascension of Elijah	Receives spirit of Elijah
II.2.19		Heals waters of Jericho
II.2.23		Curses children of Bethel
II.3.11		Predicts victory over Moab
II.4		Multiplies oil for widow of "son of the prophets"
II.4.8		Blesses the Shunammite: gives and raises her son
II.5		Heals Naaman
II.5.19		Punishes Gehazi
II.6		Restores lost ax head
II.6.8		Thwarts attack of Syria
II.7		Predicts end of siege of Samaria
II.8		Shunammite's land restored
II.8.7		Predicts death of Ben-Hadad of Syria
II.9		Sends disciple to anoint Jehu
II.13.14		Predicts Joash's victories over Syria

Matthew 3

II.13.20		Dies; his body revives a dead man
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ΒΑΠΤΙΖΩ ΕΙΣ

This expression, which appears for the first time in the Greek Bible at 3:11, is problematic. The most natural sense of εἰς would be telic, “for the purpose of, in order to,” but this does not fit with many of the objects that it connects to βαπτίζω. These include

- repentance (Matt 3:11)
- the name (of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; of Jesus) (Matt 28:19; Acts 8:16; 19:5; but also ἐπι, Acts 2:38, or ἐν, Acts 10:48)
- forgiveness of sin (Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38)
- the Jordan (Mark 1:9, but also ἐν ὕδατι Matt 3:11)
- the baptism itself (Acts 19:3)
- Christ and his death (Rom 6:3)

But telic seems impossible for our verse, since Acts 2:38 indicates that repentance precedes baptism (“repent and be baptized...”).

Mantey famously tried to defend a causal sense of εἰς (see references in BDAG), but his examples have been challenged. Yet there remain cases such as Matt 12:41 (parallel Luke 11:32), “the men of Nineveh ... repented εἰς the preaching of Jonah,” where εἰς clearly indicates something antecedent to and motivational of the main verb. BDAG puts these in their own special category 10a along with Rom 4:20 and our verse, but compare also category 5, “marker of a specific point of reference, *for, to, with respect to, with reference to.*”

So we should translate something along the lines of “baptized with reference to repentance.”

Jesus as John’s Disciple

The predominantly spatial meaning of ὀπισθω (v. 11), and its usage in the gospels, suggests that Jesus was one of John’s disciples before the Father revealed him as the Messiah by the coming of the Spirit. This relation would explain numerous parallels between the ministries of John and our Lord; the Lord is following the example that he learned from John.

Characteristic	John	Jesus
Itinerant ministry	Compare Matt 3:1 (wilderness of Judaea), John 1:28 (Bethany beyond Jordan), John 3:23 (Aenon near Salim)	Mat 9:35 And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom,
Works with a band of disciples	Matt 11:2; John 1:35; 3:25	Matt 5:1; 10:1-4
Message: repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand	Matt 3:2	Matt 4:17
Baptizing as part of preaching	Matt 3:6	John 3:22

Matthew 3

Distinguishes satanic descent of Jewish leaders from claimed Abrahamic descent	Matt 3:7-9	John 8:33-44
Confronts partisans who come to seek his support, rather than pandering for their approval	Matt 3:7	John 3:1-3
Applies Isaiah's image of judgment on fruitless vines	Matt 3:10	John 15:2