

Chapter Three (3:1-38)

THE FORERUNNER OF THE SON OF MAN

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. To what history are we alerted by the listing of the Roman and Jewish rulers (3:1-2)?
2. How could there be a baptism for the forgiveness of sins before Pentecost (3:3)?
3. Did John get his idea to immerse people in water from Isaiah (3:4-6)?
4. Why did the Jews put so much emphasis on their descent from Abraham (3:7-9)?
5. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit (3:16)? Is it for all believers?
6. If Jesus was perfect, why was He baptized by John the Baptist (3:21-22)?
7. Why trace Jesus' ancestry back to Adam (3:38)?

The Baptizer's Mission (3:1-6)

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness; ³and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

⁵Every 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;

⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

3:1-2 Context: Tiberius (cf. Lesson 1, sec. 3) was joint emperor with his step-father Augustus (Octavian) from 11 A.D. until 14 A.D. when Augustus died and he became emperor alone. He was an able administrator but cruel and suspicious. He conducted countless treason trials

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and executed scores of people he considered dangerous to his power. He died in senile debauchery on the island of Capri, March 16, A.D. 37. He was the reigning emperor at the time of Christ's death.

A number of political changes had taken place in Judea since Luke's first historical references to Herod, king of Judea (1:5) and Caesar Augustus (2:1). Those men had ruled thirty years ago. Since that time, Herod the Great had died and his kingdom had been divided between his three sons; Herod Antipas, *tetrarch* of Galilee; Herod Philip, tetrarch of Ituraea and Trachonitis; Archelaus, tetrarch of Judea. Archelaus had been deposed of his throne in Judea in A.D. 6 by the Roman emperor for mismanagement (at the request of the Jews). The Roman emperor had placed Judea under the rule of a Roman Procurator. Pontius Pilate, whom tradition says was the son of famous army general and married to the granddaughter of Augustus, was the fifth procurator, having been appointed in 26 A.D. Annas, Jewish high priest appointed by Quirinius the legate of Syria in A.D. 6, had been deposed by Gratus, the first Roman procurator of Judea, in A.D. 15, and now Caiaphas, Annas' son-in-law was High Priest. Luke does not mention all these changes because he is not writing a history of the Roman empire or of Judea, but a biography of Jesus Christ. And so far as Luke is concerned, the real significance of these "great" people (7 of them) is that the beginning of Jesus' ministry (and that of John the Baptist) dates from this time in their lives.

3:3-6 Content: The region of John's ministry was the area around the Jordan valley known as the "wilderness of Judea" (cf. Mt. 3:1; Mk. 1:4). It was a barren, uninhabited, insect-infested, sultry-hot region from the Dead Sea area on the south to Succoth on the north (cf. II Chron. 4:17). Most of his ministry was spent along the western banks of the river Jordan, but John notes (10:40) that he also preached on the eastern side. He did all his preaching near water since response to his message required immersion (baptism).

He preached an immersion of "repentance for the forgiveness of sins." John the Immerser was a unique, supernaturally-commissioned, God-sent *link* between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. John's ministry was to announce the imminent abrogation of the Law and the Prophets because the "kingdom of God" which they symbolized and predicted had arrived (in the person of the King). "The law and the prophets were until John. . . ." (Lk. 16:16). What John preached was authoritative; it was from God. He was sent to prepare the people of Israel to turn *away* from the Old system *to* the New Kingdom. He intended that they not only repent of their ethics but also of their theology. They would have to turn *from* the "type and shadow" system by which no flesh could be justified, to justification by faith in a Person, The Son of God! Those who did prepare themselves for the imminent coming of

the New Kingdom by repenting as John preached were immersed for the remission of their sins. In that state they awaited the establishment of the New Kingdom. John's immersion was performed under the authority of God and was valid until God transferred that authority to the Son. After Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven authority in the area of covenant terms was assumed by Him. He subsequently poured out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and announced that immersion must be in His name (Jesus Christ) that is, in recognition of His Lordship over all. Because the lines of communication in the first century A.D. were not as well coordinated and established as they are in our day, it took some time for everyone who had been immersed with John's immersion to get the inspired word that John's immersion was no longer authoritative (cf. Acts 18:24, 25; 19:4).

But from the day of John's preaching until the day of Pentecost, John's immersion was valid. Those who believed and were immersed by John and died before the day of Pentecost would as surely be saved as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the other Old Testament saints who, having put their trust in the promises of God, were "justified by their faith" (cf. Rom. 1:ff; Gal. 3:1ff). No man today could say he is in proper covenant relationship to God if he knows what the New Testament says about immersion into Christ and refuses to obey it, any more than those who heard John's message and refused it could be said to be right with God (cf. Lk. 7:29-30). The believer's trust must be in Jesus Christ. The believer surrenders in obedience to immersion because Jesus commanded it, not because the ritual itself has some magic in it. Those who submitted to John's immersion did so because they "justified" God (Lk. 7:29); that is, they put God in the right place; they made Him sovereign, they believed John spoke by the authority of God. Their faith was in God, not in immersion *per se*. Those Pharisees whose faith was in their own traditions and self-righteousness, "rejected the purpose of God for themselves, and would not be immersed by John because they believed they had no need of repentance and immersion in the muddy Jordan River. Many religious people who profess faith in God today refuse to be immersed in water for the remission of sins for the same fundamental reason—they have put their faith in a church's tradition and not in the sovereign Word of Christ.

Some Bible students have taught that John's baptism was not really a unique practice of his age. Some have said that his baptism had its roots in Jewish "proselyte baptism" while others imply that he was copying the rites of the Essenes. John's baptism did not come from Jewish "proselyte baptism" for the following reasons:

- a. History has no record of Jewish "proselyte baptism" prior to John the Baptist—in fact not until the 3rd century A.D.

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- b. The Old Testament has only one word that would resemble New Testament immersion (*baptizo*) and that is the Hebrew word *taval*. All other Hebrew words (*kavas*, *rachatz*, *shataph*, *duach*) mean "to wash or bathe for religious purposes."
 - c. The Hebrew word *taval* is the only specific word meaning, "immerse, dip, plunge." The Septuagint (Greek version of the Hebrew text translated about 300 B.C.) uses the Greek word *baptizo* only once for the Hebrew word *taval* and that is in II Kings 5:14. The word *baptizo* appears in only one other place in the Septuagint (Isa. 21:4) and there it is a translation of the Hebrew word *ba'ath* which means to "overwhelm." Everywhere else the Hebrew word *taval* is used in the Septuagint, the word *bapto* or a derivative is used.
 - d. The Greek word *baptizo* appears only twice in the Hebrew Apocrypha (in the LXX), Judith 12:7; Sirach 34:25; in neither case does it appear in connection with any "proselyte baptism."
 - e. Proselyte baptism (immersion) is not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament, the Jewish Apocrypha, the New Testament, Josephus, Philo, Jewish Targums or the Mishna.
 - f. None of the early Christian writers such as Barnabas, Justin Martyr or Tertullian, all of whom discussed both Jews and Christian baptism, mention Jewish proselyte baptism.
- John's baptism could not have come from the Essenes (Qumranians) for the following reasons:

- a. The "water of impurity" used by the Qumranians (IQS 3:4-9) was not an initiatory rite but was reserved for the practice of "cleansing" those already in the "covenant."
- b. There really is no textual proof (from the Dead Sea Scrolls) that these Essene "washings" were by immersion.
- c. Josephus in his, *Wars*, II:8:5, writes about the Essenes, ". . . they assemble themselves together . . . into one place, and when they have clothed themselves in white veils, they then bathe their bodies in cold water . . ." No mention of immersion, specifically.

The scriptures say John's immersion came directly from God by revelation (cf. Lk. 1:13-17; 1:76-79; Jn. 1:33). The multitudes believed his ministry came from God (Mt. 21:23-27). The Jewish rulers considered it something different than anything then being practiced religiously, and something that only Elijah or the Messiah would have the authority to institute (Jn. 1:24-28). Even Jesus, through His disciples, practiced the pre-Christian baptism of John (cf. Jn. 3:26-27; 4:1-2). John's immersion came from God; it was efficacious as an expression of repentance and for the remission of sins until Jesus commanded all men to be immersed in His (Jesus') name.

John's ministry was no accident! It was foreknown and foretold some 700 years before by Isaiah (cf. Isa. 40:3-4). John's ministry was second in importance only to the ministry of the Messiah Himself. Jesus would later say that of all those born of human parentage not one would be greater than John the Baptist (cf. Mt. 11:11). For four hundred years (since the days of Malachi) God had been silent. There had been no revelation from God about that "kingdom" and that "King" He had foretold by the prophets. Suddenly John the Baptizer burst upon the scene. Many recognized that John had been sent from God—he was a prophet! He was a "voice" from God. When an Oriental monarch was preparing to visit an area of his kingdom, he usually sent a herald ahead of him, announcing his coming and commanding his subjects to prepare a roadway over which he might pass free of all obstacles, smooth, level and straight. So John was the "herald" commanding the subjects of the King of kings to make an obstacle-free, smooth, level and straight road into their hearts where He wishes to travel and abide.

SECTION 2

The Baptizer's Message (3:7-14)

7 He said therefore to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

10 And the multitudes asked him, "What then shall we do?" ¹¹And he answered them, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." ¹²Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" ¹³And he said to them, "Collect no more than is appointed you." ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

3:7-9 Admonition: Matthew and Mark (Mt. 3:5-6; Mk. 1:5) indicate that thousands of people came out from the cities and villages and farms of Judea and were immersed by John. The word *baptizo* in Greek means *immerse*; it can only mean immerse. There is a Greek word for sprinkle, *rantizo*; there is a Greek word for pour, *cheo*. Neither of these

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words are used in the Greek text for the action of baptism—only the word *baptizo*. All Greek lexicons, ancient and modern, give the definition of *baptizo* to be, “dip, plunge, immerse.” The practice of sprinkling for baptism was not officially sanctioned by Christendom until the fourteenth century! To make changes in the mode of baptism is nowhere sanctioned in the Bible!

Among the thousands coming out to where John was immersing were some of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew uses the Greek preposition *epi* which could be translated, “. . . many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to (or toward) baptism . . .” The preposition may also be translated “for” baptism. Were they really coming *for* baptism (cf. Lk. 7:29-30)? Harold Fowler suggests, “they may have feared the loss of their leadership of the people if they did not join it (John’s baptism) . . .” (cf. *Matthew, Vol. I*, by Harold Fowler, College Press, pgs. 98-104). John did not mince words. He addressed his remarks to the multitudes, but more specifically (as Matthew points out, Mt. 3:7) to the Pharisees and Sadducees, calling them “offspring of poisonous snakes.” It was a title well placed for their teachings and their hypocrisy had poisoned the spiritual life of the covenant people (cf. Mt. 16:6, 12; 23:1-39). Jesus also called them “offspring of poisonous snakes” (Mt. 12:34). John’s question, “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” was probably couched in irony and sarcasm in an attempt to expose the sham and hypocrisy of their hearts so they might be brought to true repentance.

The Greek word for repentance, *metanoao*, means literally, “change of mind; change of direction.” It was a military term used in drilling soldiers and meant, “about face, to the rear march.” True repentance is inward and is a state of thinking and being—it is the nature of a person who is going in the direction of the will of God. But true repentance must express itself in actions and deeds—in all the issues of life. There must be “fruits that befit true repentance,” (cf. Acts 17:30-31; 26:20). True repentance involves confessing our sin (Prov. 28:13; Psa. 32:5-6; Jer. 2:35; 3:13); restitution of the damage of our sin (insofar as possible) (cf. Nu. 5:6-7); resolution that we shall not willingly sin again, (cf. Heb. 10:26-27; I Jn. 3:9).

John’s next admonition is that genetic or biological relationships, racial or national heritages and family ties have nothing fundamentally to do with our relationship to God. God is interested in character, not color of skin or cultural circumstances. All these things may have some bearing on the formation of our character, but they count for nothing in themselves concerning our future life. The Jews believed that inasmuch as God once chose Abraham and blessed him, they automatically, by reason of physical descent, must stand in the exact same favor with God as Abraham had. If God wanted only physical descendants from

Abraham, He could multiply them from stones of the ground. After all, God made the original man from the dust of the earth. But God cannot and will not overwhelm the autonomous will and spirit of man to make him a child of faith. God wants children of Abraham by *faith* (cf. Rom. 4:1ff; 9:6-7; 11:13-24; Gal. 4:21-31), and good works (Jas. 2:18-26). God is not partial for any nationality or culture; He *is* partial toward anyone anywhere who believes and obeys His Word (cf. Acts 10:34-35). God saves individuals, not nations or races. God takes repenting, obedient individuals from every nation and tribe and tongue and makes them a kingdom of His own (cf. Rev. 7:9). Jewish apocryphal traditions taught that Abraham had accumulated more merit with God than was necessary for his own salvation. All Jews in good standing with the *torah* and the traditions could draw on this excess merit for their salvation.

The final admonition of John was that the axe of God's judgment was already laid to the root of the trees (the people of the Jewish nation). John himself had come in partial fulfillment of that great prediction of judgment upon the nation in Malachi 3:1-5. Jesus' coming to judge was the other part of that prophecy (cf. Jn. 9:39-41; 3:19, 36; 5:22, 27; 12:40). The question is, when was the axe to cut down the trees? John may be warning of the imminent destruction of the Jewish system, as Jesus often did (cf. Mt. 21:33-43; 22:1-14; 23:37-39; 24:1-35; Lk. 19:41-44, etc.). The book of Hebrews warns of judgment to come upon the Jewish system (cf. Heb. 8:13; 10:25; 12:25-29). The Jewish system was ready to be done away with—it had served its purpose (cf. Jer. 3:15). All who did not repent and prepare to meet God on a new basis would be cast off. John is warning of the danger of being hewn down and thrown "into the fire" of eternal damnation. Even now, with the coming of Jesus Christ, the axe of judgment falls. Without acceptance of the Messiah there is nothing left but inevitable judgment. The Messiah is God's last message of grace and salvation to the world (Heb. 1:1-3). The One whom John is to introduce to the world is man's *only* hope. In effect, the good news becomes bad news. It is good news to the humble who surrender in faith and repentance—but it is bad news to the proud, self-righteous and impenitent. Christ is God's final touchstone of judgment—henceforward God will categorize and separate all men as to their eternal destinies according to their response to Christ's covenant. Thus, even at the beginning of John's preaching, the axe of judgment was poised, ready to fall upon mankind.

3:10-14 Application: John the Baptist has his method in the correct order to bring about the proper result. People must first repent of improper theology. Man must first obey the revealed covenant terms and come into right relationship to God. Then he acts according to God's revelation concerning right relationships toward other men. Those who repented

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and were immersed with John's baptism, having redirected their attitudes with respect to God's coming kingdom, asked how this new attitude was to affect their daily lives.

True repentance will manifest itself in sharing one's worldly goods with others less fortunate and in need. John does not qualify the necessity of sharing by asking why the one is without a coat or without food. Need is all the motivation a New Kingdom person requires. Right relationship to needy humanity is necessary in order to be in right relationship to God (cf. I Jn. 3:16-18; 4:20; James 1:27; 2:14-17; Heb. 13:16; Mt. 25:31ff). Tax-collectors (publicans) were told they should not cheat or be dishonest and take more taxes than allowed. Soldiers were told they were not to use their power and influence to extort or defraud others and to be content with their wages. G. Campbell Morgan says, ". . . the height of morality is the love-mastered life . . ." The New Kingdom person does not live his life or do his job for mercenary reasons. He keeps his life free from *love* of money (cf. Heb. 13:5; I Tim. 6:6-8). He does not have to give up a perfectly normal and socially useful vocation to come into right relationship to God—he just has to let God's revealed will give sovereign direction to whatever vocation or avocation he chooses in life. Tax-collectors did not have to quit their jobs, soldiers did not have to be discharged from the army—they simply had to do their jobs according to God's guidance. These words from John the Baptist are both timely and timeless. The apostle Paul's advice is, "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not man, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward . . ." (Col. 3:23-24; Eph. 6:5-9, etc.). Craftsmen, professional men, housewives, even children doing "chores" should remember God's ideal is that we do our tasks with excellence, not haphazardly, and not for mercenary purposes. Anyone who does otherwise cannot please God!

SECTION 3

The Baptizer's Meekness (3:15-20)

15 As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, 16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

18 So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people. ¹⁹But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰added this to them all, that he shut up John in prison.

3:15-17 Subordination: The fervor and frankness of John's preaching excited the multitudes of Judea. No religious teacher for hundreds of years had so effectively stirred individual consciences and so thoroughly exposed religious hypocrisy. John stirred up a revival! He was saying things and doing things (immersing for the forgiveness of sins) that only "Elijah" or the "Messiah" would have authority to do (cf. Jn. 1:24-28). John the Baptizer might have been tempted to bask in the limelight of fame and popularity, but he overcame it and subordinated himself to the One Coming after him, the Messiah. One of the things that made John the Baptist such a *great* man was his unfeigned humility. He was great because he was a servant. John answers the expectations of the multitudes that no matter how important his preparatory works may seem, they are very much subordinate to the ultimate work of the One Coming—the Messiah. The Messiah will immerse some in the Holy Spirit and some in fire. This statement of John does not mean that all believers are to be immersed in the Holy Spirit, for the following reasons:

- a. The context does not demand such an interpretation. We do not know who the "you" is in either the case of the Holy Spirit or fire. It is altogether possible that he simply means "some" of you. Peter and John were very early disciples of John the Baptist and were probably standing there at that moment.
- b. John's primary purpose in this statement is to make a contrast between himself and the Messiah in importance of ministries.
- c. There are only four distinct references to the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" in the N.T.

John's first prediction (with parallels); Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16

John's second prediction, Jn. 1:33

Jesus' promise, Acts 1:5 (Acts 2:1-21 is the stated fulfillment of this).

The experience of Cornelius and his household, Acts 11:15-17. This lone event upon Gentiles seems to indicate the phrase "all flesh" of Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17 was intended as *representative* or *general*, (i.e., the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon some Jews and some Gentiles signified God was opening the kingdom to the whole world).

- d. *Baptizo* means "immerse, overwhelm." The supernatural powers exercised by the apostles (cast out demons, raise the dead, punish some with judgments) were never exercised by any others.

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(This has caused some to think Cornelius did not receive the "baptism of the Holy Spirit," but only a miraculous "gift" momentarily in order to signify something—not to empower him—certainly not to save him.)

If we are going to call Bible things by Bible names, it is readily apparent that John's announcement that the Messiah would immerse in the Holy Spirit did not infer that all believers were to receive the "baptism in the Holy Spirit."

The "immersion with fire" is very evidently (from v. 17) the eternal judgment since it is an "unquenchable fire." As *Fowler* points out in *Matthew, Vol. I*, pg. 107, John has done here what many Old Testament prophets do; he views great, widely-separated events in the scheme of God's redemptive program without giving any of the historical details between such events. John the Baptist predicts the immersion in the Holy Spirit (the day of Pentecost) and the immersion in unquenchable fire (the final judgment) without regard to the great time interval between these events, (see our comments, *Minor Prophets*, Butler, College Press, pg. 32, and 184-188).

3:18-20 Suffering: It is clear from v. 18 that we do not have all the words or sermons preached by John the Baptist recorded for us. There are a few typical exhortations preserved in the gospel records. Verses 19 and 20 are Luke's brief account of the results of some of John's preaching. Luke digresses here from chronological order. Matthew and Mark give account in more detail and in chronological order (Mk. 6:17ff; Mt. 14:3ff). Some of John's exhortations had to do with the adulterous living of Herod Antipas and Herodias. John the Baptist "condemned *all* the evils Herod had done." And they were many! Herod imprisoned him. Josephus says that Herod imprisoned John the Baptist because of his popularity with the multitudes. The very fact that Josephus records the event serves to give historical confirmation to the accuracy and authenticity of the gospel records.

SECTION 4

The Baptizer's Master (3:21-38)

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased."

23 Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of

age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, ²⁴the son of Mathat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, ²⁵the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, ²⁶the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, ²⁷the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, ²⁸the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, ²⁹the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, ³⁰the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, ³¹the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattaha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, ³²the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, ³³the son of Amminadab, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, ³⁴the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, ³⁵the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, ³⁶the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, ³⁷the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, ³⁸the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

3:21-22 Goodness: Jesus came when he was about 30 years of age to submit to John's immersion. The date would have been approximately December, 26 A.D. or January, 27 A.D. It was more than 40 days before He went to the Passover recorded in John 2:13-22. He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness immediately after His baptism to be tempted by the devil. After His temptation He was pointed out by John the Baptist to some of his disciples, He traveled to Canan of Galilee for a wedding feast, spent a few days in Capernaum (Jn. 1:19—2:12) and then went to the Passover. The place He was baptized was probably "Bethany beyond the Jordan" (Jn. 1:28) also known as Bethabara ("house of the ford").

John objected; Jesus insisted. It would be a natural reaction for John to insist that he was unworthy to baptize the Messiah. John had already declared that the One Coming was so much greater than he. It is a clear doctrine of the New Testament that Jesus Christ was without sin. Why then did He need to be immersed with John's baptism? We suggest the following reasons:

- a. Acquiescence: The message God gave John the Baptist was that anyone who wished to be of the true Israel of God must acquiesce to a righteousness from an obedient

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heart. Matthew states that Jesus said, “. . . it is fitting . . .” (Mt. 3:15). The Greek word *prepon* might be translated, “proper.” It was *proper* for Jesus to acquiesce to any revealed commandment of the Father and fulfill righteousness from an obedient heart.

- b. Association: Jesus, to serve as our “pathfinder,” “redeemer,” and “faithful High Priest,” tested and tried in all points as we are tried, must “be made like His brethren in every respect” (Heb. 2:14-18). Jesus in His flesh, has traveled every road we have traveled, been tried in every way we have been tried, and submitted to every command we have been commanded.
- c. Authentication: God’s initial signal that this Person was His Son and the Messiah was at Jesus’ baptism. It was here Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 1:33-34) and approved by the verbal, audible announcement of the Father (Mt. 3:17).

Jesus acquiesced to John’s immersion to demonstrate that the man who wishes to be acclaimed “good” by God must have an obedient heart. Even the Son, who condescended to an incarnate experience, felt it was necessary to obey the Father’s will no matter who the messenger might be (cf. Mt. 17:24-27; Mt. 23:1-2; Heb. 5:7-9): If the sinless Son of God felt the necessity of walking 60-70 miles to submit in obedience to the Father’s revealed will to be immersed in the Jordan River, how can any believer today feel that it is *not* necessary to be immersed in obedience to the Son’s command?

3:23-38 Genealogy: Genealogies are “family trees.” The ancient Jews were very zealous to keep genealogical records (cf. Ezek. 13:9; Ezra 2:59, 62). These records were necessary for adjudicating inheritances of tribal lands and for succession of royal and priestly families. They were legal documents. Matthew’s genealogy traced Jesus’ lineage through Joseph because it was only through Joseph as His “father-of-record” that He had claim to David’s throne. Luke, probably not primarily interested in Jesus’ legal heritage, gives the parenthetical (“as was supposed, the son of Joseph”) explanation as he traces Jesus’ lineage back to Adam and God. Luke was more interested for the sake of his Gentile readers to trace Jesus’ ancestry to the original man Adam and thence to God. Luke’s genealogy would be a documented rebuttal to the mythological genealogies of the pagan gods. Joseph is distinctly declared by Matthew to be from David through Solomon, back to Abraham (Mt. 1:1-17; see also Mt. 1:20;

Lk. 2:4). But Joseph was connected to two lines of descent if you compare Luke's list with Matthew's. How could Joseph be the son of both Jacob (in Matthew) and Heli (in Luke)? As sometimes happened a man and his wife could not produce male heirs to their tribal heritage. God provided in the Old Testament economy what came to be known as the Levirate Law (Gen. 38:8ff; Deut. 25:5-10) whereby a deceased man's brother or nearest male kin was required to marry his brother's widow and raise up seed in his brother's name. Ruth's marriage to Boaz recognized this law (Ruth 4:1-17). This ancient custom was also applied in the practice of adoption. Orphaned children were often adopted (Esther 2:7) and thus became legal heirs through kinsmen. It is altogether possible that Heli was Joseph's first father and, upon his death, Joseph was adopted by Jacob and became legal heir to Jacob's heritage.

A comparison of Luke's genealogical record of Jesus' ancestry with that of Matthew will show Zerubbabel as the son of Shealtiel. But according to I Chronicles 3:19 Zerubbabel is the *nephew* of Shealtiel and the son of Pedaiah. Zerubbabel is at one and the same time heir, and, legally son of two men. In Matthew's list Shealtiel is the son of Jechoniah, and in Luke he is the son of Neri. How do we resolve this problem? According to Jeremiah 22:30, Jechoniah was to have no children to succeed him in a legal sense on the throne (he was to be "prophetically" childless). Shealtiel became legal heir through his father's cousin Neri (see chart, pg. 62). The only place Neri is mentioned is in Luke's list. We assume then that Neri had no sons but when Jechoniah died, Shealtiel, the blood son of Jechoniah, was adopted by Neri (son of David through Nathan). What is true of Shealtiel is also true of Zerubbabel. He became the heir through Shealtiel because Shealtiel had no sons (Pediah and his other brothers had probably died) so Zerubbabel was adopted by Shealtiel who was already legal heir through the Levirate Law. Thus God's prophecy concerning Jechoniah (legally childless) and the David lineage were both preserved.

The main aspect of the genealogical record of Christ's ancestry is to establish God's faithfulness, wisdom, and power to carry out His redemptive plan through the Divine-Man in spite of all obstacles and enemies. Imagine the difficulties that would arise if we did not possess proof that Jesus was the descendant of David! But even more importantly, the genealogies tracing Jesus' ancestry back to the original man, Adam, prove that God's plan was to save man by a Man. Man's redeemer must be a man; it was necessary that the power of the devil (the fear of death, Heb. 2:14-15) be conquered in the flesh. Man's sacrifice must be a man; a sinless, perfect man (cf. Heb. 10:4-10). Man's mediator must be a man (cf. I Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:17-18). Jesus was The Man who redeemed man

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(cf. Gal. 4:4-5). Furthermore, God's power and faithfulness to overcome all obstacles is revealed in the genealogies of Jesus. God kept His word to preserve a family and a nation through whom He delivered to the world its Savior. In spite of dungeon, fire and sword, He preserved a specific family. In spite of bondage, captivities, and resistance by this chosen nation itself, God preserved a throne. In spite of sinful men and women (David, Bathsheba, Rahab, etc.) in the lineage of Jesus, God produced a believing, humble peasant girl and her fiance through whom to deliver the Messiah to mankind. God's providential power is evident in the genealogies of Jesus.

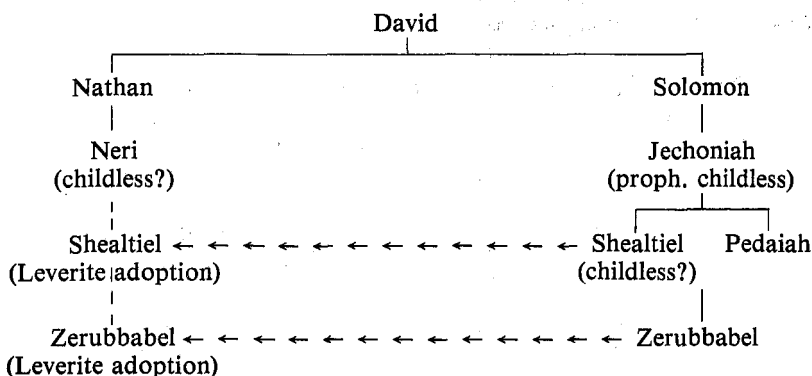
Matthew

David
|
Solomon
|
Jechoniah
|
Shealtiel
|
Zerubbabel

Luke

David
|
Nathan
|
Neri
|
Shealtiel
|
Zerubbabel

Possible Explanation



STUDY STIMULATORS:

1. What do you think of the historical context in which John the Baptist carried out his mission? Would you be able to maintain an optimistic attitude if you were called to serve God in a similar historical context?
2. How did John the Baptist serve as a "link" between the Old and New covenants? What was the response God expected from all who heard his message?
3. Were people's sins forgiven when they submitted to John's immersion?
4. Why is it incorrect to state that John's baptism originated in "Jewish proselyte baptism"?
5. Why is it incorrect to state that John's baptism originated in the practice of Essene (Qumranian) washings?
6. Where did John's immersion originate? How did Jesus verify that?
7. What is the correct New Testament mode of baptism?
8. Has the Bible given any man or group of men sanction to change the mode of baptism?
9. Why did John call the Pharisees and Sadducees "a brood of vipers"? Would this same categorization apply to any contemporary religious teachers?
10. What is repentance? Is it to be accomplished only once in our lives?
11. Why is it necessary to repent of erroneous theology before repentance in ethics?
12. May one continue to be a soldier and please God?
13. Are all believers to be immersed in the Holy Spirit?
14. Why did Jesus insist on being baptized by John?
15. Why is it important that the genealogical record of Jesus' ancestry be a part of the gospel record?