

Jesus' Baptism
Matthew 3:13—17

So far we have seen John out in the wilderness calling Israel to repent and be baptized. The leadership of Israel was located in Jerusalem at the Temple with the Pharisees and Sadducees in charge of the people. This is equivalent to our Washington D.C. with the Congress and President in charge of the country. Israel's leadership was corrupt and they were not watching out for the welfare of the people but were only seeking their own profit and well-being. Scripture presents these leaders as evil shepherds (Jeremiah 23:1—4; Ezekiel 34). We can certainly understand how those in power can easily become corrupt and look out for their own welfare instead of the welfare of those they are elected to serve.

Now John shows up outside of Jerusalem away from the dishonest and evil form of government. He was disassociating himself from those who had a form of religion but without real faith. He is calling for those in Jerusalem to come out of the empty traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees and follow the true faith presented in the Old Testament. Instead of doing the works of the Law to gain the Kingdom, John was calling on them to return to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and then do the works of the Law to demonstrate their faith.

John gave the Pharisees and Sadducees an opportunity to repent when they came out to see what John was preaching and find out if this was a threat to their power. John warned them that they couldn't depend upon Abraham being their physical father for God could raise up anyone to their position. He also challenged them to bear fruit that would be in line with true repentance.

John 15 explains that this fruit-bearing cannot come from the individual but can only come from those who abide in Christ. These verses are often applied to members of the Body of Christ but actually are directed to Israel. Those in Israel who believe, repent and are baptized will bear fruit as long as they continue to abide in Christ. If these leaders of Israel truly repented and would abide in Christ they would bear fruit. The problem was they were trying to produce their own fruit in their own power instead of doing it through Christ. As many do today, they were coming up with their own ideas as to what would please God. The only thing that pleases God is what we allow Him to do through us. Anything done by our own power is wasted effort and an offence to God. Anyone in Israel who does not bear fruit will be cut off and burned up. This certainly does not correspond to Paul's teachings.

John 15:1—6 ¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

Matthew 3:13—17 (Mark 1:9—11; Luke 3:21—22; John

John began his baptizing and preaching ministry at a very specific time—by the word of God (Luke 3:2). We also see from John 1:6 that John was sent by God. God is controlling every aspect of John's ministry. Along with his message of repentance (to turn back to God) he baptized those who did repent and thus began the formation of the Little Flock of Luke 12.

Jesus came out to be among the people who were gathering about 20—25 miles ENE of Jerusalem just east of the Jordan River. He identified Himself with them. He also identified Himself with John's ministry by being baptized by John. Jesus was 30 years old when He was inaugurated into His public ministry. This was the age at which a male Israelite would enter into service for the Lord (Numbers 4).

The people who came out to be baptized by John were acknowledging their sin and submitted to the ritual of cleansing (baptism). When Jesus was baptized, He was not signifying that He needed to be cleansed from sin but identified Himself with the sinners. He knew no sin but yet took upon Himself our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). The other reason, according to Matthew 3:15, was so Jesus would fulfill all righteousness. It actually says so that John and Jesus would fulfill all righteousness since the word *us* is used. This emphasizes Jesus' identification with John's ministry. To fulfill all righteousness basically means to fulfill all that is right according to the Law. Jesus was able to completely follow every detail of the Law without fail. If He did not get baptized, He would have violated the Law. It was right after Jesus was baptized that He walked up out of the water and the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the manner of a dove. Most people, probably through artist's renderings of the event, think the Holy Spirit appeared in the shape of a dove instead of coming in the manner of a dove. At the same time the Father's voice came down from heaven and said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." John the Baptist knew Jesus was the Messiah because God had told him the Spirit would come to rest upon the Christ. Notice that all three Persons of the Trinity were present at this time.

John 1:32—33 ³³ I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

Luke says that Jesus was baptized when all the other people were baptized (Luke 3:21). The book of John makes it sound like He was baptized before the delegation from Jerusalem came to check out his ministry because John the Baptist knew who Jesus Christ was at that time (John 4:24—27). Mark seems to indicate that immediately after Jesus was baptized that He was driven into the desert to be tempted by Satan. However, John 1:26 says that Jesus was still in the crowd when the representatives from Jerusalem were questioning John. I believe this dilemma can be understood with a better understanding of the word *immediately*.

The word used is Strong's G2117 (εὐθύς). It is often interpreted as straight or straightway and means directly. I believe Jesus did not immediately go into the desert but went directly to the desert where He was tempted. He could have been with the crowd for several days before being sent there but He did not make any other stops between the place of baptism and His temptation.

When the heavens are opened, man has an opportunity to look into the very throne room of God and see things that we normally can't see. When Stephen was being stoned in Acts 7 he saw the heavens open and he could see Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God. Peter saw the sky open up and a sheet descending (Acts 10:11). Ezekiel also saw the heavens open and he was able to see God (Ezekiel 1:1). When Christ comes back at the Second Coming the sky will be rolled back so mankind will be able to see the One who sits on the throne in heaven (Revelation 6:14—16). When Jesus was baptized, there wasn't just the fluttering Holy Spirit and the voice from heaven. The sky actually opened up so people could look into heaven. It was probably a somewhat frightening and awe-striking moment that proved to the people that this Man was indeed their Messiah and perhaps even confirmed to Jesus that this indeed was His mission.

Luke 3:21—23 ²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

Jesus' baptism was an announcement of His public ministry. The Father declared that this man being baptized was indeed His own Son and that He was pleased with Him. This was all in preparation for Satan's temptations when Jesus proves that He really is the Son.

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