

John The Baptist

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The Birth of John the Baptist We know the situation in Israel at this time; we know the history; and we know that the Messiah is going to come. It is a great thing to look at the lives of those who waited. In a sense we all wait for the coming of the Lord for the Lord's righteous activities in our own lives. It is a fine thing to look at those who waited in the right way, and to find out how we might wait.

READ Luke Chapter 1

There is a stylistic change in the Greek of this passage and the one which follows. Luke changes from the strongly idiomatic classical Greek to one that is quite Hebraistic. Since Luke was a Greek by birth, and his language is very Greek, the speculation is this: that Luke records here the memories of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Introduction

Luke 1:5-7, "In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, living without blame in all the commandments and righteous requirements of the Lord. And they had no

child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in their days."

Luke goes out of his way in his usual way to put forth the background of these two people; their general lineage, and of more importance their spiritual status.

They were both of the priestly tribe of Levi. This was a tribe of prestige and prosperity and also the tribe of the Sadducees. This religious group came into being about 300 years before Christ. They are characterized by their aristocracy, their cultural surrender to the Greeks and others, and their opposition to everything Pharasaic.

The name "sadducee" comes from the Aramaic Sadduqim, which meant 'righteousness'. However, those who were in opposition to them called them saddiqim, which meant 'destruction'.

They came from the ranks of the priests and high priests of Israel, during the time of the Greek occupation. Their desire was to give in to the Hellenizing influences of the Greeks, and thus retain their favor.

The Sadducees had a lot to lose to the occupation forces of the Greeks, because they were mostly prosperous, aristocratic people. In order to maintain their lifestyles and possessions, they placated the Greeks, giving in to their cultural and even religious influences.

Due to the double tyranny of the Pharisees and king Herod, the Sadducees had made a great comeback not long before the birth of Christ. Let's face it: the Pharisees were no fun at all.

Zacharias and Elizabeth had resisted the temptation to become Sadducees, and neither did they become Pharisees by reaction. They found a true relationship with God through the ritual system.

They lived in all the righteous requirements and commandments of God. The commandments included much more than the ten commandments. The commandments definitely included the greatest commandment to love the Lord with all their heart and soul and might.

They did so without blame. Without blame does not mean that they were perfect. It does mean that when they sinned they took care of it with the proper sacrifice and the mental attitude that went along with it. Without blame does not mean that their execution of the ritual plan was perfect they were after all human. They did their best and maintained a good relationship with God.

Elizabeth was barren. Whenever a woman of God is barren it means that God has something special in mind for her. The Greek word for "barren" is STEIRA, and it definitely indicates that she was physically incapable of bearing children.

In Elizabeth's case, this condition was in addition to her being past menopause. She was quite old, but this was not the reason for her barren condition. The two are separate in the original language.

Complicating the situation was Zacharias' advanced age. He could not have gotten Elizabeth pregnant even if she were able.

This situation was identical to that of Abraham and Sarah, some two thousand years before. It is worthwhile to note! The covenants to Adam, Abraham, and David are about to be fulfilled, and this birth will bring the messenger to prepare the way.

Luke 1:8-10, "Now it came about, while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering."

There was a great number of priests. Because of this, it is likely that each priest would get to render his service once in a lifetime. The priests were

chosen by lot to do so, and with God there are no accidents.

As a righteous man, no doubt Zacharias had big expectations for this day, and in some ways he may have looked at the event as the culmination of a good life. It was Zacharias' turn to burn incense at the incense altar in the Holy Place.

The incense altar represented the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the righteousness produced by His perfect life.

The incense burned twenty four hours a day a tribute to the uninterrupted righteousness of Christ's life. Zacharias merely went in to put on new incense, so that the burning might be perpetuated.

The aroma that the incense gave off was designed to be a pleasing one representative of the pleasure that Christ would give to God.

The position of the altar in that holy place showed the source of that righteousness the Spirit and the Word. The golden lampstand was a symbol of the ministry of the Spirit it illuminated the table of showbread. The table of showbread represented the Word of God. When illuminated by the Spirit it produces righteousness.

Thus the Holy place taught even the doctrine of kenosis.

The great multitude of people may indicate that there was a feast or that this was a holy day but we can only guess at that.

Zacharias encounters a surprise

Luke 1:11,12 "And an angel of the Lord was seen by him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. And when he saw this, Zacharias was troubled and fear fell upon him."

There is little doubt left in Zacharias' mind that this is an angel of the Lord. He did not think it was a practical joke; he did not wonder if this happened to all the priests. He had an immediate reaction.

Zacharias knew that this did not happen every day. Furthermore, this angelic being had an imposing appearance, because fear is a universal reaction to the visible manifestation of angels. They are awesome indeed!

The angel stood at the right hand of the altar. This is the place reserved for Jesus Christ Luke records it because it is significant this angel stood as a direct representative of Christ Himself.

Zacharias knows that this is a grave moment something great, and perhaps terrible is about to happen. But he does not suspect in the least what it is all about.

The angel speaks

Luke 1:13-17, “But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you son, and you will give him the name John. And he will be joy and gladness to you, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great before the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb (birth). And he will turn around many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And he himself will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to prepare a people who have been built for the Lord.”

The angel has good news for Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth they are going to have a son. The story also reveals that Zacharias had been praying for a son he had petitioned God. Not only will they have a child, but that child will also be joy and gladness to them. Such is not always the case, so this must have been welcome news.

Even greater news is that even at his birth many will rejoice, and that he will be great before the Lord. He will be different in that he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.

The first part of the verse makes it clear that he will be great in his relationship with the Lord. ENO.PION is a preposition which denotes face to face relationship. John will have that kind of relationship.

Second, there is the matter of John’s abstinence from alcoholic beverages. This also probably indicated that he would refrain from social life.

Finally, John is filled with the Spirit from birth. The preposition EK indicates separation, and this case, separation from the womb. This preposition may indicate source the origin of something from someplace, but even so, the separation is now effective. It is no longer there at the place of its origin. EK does not indicate the existence of one thing inside another.

There is no precedence for interpreting this preposition to mean ‘from inside’, as is often done.

The adverb ETI is the key here. This together with EK translates “ever since.” The Liddell-Scott lexicon makes this very clear on p.703. ETI does have some flexibility it can be taken in the ascensive meaning, which shows surprise on the part of the writer. It strengthens the phrase in which it takes part.

It was surprising that an infant would be filled with the Spirit from birth. Often this is interpreted as being in the womb because of verse 41 in this same chapter. Verse 41 in no way indicates that the fetus was filled with the Spirit in the womb. In fact, it is quite clear that it is Elizabeth who is filled, as we shall see.

With the ministry of the Spirit upon him, John will turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to prepare a people built for the Lord.

It had been quite some time since a prophet had ministered in the nation of Israel. There had been many false prophets, but not a single true one. The gift had gone out from the people. Now the fullness of time had come, and with it a prophet to proclaim the coming of the Messiah. The people must be humble; they must be obedient; they must be built inside their own souls.

Humility precedes obedience.

Knowledge precedes obedience.

Zacharias’ failure and his discipline

Luke 1:18-23, “And Zacharias said to the angel, ‘How shall I know this for certain? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.’ And the angel answered and said to him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which shall be fulfilled in their proper time.’ And the people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. And it came about, when the days of his priestly service were ended, that he went back home.”

Zacharias in the Holy Place in front of the archangel Gabriel, the very messenger of God wants proof!

All this time he has prayed for an heir. All this time he has done the right thing. But when push comes to shove, Zacharias fails to believe. He and his wife are too old, he thinks, for God to work a miracle.

The angel Gabriel is mentioned in three other passages in the Bible.

- When he appears to Mary, to announce her role in the Messiah's birth.
- And twice in Daniel, 8:16 and 9:21, to interpret the Word of God.
- Not only does this angelic being have an awesome presence, but he is also one of the highest ranking of all angels, if not the highest.

The angel refers to his duty, his rank, and his mission. His regular duty station is in the presence of God. He is an angelic attendant in God's throne room, and he is often sent as God's personal messenger.

Now, all elect angels were and are trustworthy, but Gabriel is likely the most trusted of all. The wise king always uses his best men as his messengers; the wise general his best as couriers. So it is with Gabriel. His mission was as a messenger, sent personally by God to communicate the good news of the birth of the one who would follow.

Because of Zacharias' unbelief, he is disciplined to be silent. As Gabriel was a messenger to him, so also he could have been a messenger to the great crowd of people who were outside. He could have had the honor of the first announcement of the coming Messiah. Instead, he is silenced. Silenced until the day of the birth of his son. We will contrast this with the response of Mary.

Zacharias comes out of the Holy Place; and there arrayed before him is a great crowd, all of whom were wondering why it took so long for him to do his duties.

Now comes the charades routine. Zacharias makes signs he tries to make them understand the message, but they just cannot understand him. They come to the conclusion that he has seen some kind of vision and they most likely wrote it off as another kook.

Zacharias goes home when his duties are over. We know from a later passage that he uses the time to become childlike in his humility, and to turn his heart to a righteous attitude. He builds himself up in the Lord, until he develops a proper response.

When he finally opens his mouth good things come forth.

Elizabeth conceives

Luke 1:24,25, "And after these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant; and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, 'So this is what the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked to remove my disgrace among men.'"

Elizabeth makes an expression of disgust here not of praise. She is living in seclusion, not excited to be a part of God's plan for the Messiah, but ashamed to even go out. It is going to take a visit from Mary to get her out of her funk.

Elizabeth Gives Birth to the Forerunner

Luke 1:57-66

Remember, Mary had gone back home, leaving Elizabeth to fend for herself. Elizabeth had fully recovered from her funk over conceiving at such an advanced age. She gave birth to a son, and many of her neighbors and relatives heard about it, and so they rejoiced over the birth of this child, fulfilling the prophecy of Gabriel.

It is funny to note that people make signs to him when he is not deaf, only unable to talk. Zacharias names the boy John, and immediately his tongue is freed, and immediately he speaks praise to God. He had had nine months in which to contemplate his earlier failure. He recovered and now says the most wonderful things. The local population is astonished at these events, and they wonder what the child will grow up to be. A prophet? The Messiah himself? There was a lot of serious thinking going on the subject.

Zacharias' Prophecy

Luke 1:67-69. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His way; to

give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.;"

Zacharias concentrates on the cross first. Zacharias realized the need for salvation, and that it had to come before any national independence or prosperity.

Then he talks of national freedom from oppression. He calls to mind the covenant of God, the Abrahamic covenant. He brings up the fact that peace gives one the opportunity to concentrate on God all the more.

John is the one who will prepare the way for the savior, to make smooth the path for him. He is to get people to the point where they can handle the ministry of our Lord.

Christ's ministry will be hard to swallow, because it is about a personal redemption that requires humility. The people of Israel wanted national redemption without the sacrifice of individual pride. John will preach the message of salvation and forgiveness of sins.

Zacharias concentrates on the mercy of God, because Christ is the visible manifestation of mercy to all mankind. The Sunrise from on high is a term that is used to denote the resurrected status of Jesus Christ.

- anatole means sunrise in the sense of the rising again of the sun in the east. ana is a preposition which means both up and again.
- When you add the term from on high, it is obvious that this is God.
- So, Zacharias looks forward to the manifest mercy of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ, especially concentrating on the resurrection.

The sunrise shines upon those who are in darkness and the shadow of death.

- Darkness refers to the cosmic system of Satan his design to prevent us from believing in Christ, and to destroy our relationship with God.
- The shadow of death refers to physical death.

The light guides us into the way of peace (prosperity).

John the Baptist's Childhood

Luke 1:80, "And the child continued to grow, and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel."

Preparing the Way of the Lord (Isaiah 40)

The Jews received the call to leave Egypt. They were to proceed to the promised land under the leadership of Moses. Between them and the promised land was a few hundred miles of wilderness. Of course, they had to cross it.

Leading them was the cloud by day and the fire by night; visible manifestations of Divine presence. Furthermore, there was the tabernacle, the tent of meeting with God.

Not long after they left Egypt, God provided a covenant at Mt. Sinai. A Law which defined individual liberty in ten commandments. That Law also defined sin.

Because of their involvement in sin and idolatry, the Jews were delayed in the desert some forty years. Their journey through the wilderness was anything but straight.

When Isaiah preached the message preserved in Isaiah 40, the southern kingdom of Judah was in a state of apostasy and their destruction by the Assyrians was near.

Isaiah preached a message which would remind the Jews of their crooked path in the desert, and of the reason for their failure: a bankrupt relationship with God. He would inspire them to build the highway in the heart, so that there would be a highway in the wilderness.

Isaiah's message also stood as a prophecy of the ministry of John the Baptist. It was John's mission to prepare the hearts of the Jews for their king and for their new covenant. Malachi 3:1 also predicted the ministry of the Baptist

The text of Isaiah's message. "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the Lord of Armies."

Isaiah 40:35 contains an excerpt from one of Isaiah's sermons. It has a command, and an explanation of that command.

The command comes from verses 35, while the explanation from verses 68.

Verses 35 read like this: “A voice is calling, ‘Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’”

The Jews would have responded to this message immediately, for the wilderness journey was a vital part of their national heritage.

Isaiah’s message is about the wilderness of the souls of the people of Judah, for because of their rejection of God, and their love affairs with the idols of the Gentiles, they had created an imposing wilderness indeed.

It is up to them to smooth out the rough places through confession of sin, and a humble orientation to God’s plan for their lives.

It is only when the hearts of wilderness are smoothed out that the glory of the Lord is revealed.

This revelation is the millennial rule of the king of kings and lord of lords, the bright morning star, Jesus Christ. But first the people must humble themselves to the king and his plan for their lives.

To illustrate the clever nature of Satanic propaganda, observe:

The Jews rejected the millennial king and His kingdom from their distrust of the Gentile world.

The Gentiles now futilely attempt to bring in that kingdom when it cannot come without the king bidding.

Verses 68 explain: “a voice says, ‘Call out.’ Then he answered, ‘What shall I call out?’ All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”

Isaiah makes the issue of soul leveling clear in these verses.

Isaiah communicates the mortal and fading nature of the human body, as contrasted with the word of God.

This is really a ‘you can take it with you’ verse. Everything in this life will be left behind except the word of God in your soul.

On the basis of this truth, make your priorities straight. Once they are on the level, your life will become straight as well.

Bible truth is the bulldozer in the soul. Sin and death and Satanic propaganda are the great mountains and gullies.

Jesus and John the Baptist

John the Baptist had a ministry from God to prepare Israel for the millennial kingdom and its king.

The ministry of John the Baptist had nothing to do whatsoever with the church. In essence it is in its own watertight compartment apart from the church. It drew its precedence from the dispensation of Israel.

John drew his sense of destiny from an Old Testament prophecy concerning his ministry. Isa. 40; Mal 3:1.

Since John and Jesus were cousins, it is likely that they knew one another as children and young men. John knew exactly who the Messiah was, and probably long before he ever preached his message.

John began his ministry of repentance and baptism in the Spring of 26 A.D.

Now, let us contrast John and Christ.

You must understand that John was the greatest prophet of the age of Israel. His person and message were greater even than Isaiah or Jeremiah or any other. Our Lord testified to this in Matthew 11:11.

John had a great following; he was wildly popular among the people of Israel and even among some Romans.

His mission was to point the way to one even greater. From the seeming greatest to the even greater.

Long after John was gone, people still gravitated towards his ministry, even to the exclusion of Christ. In some ways, people still do, whenever they are legalistic and place great value on outward acts of piety.

Therefore, John 1:1-18 will serve well to teach us some general truths about Christ and the contrast between he and John the Baptist. In no small part it was what John the apostle was trying to accomplish in this passage.

John 1:1-15 picks up the issue from the beginning and also describes John’s relationship to Christ.

John 1:1 translation: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the God, and God was the Word.”

This verse is divided into three clauses, each of which make a statement concerning Jesus Christ.

John (the writer of this gospel) uses the term ‘the Word’ to describe Christ. This term has quite a history in Greek and Hebrew thought (to doctrine of logos).

The first clause places the existence of the Word in eternity past.

The phrase *en arche* emphasizes the qualitative aspect of the beginning. This is the beginning of Gen. 1:1; the beginning before the heavens and the earth were created.

The imperfect tense of the verb *eimi* reveals the eternity of the Word in the beginning. The existence of the Word went on and on.

The term *ho logos* shows the personification of order and wisdom existing on and on before the creation of the heavens and the earth. This is a person, and not just a principle.

Thus from the beginning of John’s gospel you know that we are talking about God.

The second clause indicates the coexistence of the Word with the God. The proper noun *Theos* is preceded by the definite article *ho*. It points out that this is the one and only God; not just one God among many. Thus we know of at least two persons in the Godhead. The preposition *pros* shows the face to face presence of one with the other.

The third clause is one which clarifies the divine nature of the Word. There is no doubt from this clause that the Word was always God. Again the imperfect tense testifies to the timeless nature of the Word.

So the first contrast: with Christ we have God; John is man, created by God.

John 1:2 offers even more clarification on the trinity and the preexistence of the Word: “This one was in the beginning with the God.”

John 1:3 turns to the creation. Up to this point all activity has been in precreation eternity past. “All things came into being through him, and outside of Him not one thing that came into being came into being.”

This verse describes the logos as the agent of the creation.

All things is from the Greek *panta*. It refers to both creatures and the material universe apart from living creatures.

Whether the material universe or living creatures, all were created by God the agency of Jesus Christ.

Along with this creation is the responsibility of maintenance, which is also handled by the deity of Jesus Christ, Col. 1:16-17.

Notice that God is apart from the material universe; he created it, but it is not Him.

Again, John is very thorough by his repetition of the idea. He wants his readers to make no mistake about what he is saying, so he clarifies the original statement by stating the absolute in the negative. ‘and outside of Him not one thing that came into being came into being.’

The second contrast to John the Baptist is the creator contrast the Word created; John could not.

John 1:4 turns back to eternity past and then marches forward into the time of men. “In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.”

There was always life in Jesus Christ: this is indicated by the imperfect tense of the Greek verb to be, *eimi*.

This life, *zoe*, is much more than the principle of biological life it was soul life. *zoe* rises above animal instinct and behavior to the independence of the soul. And not just the function of volition, but the soul as it was designed to enjoy God and His provision.

From eternity past Christ had this life, and this life was given to Adam and the woman.

That same life was surrendered to the slavery of Satan at the fall, but it was never lost by Christ.

Christ is life, real life, personified. The life of Christ was the light of men.

At last the Word and the Life enter into time.

Although it always existed and always will exist, the Word of Life entered into time and was the light of men.

Light is the opposite of darkness. Light always destroys darkness, but darkness cannot overcome the light. Darkness is the result of obscuring the light, but the light always exists. Light and darkness are incompatible mutually exclusive. The Sun always shines, but there are times when we do not see it.

God the Holy Spirit provides the light so that we can comprehend the Word. In order to see the Word we must have light.

This life was the light of men in the past. It kept on shining. This sums up the first incarnation.

John 1:5 gives the final description of Christ, bringing Him into present times (for John and for us). “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it.”

There is a nice little double entendre here with the katalambano. It has the dual meaning of overcome and comprehend. Had the forces of darkness truly comprehended the intrinsic good of the light, then it would not have tried to put it out.

John uses the present tense of the verb *phaino* to portray Christ’s present shining. Even though he died on the cross he still shines now.

Christ is the Sun (1 Cor 15:41), and the Morning Star (Rev 22:16). The Morning Star shines just before sunup. It shines as the darkness is about to end.

The darkness is the darkness of the devil’s world. The roach illustration.

John 1:6 turns to our man, John the Baptist. “There came a man, the side of God, his name, John;” Even the style of this verse differs from that of the previous five. It is very spare and understated, as if to downplay the nature of this man, especially when compared to Christ. Although John’s writing style is almost always simple, here it become hyper-simple, and less elegant than John’s brief discourse on Christ.

The verb *egeneto* is used here to describe the arrival of John. Again it is the inchoative aorist that John uses to describe the beginning of an action. John had a definite beginning. It is also the same verb that John has used previously to describe the creation by the Word. John was one created by the creator. But this verb more describes the arrival of John’s public ministry than the creation of his soul.

The noun *anthropos* leaves no doubt about the true nature of John. He is a man of the human race.

The participle *apestalmenos* portrays the action of God in sending John the Baptist. It is from the verb *apostello*, ‘to send forth’. It is the perfect participle, so it shows that before John arrived someone sent him. It is the passive participle, so it shows that it was not John who was the ultimate source of arrival, but someone else.

The preposition *para* points to the source of the sending it is God. This shows that John came from the side of God. A figure of speech that reveals how very close John the Baptist was to God. Before John began his ministry he was close to God he prepared himself in a very thorough manner by laying aside the distractions of everyday life.

The final phrase of the verse is to the point of being laconic. Three nouns lay alongside one another to identify the name of the man sent from the side of God.

John 1:7 continues John’s description of John. “He himself came as a witness that he might testify concerning the light, that all might believe through him.”

The aorist verb *elthen* describes again the arrival of John on the scene. It is translated, ‘he came’.

The subject of the verb is *houtos*, the demonstrative pronoun used to intensify the source of the action in the verb. It points strongly to John in contrast to Jesus Christ.

The preposition *eis* plus the accusative case of the noun *marturian* is translated, “as a witness.” John was a witness, a man who pointed to the truth of the matter.

John then goes on to give the twofold purpose of the Baptist’s ministry, using the particle *hina* twice to introduce two purpose clause.

The first clause is *hina marturese. peri tou photos*. “that he might testify concerning the light.”

The potential subjunctive mood of the verb *marturese*. indicates that John had a responsibility to fulfill in his ministry. This mood lays the emphasis on human volition, or choice.

John’s responsibility was in area of testimony he was to give his testimony about the light. The light, of course is Jesus Christ.

Notice that this passage does not say it was John’s responsibility to convert people. That is addressed in the next clause.

The second clause is *hina pantes pisteuso.sin di’ autou*. “that all might believe through him.”

The subject of the clause is all those who were alive at the time of John’s ministry.

The responsibility of the potential subjunctive lies squarely on the shoulders of John’s audience. Their responsibility is to believe in what John has to

say. This responsibility is not John's. They believe through him, but John does not do the believing.

This summarizes very well the issue in personal evangelism. It is our responsibility to testify concerning the light; it is their responsibility to believe. You have completely and totally succeeded in your mission if you get the word out, regardless of how your audience responds.

If this is true, then do not fear rejection does not matter to the messenger. You should always be glad when someone believes on account of your testimony. However, you should be objective about your duty no matter what the response. The accomplishment of your mission should never depend on whether you are getting positive results.

John 1:8 makes a clarification for the sake of being thorough: "He himself was not the light, but came that he might testify concerning the light."

The far demonstrative is used to point to John the Baptist. Used in conjunction with the verb to be, an emphatic contrast is set up between the light and the witness to the light.

John's purpose in life is reiterated in the second clause. There he quickly goes over what he has already communicated.

All of this adds up to a very thorough and even redundant statement about John's role in relation to Christ.

Since John has gone so far out of his way to put the Baptist into his place, it is fair to assume that there was a problem with Baptist worship at the time.

John 1:9 turns back to Christ, and begins to add some details about Him, "He was the true light, who illuminates every man, coming into the world." This is very poorly translated into your English Bible, and so we must make some corrections.

There is first an addition of one adjective to the idea of light: *ale.thinon*, true. There were many false messiahs at the time of Christ, and even the Baptist was thought to be the Messiah himself, he was so magnificent. Therefore the light is qualified as the true light.

The next statement reveals a function of the light related to creation. It begins with the definite article used as the relative pronoun *ho*, which simply picks up the true light from the previous clause and makes it the subject of the verb of this sentence.

The verb *pho.tizei* describes the action of illumination. This is a transitive verb, so the translation shining does not work as well as illumination. This is the light shining on someone or something giving its light.

This is a figure of speech which refers to the availability of Divine illumination from birth.

The idea of illumination, when used as a figure of speech, always describes the process of understanding.

The object of the verb is *panta anthro.pon*. This is translated "every man". John chooses to emphasize the individual by using the singular of *anthro.pon*. The illuminated truth is available to every man from the moment that he enters the world.

The third clause of the verse indicates the moment of illumination.

This clause begins with the accusative participle *er.chomenon*. This participle can only be connected with *anthro.pon*, since *anthro.pon* is the only noun in the previous sentence that is in the accusative case. *ale.thinon*, which appears to be in the accusative is actually in the nominative neuter as the predicate of the first clause.

Grammatically, the participle can only describe the coming of every human being into the world. The phrase *eis ton kosmon* describes a transition from one place to another. It cannot describe the moment of conception, because that would indicate some kind of preexistence, which is not a Christian doctrine. It therefore must describe

The moment of birth is the moment at which this illumination takes place. From that moment forward, the common grace ministry of God the Holy Spirit is available to every human being. From that moment forward, Christ remains the great hope for every man.

John 1:10 reveals the relationship between Christ and the world. "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, but the world did not know him." There are three parts to this verse: The incarnation; eternity past; and a comment on the two.

He was in the world. This testifies to the incarnation that God came into the world. That he came as a human is revealed in a later verse. For right now it is enough to know that God came into the world.

The world here is planet earth, the habitation for humanity.

And the world came into being through him. This is a repetition of an idea already introduced, but now there is more of a context for it.

Because God created the world, He is truly outside of it. He exists completely independent of space and time. Now the world is planet earth and all its inhabitants.

But this is significant on the basis of the first clause of the verse he was in the world, the same world that he created. God is responsible towards his creation.

The conjunction *kai* sets up a mild contrast to that which has come previously in the verse. The contrast has to do with the difference between what God has done for man and how man responded.

God came into the world the greatest sacrifice and expression of love in history.

God created that same world.

But the world did not know him. This is a description of the response of humanity to the incarnation. They did not know him describes both recognition and acceptance. Although Christ presented himself as the Son of God, the world did not accept Him as such.

Here *ho kosmos* is identified with the human race at the time of the incarnation.

John 1:11 tells of the coming of the Word to a chosen people, “He came unto His own, and His own did not receive Him.”

This of course is a reference to the Jews and their rejection of Him.

The Jews were the chosen people of the Messiah, and they did have a long association with Him, going back to the very beginnings of their history.

He came to them; He was the Messiah; and yet they did not receive Him. The objective negative adverb *ou* makes it clear that this was a complete rejection. Of course what rejection is more complete than death?

John 1:12 identifies the shift in Christ’s ministry: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe unto His name.”

The correlative pronoun *hosoi* describes a direct correlation between those who receive Christ and what they receive as a result. The number is an exact correlation, so that no one is short changed.

The aorist tense of the verb *lambano* describes the action. It is past action, summed up in one moment of time. It is translated “received”, and it is a synonym for trust or belief in Christ.

The accusative direct object *auton* identifies the object of belief, who is Christ: Him.

The second clause of the verse puts down what those who receive Christ receive in return.

The dative indirect object of the personal pronoun *autois* identifies the receivers as those who receive Christ. “to them”.

The aorist tense of the verb *didomi* identifies a past action that is seen in one moment of time. It is translated “He gave.” The ‘He’ here is Jesus Christ, the living Word.

What is given is a right *exousia*. This word describes legitimate authority, and individual rights. Since this is given to individuals, it is better to call this a right given by God.

The right is related to a potential. The right implies responsibility. The infinitive verb *genesthai* is from the verb *ginomai* ‘to become’. It is the aorist infinitive, which is the complement of *exousia*. A right always has a direction. It may take the direction of free speech or bearing arms. Rights are divided into realms. Here the realm is related to a potential: the potential to become children of God.

Becoming a child of God is not something which occurs at salvation; it is there only in the form of potential. At salvation God gives you the right to become a child of God; whether you do so is entirely up to the free expression of your volition.

Therefore, being a child of God is not synonymous with salvation. It is identified here as the goal of post salvation life. In this case, being a child of God is equal to being a mature believer in Christ.

As a child imitates the parents, so the adopted child of God is to become an imitator of Him.

John 1:13 is the follow up to the twelfth: “who have been born not from bloodshed nor from the will of flesh nor from the will of man but from God.”

This verse comments on how one becomes a child of God. You must be born first.

The aorist passive verb *egennethesan* makes it clear that the birth is outside of the choice of the one being born. The objective negative adverb *ouk* shows that the three things listed before God are definitely not the way.

John sets up this verse in anticipation of the guesses of his readership.

When he says ‘who have been born’, he anticipates them thinking of a change in life, as illustrated by birth.

There are three types of changes cited by John: change by violence; change by self; and change by someone else’s will.

Remember that the context of verse twelve is not salvation, but post salvation spiritual growth. The context is change, not salvation. John uses the figure of birth to portray post salvation spiritual growth in his epistle.

The word haimaton is translated, ‘bloodshed’. It is in the plural here, and the plural of this noun always depicts the shedding of innocent blood. It could easily be translated ‘violence’. This is emphatically not a portrayal of the physical birth of a child, but instead of attempting to bring change about through violence. The threat of physical violence to a person does not bring about true change.

The next possibility of the means of change is from the Greek phrase ek thelematos sarkos. This is change from the will of the flesh. sarkos is the Greek word for flesh, and it often describes the activity of the Old Sin Nature. It certainly does here.

What comes from the sin nature may be change in the sense of ‘different’, but never in the sense of ‘better’.

Changing the trend of your sin nature from self-righteous moral degeneracy to immoral overt degeneracy or vice versa is definitely not a change for the better. In fact, sometimes it is a change for the worse.

The noun thelematos outlines the function of volition. Here it is the human volition as controlled by the Old Sin Nature.

You cannot do it is impossible to bring about change in your life by your own efforts.

No campaign of self-improvement apart from the grace of God can accomplish intrinsic and lasting good.

The appearance of good may be achieved by self, but underneath the appearance remains a wicked heart.

Do not allow yourself to fall prey to anti-grace sentiment about self.

The third possibility for change is ek thelematos andros ‘from the will of man’.

This phrase contrast the previous one by emphasizing dependence on others as a viable means for personal change.

Again, this may bring about a change in the sin nature trend; a change of outward appearance, but underneath remains the wicked heart.

Welding your own will to that of another may effectively stop a pattern of overt behavior, but it is not in any way the means to true change.

This phrase includes counseling and discipling in the bad sense of the word. Those things do not bring about true change any more than the sin nature can.

The only real catalyst for change is God, as explained by the Greek phrase alla ek Theou.

The conjunction alla indicates a very strong contrast with what has gone previously. What is to follow is the right and true way to the change of heart. It is the true post salvation change.

ek Theou tells us that true change only comes from God, and this is the set up for what is to follow in verse 14.

Get it through your heads that you can only bring about true change through the change of heart that is brought on by faith perception of the truth.

Faith perception is what makes Christianity distinct from all religions.

Faith perception is what makes Christianity distinct from all worldly means of false change.

Faith perception is what makes Christianity work, period.

John 1:14 now defines how the change was brought about: “And the Word became flesh and camped among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as a unique and only born one from the side of the Father, full of Grace and Truth.”

The verse begins with the conjunction kai which continues the train of thought from the previous verse.

The noun logos is next, and with the definite article ho it is translated “the word”. It is the subject of the sentence, and of course it is describing Christ.

The verb of the sentence is egeneto, which describes the beginning of the hypostatic union at the virgin birth. It is in the aorist tense, so it portrays one

moment of time in the past. It is translated, “became”.

sarx is the Greek word for flesh, and in this case it describes the physical human body, with no sin nature.

The conjunction *kai* shifts the thought to another fact about the incarnation. It is translated “and”.

The aorist verb *skenosen* depicts an action from the past as occurring in one moment of time. It describes the temporary dwelling in a tent. “Camped” is a good way to translate this.

The preposition *en* plus the locative of place is translated here “among us”.

Again the conjunction *kai* is used by John to shift to another fact about the incarnation, this time a more personal one.

The verb *etheasametha* is in the first person plural and so it reveals that John was an eyewitness to these events. It is in the aorist tense, and so it sums up the past action into one moment of time. The verb itself describes the act of witnessing an event with your own eyes. It is translated “we beheld” or “we eyewitnessed”.

10. The object witnessed was *te.n doxan auton.*, which is translated “His glory”.

This may be taken in the narrow sense of the transfiguration, or in the wider sense of His entire life, but we will go with the latter, as it seems to fit the context a little better.

Glory is a synonym for the essence, capabilities and attributes of God, as well as His actions toward mankind.

Glory here represents the reflection of the glory of the Father in the life of the Son.

This glory is further described with the phrase “*doxan hos monogenous para patros.*”

The comparative conjunction *hos* makes an exact comparison between the status described and the glory itself. This is translated “as”.

The status is *monogenes*, which contains the idea of “unique and only born”.

Completing the idea is the preposition *para* and the noun *patros*. The preposition indicates that the action proceeds from the very side of the person named, which in this instance is the Father.

The final description of the incarnation is *ple.re.s charitos kai ale.theias*.

ple.re.s describes a state of being completely full, and it is translated “full”.

The genitive of description of the noun *charitos* is translated “grace”.

The connective conjunction *kai* is translated “and”.

The noun *ale.theias* is in the genitive case, and translated “truth”.

This is the full explanation of our birth from God.

This verse progressively explains the statement in the previous verse about being born from God.

Verse 13 gave three ways in which the salvation birth is not accomplished, and then goes on to state that it instead comes from God.

The salvation birth is based on the following:

That the word became flesh. This defines the person through whom our salvation was accomplished.

That the word camped, or temporarily lived among us. Our salvation was accomplished while Christ was living on planet earth.

That the word was observed by other human beings, even the writer of this gospel.

That the life of the word was glory and this glory was related to the Father as the only born Son. Our salvation was accomplished by the Son of God.

The Son of God was full of grace and truth. Grace and truth are the opposites of the three things on the list in verse thirteen: violence, self reliance, and reliance on others.

If an unbeliever can use it or do it, it is not a part of God’s plan for salvation or the post salvation life.

Christ represents both our salvation and the secret to the post salvation life.

It all depends on Divine provision, and the key to that provision is the truth. You cannot possibly access divine provision without knowing the truth, and therefore the truth must be the first priority in the Christian life.

Just as you cannot become a believer without the gospel, so also you cannot reach maturity without the Bible.

Just as you cannot perceive the gospel without the ministry of the Spirit, so also you cannot perceive the truth without.

Just as you must believe in the gospel in order to be saved, so also you must believe the truth in order to reach maturity.

John 1:15 turns back to the testimony of John: “John testified concerning him and cried out saying, “This was he about whom I said ‘The one coming after me has attained rank above me, because He was (always) first with reference to me.’”

This is John’s statement of humility. It confirms from his own mouth what John the apostle has already stated in verses 6 through 8. At the time of his ministry John the Baptist knew exactly where he stood with reference to his second cousin, the Messiah.

The Accession of John the Baptist Introduction

Note the distinction: to this point John has pointed the way to Christ, and noted Christ’s superiority; here he completely accedes to Jesus, more than hinting to his disciples to give way and follow Christ.

For a few weeks after Christ’s return from the wilderness, John has continued to point the way to Christ. Since Christ returned, here is what happened:

- The priests and Levites came to John to inquire about Christ (John 1:19-28).
- John identified Christ as the Son of God (John 1:29-34).
- Christ called His first disciples (John 1:35-51).
- Christ performed His first miracle, at Cana, in Galilee (John 2:1-11).
- Christ stayed a few days at Capernaum with His family and His disciples (John 2:12).
- Christ cleansed the temple at the Passover (John 2:13-22).
- The people in Jerusalem responded positively to Christ’s miracles at the Passover (John 2:23-25).
- Nicodemus came to Christ at night and inquired about His person (John 3:1-21).

This places the time at around late Spring to early Summer of 27 AD. Christ is thirty years old.

Now Christ’s ministry has begun in earnest, and it is time for John to completely step aside. Christ’s appearance in the region provides a golden opportunity to do so.

By this time John has been on the scene for about a year and his ministry has gained great fame and popularity. In fact his message continued to have a following even decades after, and spread to far distant places even after his death.

Imagine the humility of this man. To find such popularity, and then give it all to Christ.

Discussion of John 3:22-36

John 3:22: “After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the Judean land and there He spent time and baptized with them.”

So Christ moves from Jerusalem to the Judean countryside, apparently somewhere near the river Jordan. The phrase *meta tauta* summarizes everything that had happened in Jerusalem at that first Passover.

John uses the Roman term Judea, so this includes not only the old Judah, but also a good deal of the old Northern kingdom, now called Samaria. The location of this verse can be anywhere from halfway between Galilee and the Dead Sea south along the Jordan River to the Dead Sea itself. They may have been only a few miles from John and his disciples at the time. At any rate, not more than forty miles, and probably much less than that.

In the Greek, when there are two verbs and only one object in a sentence, the object takes both verbs. That is the case with *DIATRIBO* and *BAPTIZO*. They each describe different actions taken by Christ, but they both take the same object, the disciples.

This object, the personal pronoun *auton* ‘them’, is modified by the preposition *META*.

META defines the relationship of subject and object, and modifies the action of the verb accordingly.

Christ did these actions in the company of the disciples; He ‘does’ these things with them. They do these things together, but since the verb is in the third person singular, it portrays Christ as the initiator of the action.

Christ ‘spent time’ with the disciples.

Since Christ produces the action of the verb, He is the initiator, while the disciples are the co-participants.

DIATRIBO means to ‘wear away’ or ‘rub away’. It describes the wearing of a path by foot traffic, or the wearing away of clothes from use. Since the preposition *DIA* compounds this verb, the picture

is of complete use or wear. Not just worn, but worn through.

After a while, the Greeks applied the concept of this verb to time. 'While away the hours', 'spend time'. It also applied to money 'spend', and others things that get spent, like physical energy.

It even came to exemplify academic effort. Our English word 'diatribe' is the direct descendant of this concept. The noun form of this verb could mean both 'pastime' and 'study'. The adjective always meant 'pedantic' as in teaching in such a way that wears on the student.

John 2:12 describes Christ and others staying at Capernaum. John employs the usual verb for such activity, *meno*.

John 3:22 is quite far enough away where the use of a synonym would not be required. In this verse John wanted to describe exactly how Christ spent the time with His disciples.

The time spent was a wearing time, a time of study.

Christ took this time to inculcate His disciples in the essentials of His kingdom. He baptized with His disciples.

Now we have a puzzle. Christ initiated this action; the Pharisees perceived that He was baptizing; but John makes it clear that it was not Christ Himself that was doing the actual baptism. And there is little doubt that this is baptism by water.

We know that Christ initiated this action because BAPTIZO is third person singular, and Christ is the subject. His disciples did this with Him, META AUTON.

We know the Pharisees' impression from John 4:1, "Jesus knew that the Pharisees heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John."

We know that part of this impression was mistaken from John 4:2, "Although Jesus Himself was not baptizing but His disciples were."

The conclusion is that the baptizing was Christ's idea, but the disciples carried it out.

This idea bore fruit in two areas:

The introduction to Christ's kingdom ministry continues. People are baptized, and from it are identified with the millennial kingdom. (doctrine of the Millennium, intercalation of the church age)

The disciples get a more intense form of training. Teaching always requires a more thorough understanding of the subject matter.

You must anticipate what your pupils want to know, and distinguish what they need to know. You must filter your subject matter accordingly, and thus you think about it.

You must sort out what is true and false concerning the subject matter.

You must put the subject matter into a teachable form, and be able to explain it in a manner that will satisfy the curiosity of your pupils.

You must fit the subject matter into the overall system, to give your pupils the broader picture.

So by instructing the disciples on how to introduce others to the kingdom, Christ better inculcates them into its precepts.

None the less, after this accession by John, water baptism never again enters the scene in Christ's ministry.

John 3:23, "Now also John was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there, and they were appearing and being baptized."

So in the time since Christ returned from the wilderness John has continued his ministry, pointing the way to Christ.

Aenon near Salim was a little north of halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.

The phrase 'John was also baptizing' tells us that the baptism of Christ's disciples was water baptism.

An interesting verb is PARAGINOMAI 'they were appearing'. It paints this picture: one moment they are nowhere to be seen, and the next they appear right at John's side. It tells us that John's ministry was going like hotcakes.

John 3:24: "For John had not yet been thrown into prison."

This event is not too far off, but we do not have the exact time. A little over a year later John the Baptist is in jail, Luke 7:1117. It does occur before Christ goes back to Galilee, according to Mark 1:14. This return is apparently just a few days off.

John's readers knew that the Baptist would go to prison and die there, and this verse explains that those events are still in the future.

Just as John preceded our Lord in ministry, so also in imprisonment and death.

Herod Antipas feared that John's ministry would bring about an armed revolt in Judea and Galilee.

This, and John's rebuke of Herod for marrying his brother's wife were the human viewpoint reasons. But perhaps there is something more than meets the eye here... It is obvious that it was God's plan for John's ministry to end.

John 3:25: "Then there arose an inquiry from the disciples of John with a Jew about purification."

So the disciples of John and a Jew got into an inquiry about purification. The word for inquiry portrays two or more people investigating a matter, all seeking the truth. It is literally, 'a seeking', or 'a quest'. It is interesting that these natural adversaries have joined together on a topic that would pit them as adversaries purifications. The preposition META reveals that these two have allied on this matter.

Purification would be an interesting subject, but it does not seem to line up well with their question, which is given in the next verse. What they actually ask about is Christ. Let's try to connect the two.

Purification fits well into the topic of baptism, for baptism could easily be perceived as a ritual of purification.

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance in preparation for the Messiah and His kingdom. Just like the other rituals of the Jewish system, it was a real act that taught Bible doctrine.

However, it was the Jewish trend to distort the teaching rituals into legalism. It was their contention that just doing the rituals themselves pleased God, regardless of what was in their hearts.

At some point the conversation must have shifted to a comparison of Christ and John.

It must have been interesting indeed for John and his disciples when Christ began to baptize.

Remember, John brought in this new ritual of baptism after the Jews had been doing the same things for 1400 years.

Remember also that John was the first true prophet of Israel in a few hundred years. He had a spectacular following because of his gift.

But John made it clear from the start that he was just showing the way to Christ, and that his baptism was intended for that same purpose.

Now Christ, the superior has set His disciples to baptizing, and not too far from where John's ministry was located.

They are in a quandary: what change does this bring to John's ministry?

John 3:26: "And they came to John and said to Him, 'Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, about whom you yourself have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.'"

Hey, these guys are out of fellowship about losing their ministry to Christ and His disciples.

Their concentration and focus is entirely on John, in the first part. "He who was with you..." "About whom you have testified..."

But then they notice that this ministry is tapering off and they do not like it. "He is baptizing [sneering tone], and all are coming to Him."

This is the wrong focus! Wrong attitude!

But something else. Christ has now begun His own ministry. Why is John still at work? Why has John not ceased now that Christ has begun? Perhaps this is John's one flaw. He did not know when to hang it up.

John 3:27: "John answered and said, 'No man can receive a single thing unless it has been given to him from heaven.'"

This is a hard line grace answer. The real man in question is Jesus Christ.

It reveals the unasked question of the disciple-Jew alliance: Why Christ and not John?

John tells them: All are going to Christ because it comes from heaven.

John uses two very strong grammatical constructions in order to make clear the absolute nature of grace.

The first is OUDE HEN, which I have translated 'a single thing'. OUDE is nothing, and HEN is the numeral one. Together with the phrase 'no man', they make a double negative, which is fine in the Greek, but confusing in the English. In the Greek one negative strengthens the other. In the English, one negative cancels the other. This construction is very strong and makes an absolute statement. John is hammering on this alliance.

The second is the perfect periphrastic participle of DIDOMI. This one shows that heaven is the ultimate source of all things. You receive not a single thing, unless it comes from heaven. It is one of the strongest ways to state a principle of doctrine.

Additionally John makes clear the subjects to whom this rule applies: mankind. He uses ANTHROPOS. Christ is a member of the human race, and so this principle certainly applies to Him.

Therefore, what Christ has in the people who are flocking to Him comes straight from heaven.

Remember, in verse 23, people were appearing out of nowhere to be baptized by John. Now they are all going to Jesus, according to verse 26. Insert millennium comment: Christ is here to found the millennial kingdom; John is in the way. Beware yourself in getting in the way of the kingdom of Christ. You should be a window on the kingdom of heaven, an open doorway.

John 3:28**: “You yourselves witnessed me saying,” I myself am not the Christ, but that I have been sent ahead of Him.“**

Again, John draws attention to Christ, and his relationship to Christ. Here he reprises his role as the waypaver, even for some of his disciples.

The emphasis here is interesting:

In claiming that he is not the Christ, John emphasizes himself with the intensive use of the personal PRONOUN EGO.

In claiming that he has been sent, John uses the perfect periphrastic construction. This again concentrates on John’s person.

John uses the preposition EMPROSTHEN to describe his relationship with Christ. He sees himself as going ahead of Christ to prepare the way.

The conclusion is that John says the right things, but that he has appearance of being self-centered. If John was doing the right thing at this time, this would be a marvelous statement; but since he is not, we may call it somewhat self-centered.

John has applied his mission in this way: he sees himself as the one who must prepare the way for every individual in Israel. That before anyone goes to Christ, they must go through him.

He sees a continuing role for himself in Christ’s kingdom. He is the screener, the waypaver, the man who prepares the hearts of all for Christ, even as Christ is on the scene.

But Christ, by setting His disciples to baptize, has communicated a very hard message to John that with the beginning of the Kingdom ministry, he is no longer needed.

Christ is there to be seen face to face; His ministry is in the open. Why should Israel go through a human being to see Him?

John 3:29: **“The who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, the one who stands and hears him rejoices with joy through the sound of bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine has been made full.”**

The bride at this point is Israel; the groom is Christ; the friend is John.

The friend is what we would call the best man. In the Jewish wedding, the friend would stand next to the bridegroom and hear his vows. At this he would rejoice, as any best man would.

John says:

That he does not have the prize at this wedding of all weddings: Christ does.

But that he still rejoices for Christ, and that the joy of hearing Christ’s voice has been made full at this time.

Again, though, there is hint of bitterness. John perhaps has indulged in self-pity here. Oh, he is not the bridegroom, and he does not get the bride, but at least he vicariously experiences the bridegroom’s joy. “Even though I do not get Christ’s joy, I am happy for him. My limited joy has been made complete.”

Why the negative assessment of John’s statement? Because of his actions. If John had ceased his ministry at the beginning of Christ’s ministry, then these statements could have been taken in the most positive light possible. Now because of John’s action, they have the appearance of tarnish and rust. There is a dark side to them.

John 3:30, **“It is necessary for that one to increase, but for me to diminish.”**

Note the two verbs that reflect the necessity.

The first is AUXANO, to grow. This verb described the growth of living things, of plants and trees, of children. It shows a gradual growth over a period of time.

The second is ELATTOO, to shrink. This too is a verb of gradual change. It describes the action of shrinking over time, of growth in reverse.

What John has done here is nothing less than put a spin on the events of the past few days. But let’s look again at the facts!

In verse 23, people are coming out of nowhere to be baptized by John.

In verse 26, they are all going to Christ.

This is not a gradual growth and diminishment! This is an all at once radical change.

But why does John put his spin on these events? It can only be because he wants to hold on to the following and the ministry that he thinks he has.

John sees his accession as gradual; what has already happened was immediate and absolute.

John uses a rather impersonal mode of reference to Jesus Christ. It is the far demonstrative pronoun, *ekeinon*.

In fact, in this entire discourse, John uses the word Christ only once, and never the word Jesus.

In verse 27, John says, “a man cannot receive a single thing”. The application is Jesus.

In verse 28, John says, “I myself am not the Christ.” But the real focus of the sentence is John, through his use of the intensive pronoun.

In verse 29, John employs a short parable, where Christ is the bridegroom, but Christ is never mentioned by name.

In verse 30, John uses the far demonstrative.

Jesus was John’s own cousin. They were family, and yet John the Baptist uses only titles and round-about ways to describe our Lord.

John uses emphatic, intensive, and self-centered modes of expression to describe himself.

Apparently, all the popularity and approbation had gone to John’s head. He would lose that same head about a year later.

What follows now is an injection of John the Apostle’s. He inserts his own discourse, and in a way it concentrates on what the Baptist has just said. In opposition to John’s self-centered words, the Apostle concentrates very much on the person and character of Christ.

John 3:31: “The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all.”

Now for John the Apostle’s editorial comment. He tells us in this verse that what the Baptist has just said is cosmic propaganda, and entirely wrong.

First is Christ. Christ comes from above, and is above all. He is above the selfishness and pettiness of the Baptist. He is above all human flaws.

Second is the Baptist. He is from the earth and he speaks the worldly point of view. Make no mistake. John paints the Baptist here as he is: worldly and trapped in the cosmic system. Spouting forth to his last few followers the propaganda that he hopes will keep them.

Third is Christ again, and you can see immediately John the Apostle’s desire to keep his gospel centered on Christ, and above all in its own right. John needed to get out the truth on the last days of the Baptist’s ministry, but did so in such a way that was objective and did not linger on the sad details of the demise of this great prophet of Israel.

Knowing what we now know now will make it easier to understand why in a few more days John will be thrown into prison, and his enigmatic message to Christ once there.

From here, the Apostle sticks to Christ.

John 3:32: “What He sees and hears this He testifies, and His testimony no one receives.”

Now this is Christ. The nearest antecedent to the third person masculine pronoun is the last sentence of verse 31, which is about Christ.

Nice. A description of the human faculties of sight and hearing, attributed to the one from above. Now we have the hypostatic union.

This verse tells us that from Christ we get just the facts. That Christ tells us like it truly is. It also describes the general response to this ministry of truth.

No one receives the truth. It is the old aphorism, the truth hurts. The truth often demands that we surrender our pride, and that is the most painful thing. Only true humility will respond to the truth in the right way. But truth is the kind of ministry that Christ has undertaken.

Christ testifies what He sees and hears. This also refers to His method of faith perception. He only has available for application what He has gained through faith perception. That very same thing is what we have. This is a great testimony to kenosis.

John 3:33, “The one who receives His testimony sealed that God is Truth.”

Positive believers receive another kind of sealing. This one they produce by themselves. It is the sealing of the notion that God is truth.

God is the very personification of the truth, and when someone believes in Christ, they confirm that notion in their hearts.

The sealing is a confirmation that what has been said by Christ is true.

Verse 34 will explain this idea a bit more.

John 3:34, **“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He did not give the Spirit from measure.”**

This jumps back to Christ in order to explain this new believer produced sealing in the previous verse.

Christ speaks the words of God.

God gave the Spirit without measure to Christ, so that Christ could speak God’s Words.

The term John uses for words is *remata*. This can mean the actual words that come out of a person’s mouth, or it can mean the principles of a person’s life. Here I think it covers both. Christ spoke the very words of God (albeit in translation), and communicated the important principles that come from Him.

This Christ did from the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, in perception and application of the truth.

(faith perception of the truth)

John 3:35, **“The Father loves the Son and has given Him all things into His hand.”**

This a direct reference to Daniel 7:1314.

John 3:36, **“The one who believes unto the Son has eternal life; the one who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”**

Again this has to do with imputations, and is a restatement of verse 17.

For the sake of clarity understand that obeying the Son means believing in Him, and does not make reference to post salvation obedience.

This verse does not undermine eternal security.

Christ on John the Baptist Matthew 11:2-19

Luke 7:18-35

The report and the response.

The report: “And his disciples reported to John in prison about all these things.”

John had been imprisoned for about a year; he had been imprisoned the previous summer by Herod the Tetrarch, Antipas.

Herod the Tetrarch had thrown John in prison because John had criticized him for marrying his brother’s wife Herodias.

- (1) Herod the Great was his father, and he in many ways personified the trouble in Israel at the time of Christ.
- (2) For a long time, hundreds of years, the Jews had lived under the control of one nation or another, and they longed to be truly autonomous.
- (3) It seemed like whatever empire had the upper hand in history would rule them.
 - (a) If it wasn’t the Babylonians, then it was the Persians, when the Persians took over.
 - (b) If it wasn’t the Persians, it was the Greeks, when Alexander came rumbling through the ancient near east.
 - (c) If it wasn’t Alexander, it was the Romans, after the death of Alexander and the disintegration of his empire.
- (4) They still understood that they were a holy people, set apart for God.
 - (a) They always remembered that, if nothing else.
 - (b) They rankled under the rule of Rome, and it especially rubbed them wrong that Herod, the so-called Herod the Great had power over them.
- (5) He was worse than a Gentile; he was a half-Jewish Idumaeon, a descendant of Esau, a wild desert-dwelling type. The Jews considered them with no small amount of prejudice.
- (6) To make matters worse, Herod was hardly a model human being. He has been called a monster - one who was crafty and cruel, jealous and vain and always quick to seek revenge when wronged.
 - (a) He came to the throne over the Roman province of Judea through cunning and manipulation of Marc Antony.
 - (b) He had nine or ten wives. Even the historians lost count after a while.

- (c) On the smallest of suspicion he had even his favorite wife, Mariamne, put to death, along with her sons Alexander and Aristobulus.
 - (d) Even while on his own deathbed, just days before he died he had his own son, his flesh and blood Antipater put to death.
 - (e) Caesar Augustus was heard to say, "It is better to be Herod's hog than his own son!"
 - (f) Again at his deathbed he ordered all the principle men in Israel to be rounded up and placed in the local stadium, where they could be surrounded by his soldiers and then slain when he died. The reason: so that there would be great mourning at his death. His sister relented and refused the execution.
 - (g) To be ruled by someone who was so obviously inferior! Who was so immoral and cruel!
- (7) It must have been difficult to read the Scriptures, and to know that their destiny was so great, and yet have the reality so different.
- (a) Understand, however, that this was Divine Judgement on the nation of Israel; that they had neglected their relationship with God, and that the situation was appropriate to their spiritual state.
 - (b) In this case the outward circumstances reflected accurately the inward condition: slavery.
 - (c) It is no wonder, then, there was a great fascination in the nation of Israel with the prophecies about the Messiah.
- The one who would come and re-establish the greatness of their kingdom and their people.
 - A man who would rise up and smite their enemies and make them a free people once again.
 - From time to time a fairly great and famous man would rise up, and there would be some excitement about the possibility of his being the Messiah.
 - Of course, things would quiet down when he turned out to be quite human, and the slavery of Israel droned on and on.
 - After a time there was even a certain amount of cynicism about the whole deal.
 - The same phenomenon exists today with the fascination about the end times and the return of Christ.
- (8) Herod tried bribing the Jews, so that they would like him, and he could view himself as a successful ruler.
- (a) Julius Caesar had given Herod a fantastic and truly royal inaugural celebration back in 37 BC, when Herod took the throne.
 - (b) He always longed for that past glory, when in fact the traditional Roman warning of "sic transit gloria mundi" applied to him more than any other.
 - (c) The bribes came in the form of a building program that was the very rival of Solomon's.
- He built monuments and buildings in the Holy Land, and even rebuilt their temple in magnificent fashion, topping it with a golden dome.
 - The rebuilding of the Temple was much like the building of the Winchester Mystery House in San Jose, California.
 - More was added every year. A higher roof here, an annex there - all very magnificent.
 - When Herod died, his relatives took over the folly and the never-ending program continued until it was finally finished in 66 AD, some 87 years after it was begun.
 - It is one of the great ironies of history that it was burned down just four years later when Jerusalem was destroyed.
 - Other buildings and monuments were undertaken.
 - A temple, a forum, and a theatre at Samaria.
 - A great Greco-Roman capital, a temple, and port at Caesarea.
 - The port was an engineering marvel that even today is remarked upon by the archaeologists who work at the site.
 - Luxurious palaces and fortified retreats were built at Masada, Jerusalem, Jericho, and Herodium, which was near Bethlehem.
 - In Jerusalem he had baths, a theatre, and a Hippodrome constructed.

· He also promoted Greek and Roman games so that the people might be entertained.

- (d) All of these things struck a sour note - as any bribe to a slave will.

· The people really did not want these things. They wanted to be autonomous and free.

· But in order to be truly free, any people must know God, and that was exactly the problem in Israel.

Herod had ten wives and seven sons. Four of those seven would play a role in the New Testament. All of the wives wanted their sons to be Herod's successor. This was a complication.

- (1) His first son Antipater was through his first wife Doris.
- (2) Herod repudiated her and Antipater when he married Mariamne I, the granddaughter of the famous Hyrcanus. This was in 37 BC Alexander and Aristobulus were born by her.
- (3) In 24 BC Herod married Mariamne II, by whom he had Herod Philip.
- (4) Just a year later, he married his fourth wife, Malthace, a Samaritan by whom he had Archelaus and Antipas.
- (5) And another two years after that, he married wife #5, Cleopatra of Jerusalem, by whom he had Philip the Tetrarch.
- (6) The other five wives bore him no sons, and only three are mentioned by name, Pallas, Phaedra, and Elpis. He also had daughters.

Herod's two favorite sons were those by Mariamne I, Alexander and Aristobulus.

- (1) Make note: Aristobulus married his cousin, Bernice.
- (2) Make note: This union produced a daughter, Herodias.

Herod had a sister, Salome, who hated these two favorite sons, even though her daughter Bernice was married to Aristobulus.

- (1) She had designs for her own son, a certain Antipater, to ascend to the throne of Herod. He is not to be confused with Antipater, Herod's first son by Doris.
- (2) Salome maligned Mariamne I before Herod, and Herod believed her and had Mariamne I killed.
- (3) The two sons were naturally indignant, and threatened to bring charges before Caesar that would cause him to lose his throne.
- (4) And as a consequence Herod changed his will so that Antipater by Doris was named the sole heir to the throne. He then sent Antipater to the emperor to have the will ratified.
- (5) Realizing that being gone from Herod's presence was a dangerous thing, Antipater wrote slanderous letter against Alexander and Aristobulus from Rome.
- (6) As a result of this slander, Herod had these two tried before Caesar Augustus in 12 BC Amazingly, the court system worked, and they were found not guilty on all counts, and more than that, they were reconciled to their father, and to Antipater as well.
- (7) Herod changed his will to name all three sons equally.
- (8) But Salome, Herod's sister, was not finished yet. Together with brother Pheroras and son Antipater, the slander began again against the two sons of Mariamne I.
 - (a) This time they obtained the testimony of one friend of Alexander's, and on the basis of a single eyewitness they convinced Herod that the two were plotting Herod's death and planning to lay claim to the throne before Rome.
 - (b) Alexander was cast into prison, but thanks to Alexander's father-in-law, he was set free and reconciled to Herod.

In the next round, Antipater convinced his friend Eurycles from Sparta to play Alexander and Aristobulus against Herod. They fell for it, and were caught in the plotting phase.

- (1) Herod became so suspicious that he once again imprisoned the brothers, and accused them of treason.

- (2) Herod sent to Rome seeking the Emperor's advice regarding his sons, and Augustus gave Herod full authority to deal with his sons as he wished, but advised to him to conduct a Roman trial outside of his own territory. He feared that without a change of venue there would be a rebellion.
- (3) The trial was conducted in Berytus (Beirut), and a guilty verdict was passed. The two sons Alexander and Aristobulus were executed by strangulation in 7 BC
- (4) Herod's fourth will now named Antipater by Doris his sole successor.

But Antipater was an impatient man...

- (1) He held secret conferences with Herod's brother Pheroras. They intended to kill the old man.
- (2) Salome, Herod's sister, got wind of these meetings and spilled the beans to Herod.
- (3) Thus Herod's relationship with his sole named heir became somewhat strained.
- (4) Antipater then arranged to have emperor Augustus summon him to Rome, with the excuse that the new will needed ratification. He was then conveniently out of town.
- (5) Pheroras, Herod's brother and Antipater's uncle died. Herod conducted an investigation, and discovered that not only did Pheroras die of poison, but also that same poison had been intended for him.
- (6) Herod recalled Antipater under false pretenses, and he thus returned without suspicion. He was thrown into prison, tried the next day and found guilty. It took some time, however to gain permission to execute Antipater, but eventually it was done.
- (7) And so Herod had another will drawn up. Since his two oldest living sons had been turned against him by Antipater, that is, Herod Philip by Mariamne II and Archelaus by Malthace, he excluded them from will #6. Everything now went to Antipas by Malthace.

Herod was by now old and feeble and full of disease. Nothing could ease his discomfort, soul and body.

It was around this time that Christ was born, and everyone was talking about the new-born true king of the Jews. Herod's paranoia was at an all-time high, and so he was motivated to kill all those children in Bethlehem.

And at the same time, two rabbis incited the people to tear down the Roman eagle from the temple gate. The offenders were seized and burned alive.

And just then he made his final will, naming Archelaus of Malthace as king, Antipas of Malthace as Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, and their half-brother Philip of Cleopatra of Jerusalem as the Tetrarch of Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Batanea, and Paneas.

But of course the last will was disputed, because it was made just five days before Herod's death, and it needed the emperor's ratification.

- (1) Archelaus was the de facto ruler during this time. During the next Passover, a crowd gathered before Archelaus and began to demand retribution for the deaths of those killed by his father during the eagle incident.
- (2) The crowd turned ugly when Archelaus refused this retribution, and so he ordered the troops in. Three thousand people were killed. Not a good start.
- (3) Immediately after this, Archelaus and Antipas went to Rome together, each to claim before the emperor the will which benefited himself. Archelaus said the last will always counts, while Antipas said the last will was not made by a mentally well Herod. It must have been an interesting boat ride. Philip was left behind to manage matters.
- (4) While these were in Rome, another riot broke out during Pentecost, and this went on for about two months and many more deaths.
- (5) The Jews therefore sent a delegation to Rome, pleading for their lives and their autonomy.
- (6) Philip got nervous about everyone being in Rome, so he went too.
- (7) Augustus, thoroughly tired by the whole mess by now, issued a compromise.
 - (a) Archelaus was made ruler over Idumea, Judea, and Samaria with the special title of Ethnarch. He was promised kingship if he ruled well.

- (b) Antipas was made tetrarch over Galilee and Perea.
- (c) And Philip was given Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Batanea, and Paneas as tetrarch. (See map)

Archelaus reign as ethnarch was characterized by brutality and tyranny, even though like his father he tried to bribe the people by building things.

- (1) In AD 6 the Jews and Samaritans joined together in a delegation to Rome, where they complained to the emperor. Antipas and Philip the Tetrarch also went because they felt Archelaus had neglected their territories.
- (2) Archelaus was then deposed and exiled to the south of France.
- (3) Archelaus territory then became an imperial province under direct Roman rule.

Antipas was the ruler over Galilee, the central area of most of Christ's ministry.

- (1) He first undertook a rebuilding program to fix the destruction of the revolt of 4 BC. Sepphoris was the largest city of Galilee. It was rebuilt, and since it was just 4 miles from Nazareth it is likely that Joseph, a carpenter, worked on the project.
- (2) Tiberias was a new city founded under his building program. But while they were building, the builders struck on the site of an old cemetery, and thus the whole area became unclean to the Jews. He therefore enticed people there by offering free homes and lands and tax exemption for the first few years.
- (3) Antipas married the daughter of the Nabatean king Aretas IV, an Arab. This added to Antipas' realm, and to Caesar Augustus' tax base.
- (4) In AD 28 or 29, Antipas decided to go to Rome, and on the way to visit his half-brother Herod Philip, who lived down on the sea-coast.
- (5) Now Herod Philip had married his brother Aristobulus' daughter, whose name was Herodias. You remember her. Well... Herodias was a very beautiful woman, and Antipas fell in love with her; his own niece and sister-in-law.

- (6) Now Herodias was a typical scheming member of the Herod family, and she secretly agreed to divorce Herod Philip and marry Antipas, provided that he divorce the daughter of Aretas IV.
- (7) Somehow, Antipas' first wife discovered the plan, and fled to her father. Aretas took the whole deal as an insult, and a few years later attacked and defeated Antipas in a battle.

But John the Baptist took offence at this incestual marriage, and let off steam about it. This is why he was thrown into prison - Matthew 14:3.

Later Herodias would connive to have John killed as retribution for stirring up the people against her behavior - Matthew 14:1-12.

Antipas was greatly fascinated with the ministry of Christ, and longed to see His miracles.

- (1) And when Pilate had custody of Christ and understood our Lord to be a citizen of Galilee, he sent him to Antipas, for it was under his jurisdiction. Herod Antipas was there for the feast of the Passover.
- (2) Luke 23:8-12 records what happened. "(8) Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. (9) And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. (10) And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. (11) And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. (12) Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other."
- (3) Antipas identified himself with the Jews by treating their enemy as his enemy also. He may also have been outraged that Christ gave him no show.

But John's disciples kept him informed with all the happenings on the outside, and especially the happenings in the life of Jesus.

B. John's response is cold: "And summoning some two of his disciples John sent to the Lord, saying, 'Are you the coming one or do we expect another?'"

1. It is cold because he hears all these great things about Christ, and yet he does not see Christ as the Messiah.
 2. And why is that? How could you deny Christ as the Messiah when you hear all of these things about him?
 3. It had to do with personal circumstances. John was in prison, put there by his enemy and the enemy of Israel. That in John's mind Christ had done nothing to free him (which was the law of volitional responsibility), nor to free his people from the Herodian tyranny was enough to deny Jesus as the Messiah.
 4. This is the classic cosmic rationale.
 - a. John was suffering because of his own stubborn efforts in clinging too long to his ministry, and his shift of focus from the Pharisees to the Herodians.
 - b. But John refused to see that in his state of spiritual blindness, and so he shifted the blame to Jesus.
 - c. He concluded that Jesus could not be the Messiah, because He had not freed him, when that was so obviously what any Messiah should do.
 - d. Suddenly God was not God because John had not gotten his way. And because of his spiritual malfunction, John had become like his worst enemies, the Pharisees.
 5. John must indeed have been suffering from spiritual blindness.
- II. Christ's Reply to John. "And after they appeared beside Him the men said, 'John the Baptist sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the coming one or do we expect another?'' In that hour He healed many from illness and disease and evil spirits and to many blind He freely gave to see. And after formulating an answer, He said to them, 'After you arrive proclaim to John what you saw and heard; blind men see again, lame men walk, lepers are cleansed and deaf men hear, dead men are raised, poor men are evangelized. And blessed is anyone who does not stumble over Me.'
- A. Now John had heard of the miracles, but not seen them.
1. Remember, John has never seen the miracles of Jesus Christ, other than the approving proclamation and the dove at Christ's baptism.
 2. And that incident did not contain a miracle under Christ's initiative, but came direct from the Father.
- B. And Christ performed many of the miracles right before John's disciples, so that they could validate the occurrences back to John personally. They had witnessed the entire thing, and the eyewitness is by far the most effective witness of all.
1. By seeing it with their own eyes, the disciples of John could move away from the self-testimony of Christ to their testimony.
 2. This harkens back to the testimony of Andrew for Peter. John 1:35ff: "Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!' And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and said to them, 'What do you seek?' And they said to Him, 'Rabbi [which translated means Teacher], where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come, and you will see.' They came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' [which translated means Christ]. He brought him to Jesus."
 3. But now this places a requirement on your own witnessing life within this principle. You have the requirement to be an eyewitness to the gospel from your own life.
 - a. The gospel is never going to sound genuine if you do not have direct experience with the source.
 - b. Your communication of the plan of God will not hit home without your experience in its execution.
 4. As a result, Christ does John a great favor here; He gives to him the best possible chance of recovery through these acts.

5. Christ gives an indication that this is a grace ministry with the phrase, “and to many blind He freely gave to see.” (Luke 7:21).
 - a. The verb ECHARISATO is in the aorist indicative. It summarizes a simple past action.
 - b. It describes giving within the grace framework.
 - c. This verb extends over all the activities described herein. All of these things were freely given.
6. The messengers are commanded by Christ to give proclamation to John. This is not simply passing along a message; it is APAGGEILATE. This is a command from Christ, to be carried out when these messengers arrive at John’s prison cell. A proclamation is stronger than a message, and concentrates with a stronger claim of integrity toward truth.
7. The final phrase is intriguing. “And blessed is anyone who does not stumble over Me.”
 - a. The aorist passive subjunctive of SKANDALIZO does the following:
 - (1) It describes an action without reference to time. That is, the action could occur at any time; it is open-ended.
 - (2) It describes potential action, performed by any human being alive at the time of Christ.
 - (3) It describes action that acts on the subject ‘anyone’. It is more literally ‘stumbled’ The idea is that someone is stumbled by something outside of Christ - that there is no reason to stumble over Christ, but because of the words of others there is a choice to stumble
 - b. People only chose to stumble over Christ because of what others were saying, and this remains true today. This is the purpose of the propaganda branch of the cosmic system.

Christ’s Teaching to the Crowd on the Baptist

“And after the messengers of John left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, ‘What did you go

out into the desert to witness? A reed stirred by the wind? Really, what did you go out to see? A man wearing white clothes? Behold those in glorious clothing and possessing luxury are in the palace.”

So now Christ has the opportunity to really set the record straight about John the Baptist, and to let the world know that the great one has failed. And he does not.

Christ’s response is to the crowd. Many of them had no doubt shaken their heads in wonder at the demise of such a great man. For if this is obvious to us, it would have been obvious to them.

And Christ wants to make very sure that the crowds do not enter into judgment, knowing what they know about John.

(1) Because judgment is this:

(a) Judgment is the mental conclusion that someone is guilty before the evidence and witnesses are gathered. This can occur in or out of the courtroom, and applies even if you are an eyewitness to the act.

· Ultimately, the right to judge is reserved for our Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge all church age believers at the judgement seat of Christ.

· Many times, people will judge because they fear they will not be vindicated. When you have confidence in the justice of God, then this fear will be removed.

· Jesus Christ will be perfectly fair at the judgment seat. No detail will escape His attention.

· Jesus Christ is the only person who is perfectly qualified to judge the human race.

- He died for those sins.

- He too lived a human life, and was tempted far beyond what we will ever encounter.

· When we overstep the boundaries of our legitimate right to judge, then we presume to take the place of Jesus Christ. James 4:12, “There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?”

(b) Grudge judgement is the failure to forgive the perpetrator of a sin, when that sin has been

judged on the cross. This category of judgment also comes into play when someone assumes that God cannot forgive a sin or complex of sins.

- (c) Lifestyle judgment is when one considers his lifestyle as superior to another, when sin is not an issue.
- (d) Gossip is the verbalization of any category of judgment to parties that are not fundamental to the case. The intent is to damage the reputation of one who may be guilty, but whose guilt has not been established by proper evidentiary procedures. This applies to ANY sin.

And so Christ asks them a series of rhetorical questions.

- (1) The base question is this: ‘What did you go out into the desert to witness?’
 - (a) With the language of this question, Christ paints a graphic picture of people rushing out to the wilderness to eyewitness something spectacular.
 - (b) In other words, He says this: ‘For a bunch of people who are scowling right now at John the Baptist, you sure were in a big hurry to go see him during the prime of his ministry.’
 - (c) The verb THEASASTHAI means to ‘behold’ or ‘witness’ something spectacular or completely out of the ordinary.
 - (d) The fact that so many people left their everyday lives and went clear out to the desert to see John shows how very earnest they were about the whole deal.
 - (e) The desert was a journey of several days, and would have been the equivalent of a drive of a thousand miles or even more.
- (2) Christ then employs a facetious proposition with this question: ‘A reed being shaken by the wind?’
 - (a) In the desert there are millions of these reeds - and the wind is always blowing.
 - (b) So it’s kind of like: did you go out into the desert to witness something completely commonplace? I don’t think so.

- (c) But right now you are acting like John is completely commonplace.
- (3) And a second proposition follows with a repetition of the base question: ‘Really, what did you go out to witness?’
 - (a) The adversative conjunction ALLA works as a focusing element here, placing the attention of the crowd on the second statement. It should be translated ‘really.’
 - (b) And the facetious question is: ‘a man dressed in white?’

· Christ actually answers this one for the crowd. ‘Behold those in glorious clothing and possessing luxury are in the palace.’

· Because there is no chance in the world that someone would find someone dressed in such a fine way out in the wilderness. The notion is utterly ridiculous. In fact, John was dressed in rough clothing, fit for his life there, as they all would remember - Matthew 3:4.

- (c) So Christ employs strong and biting rhetoric to point out that their original motive for going to all that trouble to see John.
- (4) Because they had gone out to see something really great, something that had not been seen in Israel in hundreds of years.

“But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes I say to you, and more than a prophet. He is the one about whom it has been written, ‘Behold I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ Truly I say to you, among those born of women, no one is greater.”

In fact, the crowds went out to see a prophet. They went out to see the first prophet in Israel in more than 450 years. The first prophet since Malachi’s ministry around 435 BC

And not only this, but he was the greatest prophet of Israel, because he was the one to introduce the Messiah personally to the world.

Christ quotes Malachi 3:1 for two reasons. First to make a connection between the last two prophets of Israel; second to identify John’s ministry clearly before this crowd.

And by doing this, Christ makes His own identity even more clear.

John had the most sacred duty of all the prophets of Israel, and it is clear that he performed his duty in a most excellent manner.

Well, let's see; among those prophets born of women - let's see - that would be ALL PROPHETS! John is the greatest.

John is the greatest prophet of his time, and really the greatest man of his time.

He is not to be scowled at; and certainly not to be judged, for Christ has rendered all the judgment that is going to happen before the judgment seat occurs.

A comparison of John with those in the coming dispensation: "But the least in the kingdom of God is greater than him. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens suffers violence and violent men capture it. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John; and if you want to listen, he himself is Elijah, the one who is about to arrive."

- (1) The tribulation is a much tougher dispensation, because of the evil ruling the earth unswayed by good.
- (2) Therefore God compensates believers in that dispensation with greater grace.
- (3) And because of the difficulty of their mission, there is also greater reward.

Christ transitions to His own dispensation now, so that the crowd might know their own spiritual standing, and live up to it.

For maligning a great figure, even a fallen great figure, is not living up to the standards of the kingdom.

- (1) Matthew 5:21-24, "21 You heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You will not commit murder': and, 'whoever murders, will be guilty before the court.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'Raka' will be guilty before the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, 'Fool' will be guilty unto the Gehenna of the Fire. 23 Therefore if you are presenting your gift upon the altar and there remember that your

brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go first to be reconciled with your brother, and then after coming back present your gift."

- (2) Christ set this standard during the Sermon on the Mount, and it is the extension of the Law in His dispensation.
- (3) The extension of the Law was because of the greatness of Christ's rule.
- (4) Principle: Strictness should always be a measure of the people's true capacity to live up to the standard.
- (5) Application: People in the millennium will have a fantastically high standard of behavior, but this is only because through Christ's direct rule they will have the capacity to live up to it.
- (6) Remember that this is a standard of purity that extends to the mouth and the soul.
- (7) In this dispensation we have standards that mainly apply to overt action; the soul remains unregulated by the establishment.
- (8) In the millennium, divine establishment will extend to matters of the soul.

Principle: when anyone falls from the grace status of the plan of God, when anyone does this in any dispensation, it is best to teach the principle of doctrine related to the point of his fall.

- (1) We have done a study on the fall of John the Baptist, and we have seen in some detail why this man fell from grace. Scripture has done this so that we might see the full picture.
- (2) But Christ teaches the doctrine without applying it directly to John the Baptist, displaying an absence of judgment in His procedure while among men.
- (3) Even Christ would refrain from judgment until His proper time at the judgment seat. This was a part of His kenosis, the limiting of His divine nature during the incarnation.
- (4) So you teach or tell the point of doctrine related to the point of a man's fall without applying it to him directly.
- (5) To illustrate this, examine closely what Christ has done with John.
 - (a) He is the greatest man of his dispensation.

- (b) The least in Christ's dispensation is greater than him.
- (6) Now apply this to John's downfall:
 - (a) The nature of Christ's teaching would apply to anyone who acted like John and wanted to cling to the dispensation of Israel.
 - (b) But it would only apply if it was true to John, and Christ refuses to make that judgment.
- (7) There are instances where establishment authority must have its say.
 - (a) Each establishment realm of authority must have its say if it is proper.
 - (b) The criminal realm must have its say if a crime has been committed.
 - (c) The church realm must have its say if one of its leaders has violated the provisions of 1 Timothy 3.
 - (d) In all other legitimate realms there may be reason for discipline.
- (8) In all such cases, there must exist a proper system of jurisprudence, based on biblical principles.

Then Christ summarizes the time of His ministry and even a little before:

- (1) That from the days of John the Baptist until the present time just after the sermon on the mount the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men capture it.
- (2) The verb BIAZETAI is the present passive indicative. It describes the subject (the kingdom of heaven) as receiving the action, and it means to receive or suffer violence.
- (3) So this is Christ's mid-term grading of the people of Israel. The kingdom that He has offered is suffering violence.
- (4) We need only remember John 5:17-18, "But He answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.' For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

- (a) The two verbs translated "working" are both the same, ERGAZOMAI. They are the present middle indicatives, indicating ongoing, non-stop work to the indefinite future.
- (b) The purpose of these verbs is to answer the assertion that we rest because God rested. The essence of the Sabbath is not the cessation of work, but concentration on God.
- (c) But Christ's works and God's works should be the objects of concentration, and they certainly are not a violation of the Moses' Sabbath.
- (d) Christ uses the personal pronoun EGO in order to emphasize His own work - not in contrast to that of the Father's, but in concert.
- (e) So two things here would get the attention of the Pharisees:
 - That Christ called God His Father.
 - That Christ considered His work equivalent with that of the Father's.
- (f) As a result, the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him.
 - The more bold Christ became, the more the Jews wanted to kill Him; the more that Christ revealed about the plan of God in Him, the more the Jews wanted to kill Him; the more that Christ set Himself up as a substituted for them, the more the Jews wanted to kill Him.
 - So this was not only persecution, but deadly persecution.
- (g) Even two years before the death of Christ, the conspiracy to kill Him gained great strength.
- (h) Christ spoke the truth - He is a part of the trinity. God is three persons in one Godhead.
 - The first person of the Trinity is God the Father. The second person of the Trinity is God the Son. The third person of the Trinity is God the Holy Spirit.
 - The three persons of the trinity possess identical essence in one being.
 - This divine being has three distinct persons which are autonomous from one another in soul function.

· This distinction in persons is more than just one God showing different facets or modes of His one person.

And violent men try to capture this kingdom.

- (1) Now here is a worthy axiom: that every institution of God is under assault from the enemy.
- (2) That every good thing of God is constantly under attempt to capture by those who wish to turn it for their own ends.
- (3) BIASTAI is violent men; the plural noun form of BIAZO.
- (4) And these violent men engage themselves in HARPAZOUSIN. This verb means to seize or capture something by force. But it describes this action as having a purpose. It is robbery or kidnapping, but never to destroy the person or object taken!
- (5) So there are those who are trying to take the kingdom of heaven by force, to turn it to their own ends.
- (6) There are therefore two categories of attacks against the kingdom of heaven, and these tend to transfer to every dispensation.

Christ concludes with an assessment of the response of Israel to His ministry and John's. 'Therefore to whom will I compare the men of this generation and to whom are they like? They are like children who are sitting in the market-place and calling out to one another who say, 'We played the flute for you and you did not dance, we sang a dirge and you did not weep.'

So imagine children playing instruments in a marketplace; really poor music coming from them in flute and voice.

There is no funeral there, nor any celebration, so the demands of the children are inappropriate.

The music is bad and the occasion inappropriate. And then they become indignant over the situation because there is no response from the crowd.

He goes on to explain His illustration: For John the Baptist came not eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners. And wisdom is justified by all her children.'"

- (1) This points out the utter hypocrisy of those who were negative to the truth.
- (2) And a principle: that hypocrites are negative to any form of behavior on the part of those who have true freedom.
- (3) Obedience to the law of God creates individual liberty. People who are negative to the law of God are haters of freedom.
- (4) So when John the Baptist lived an ascetic life in the wilderness, the hypocrites slandered him, saying that he had a demon.
- (5) And when Christ does just the opposite, eating and drinking (alcohol), criticism comes His way. The slanderers go to work, and call him a glutton, drunk, and friend of evil men.
- (6) The final statement is about the fruit of wisdom. Wisdom is justified by what it produces. The opposite is also true: folly is condemned by all her children.
 - (a) A man is condemned by his children, if they are wrong.
 - (b) 1 Timothy 3:4-5, "(4) He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (5) (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how ill he take care of the church of God?)"
 - (c) And Christ is saying here that if you wonder about those who are negative to doctrine, then simply examine their fruit.
 - (d) Is irrational hypocrisy the fruit of wisdom?

Herod and John the Baptist

Matthew 14:1-2

"(1) During that time Herod the Tetrarch heard the news of Jesus, (2) and said to his servants, 'This is John the Baptist; He was raised from the dead and for this reason the miracles are working in him.'"

Mark 6:14-16

And king Herod heard [the news of Jesus], for His name became perspicuous, and they were saying, 'John the Baptist is risen from death and 'for this reason the miracles are working in Him.' (15) But others were saying, He is Elijah;' and others were

saying ‘He is a prophet like one of the [old-time] prophets. (16) But Herod, after hearing [these things] was saying, ‘The one whom I beheaded, John, he is risen.’”

Luke 9:7-9:

“(7) Now Herod the Tetrarch heard all the happenings and he was going through difficulty because the things said by some that John was raised from the dead, (8) and by some that Elijah had appeared, and others that one of the prophets of old had risen again. (9) And Herod said, ‘I personally beheaded John; but who is this man concerning whom I am hearing such things?’ And he kept on seeking to see Him.”

Exposition.

An identification and biography of Herod the Tetrarch.

This is the son of Herod the Great, Herod Antipas. He was the Tetrarch over Galilee and Perea, where the majority of the events of Christ’s life took place.

Herod the Great had ten wives and seven sons. Four of those seven would play a role in the New Testament. All of the wives wanted their sons to be Herod’s successor. This was a complication.

His first son Antipater was through his first wife Doris.

Herod repudiated her and Antipater when he married Mariamne I, the granddaughter of the famous Hyrcanus. This was in 37 BC Alexander and Aristobulus were born by her.

In 24 BC Herod married Mariamne II, by whom he had Herod Philip.

Just a year later, he married his fourth wife, Malthace, a Samaritan by whom he had Archelaus and Antipas.

And another two years after that, he married wife #5, Cleopatra of Jerusalem, by whom he had Philip the Tetrarch.

The other five wives bore him no sons, and only three are mentioned by name, Pallas, Phaedra, and Elpis. He also had daughters.

Herod’s two favorite sons were those by Mariamne I, Alexander and Aristobulus.

Make note: Aristobulus married his cousin, Bernice.

Make note: This union produced a daughter, Herodias.

Herod had a sister, Salome, who hated these two favorite sons, even though her daughter Bernice was married to Aristobulus.

- (1) She had designs for her own son, a certain Antipater, to ascend to the throne of Herod. He is not to be confused with Antipater, Herod’s first son by Doris.
- (2) Salome maligned Mariamne I before Herod, and Herod believed her and had Mariamne I killed.
- (3) The two sons were naturally indignant, and threatened to bring charges before Caesar that would cause him to lose his throne.
- (4) And as a consequence Herod changed his will so that Antipater by Doris was named the sole heir to the throne. He then sent Antipater to the emperor to have the will ratified.
- (5) Realizing that being gone from Herod’s presence was a dangerous thing, Antipater wrote slanderous letter against Alexander and Aristobulus from Rome.
- (6) As a result of this slander, Herod had these two tried before Caesar Augustus in 12 BC. Amazingly, the court system worked, and they were found not guilty on all counts, and more than that, they were reconciled to their father, and to Antipater as well.
- (7) Herod changed his will to name all three sons equally.
- (8) But Salome, Herod’s sister, was not finished yet. Together with brother Pheroras and son Antipater, the slander began again against the two sons of Mariamne I.
 - (a) This time they obtained the testimony of one friend of Alexander’s, and on the basis of a single eyewitness they convinced Herod that the two were plotting Herod’s death and planning to lay claim to the throne before Rome.
 - (b) Alexander was cast into prison, but thanks to Alexander’s father-in-law, he was set free and reconciled to Herod.

In the next round, Antipater convinced his friend Eurycles from Sparta to play Alexander and Aristobulus against Herod. They fell for it, and were caught in the plotting phase.

- (1) Herod became so suspicious that he once again imprisoned the brothers, and accused them of treason.
- (2) Herod sent to Rome seeking the Emperor's advice regarding his sons, and Augustus gave Herod full authority to deal with his sons as he wished, but advised to him to conduct a Roman trial outside of his own territory. He feared that without a change of venue there would be a rebellion.
- (3) The trial was conducted in Berytus (Beirut), and a guilty verdict was passed. The two sons Alexander and Aristobulus were executed by strangulation in 7 BC
- (4) Herod's fourth will now named Antipater by Doris his sole successor.

But Antipater was an impatient man...

- (1) He held secret conferences with Herod's brother Pheroras. They intended to kill the old man.
- (2) Salome, Herod's sister, got wind of these meetings and spilled the beans to Herod.
- (3) Thus Herod's relationship with his sole named heir became somewhat strained.
- (4) Antipater then arranged to have emperor Augustus summon him to Rome, with the excuse that the new will needed ratification. He was then conveniently out of town.
- (5) Pheroras, Herod's brother and Antipater's uncle died. Herod conducted an investigation, and discovered that not only did Pheroras die of poison, but also that same poison had been intended for him.
- (6) Herod recalled Antipater under false pretenses, and he thus returned without suspicion. He was thrown into prison, tried the next day and found guilty. It took some time, however to gain permission to execute Antipater, but eventually it was done.
- (7) And so Herod had another will drawn up. Since his two oldest living sons had been turned against him by Antipater, that is, Herod Philip by Mariamne II and Archelaus by Malthace, he excluded them from will #6. Everything now went to Antipas by Malthace.

Herod was by now old and feeble and full of disease. Nothing could ease his discomfort, soul and body.

It was around this time that Christ was born, and everyone was talking about the new-born true king of the Jews. Herod's paranoia was at an all-time high, and so he was motivated to kill all those children in Bethlehem.

And at the same time, two rabbis incited the people to tear down the Roman eagle from the temple gate. The offenders were seized and burned alive.

And just then he made his final will, naming Archelaus of Malthace as king, Antipas of Malthace as Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, and their half-brother Philip of Cleopatra of Jerusalem as the Tetrarch of Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Batanea, and Paneas.

But of course the last will was disputed, because it was made just five days before Herod's death, and it needed the emperor's ratification.

Archelaus was the de facto ruler during this time. During the next Passover, a crowd gathered before Archelaus and began to demand retribution for the deaths of those killed by his father during the eagle incident.

The crowd turned ugly when Archelaus refused this retribution, and so he ordered the troops in. Three thousand people were killed. Not a good start.

Immediately after this, Archelaus and Antipas went to Rome together, each to claim before the emperor the will which benefited himself. Archelaus said the last will always counts, while Antipas said the last will was not made by a mentally well Herod. It must have been an interesting boat ride. Philip was left behind to manage matters.

While these were in Rome, another riot broke out during Pentecost, and this went on for about two months and many more deaths.

The Jews therefore sent a delegation to Rome, pleading for their lives and their autonomy.

Philip got nervous about everyone being in Rome, so he went too.

Augustus, thoroughly tired by the whole mess by now, issued a compromise.

- (1) Archelaus was made ruler over Idumea, Judea, and Samaria with the special title of Ethnarch. He was promised kingship if he ruled well.

- (2) Antipas was made tetrarch over Galilee and Perea.
- (3) And Philip was given Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Batanea, and Paneas as tetrarch. (See map)

Archelaus reign as ethnarch was characterized by brutality and tyranny, even though like his father he tried to bribe the people by building things.

In AD 6 the Jews and Samaritans joined together in a delegation to Rome, where they complained to the emperor. Antipas and Philip the Tetrarch also went because they felt Archelaus had neglected their territories.

Archelaus was then deposed and exiled to the south of France.

Archelaus territory then became an imperial province under direct Roman rule.

Antipas was the ruler over Galilee, the central area of most of Christ's ministry.

He first undertook a rebuilding program to fix the destruction of the revolt of 4 BC Sepphoris was the largest city of Galilee. It was rebuilt, and since it was just 4 miles from Nazareth it is likely that Joseph, a carpenter, worked on the project.

Tiberias was a new city founded under his building program. But while they were building, the builders struck on the site of an old cemetery, and thus the whole area became unclean to the Jews. He therefore enticed people there by offering free homes and lands and tax exemption for the first few years.

Antipas married the daughter of the Nabatean king Aretas IV, an Arab. This added to Antipas' realm, and to Caesar Augustus' tax base.

In AD 28 or 29, Antipas decided to go to Rome, and on the way to visit his half-brother Herod Philip, who lived down on the seacoast.

Now Herod Philip had married his brother Aristobulus' daughter, whose name was Herodias. You remember her. Well... Herodias was a very beautiful woman, and Antipas fell in love with her; his own niece and sister-in-law.

Now Herodias was a typical scheming member of the Herod family, and she secretly agreed to divorce Herod Philip and marry Antipas, provided that he divorce the daughter of Aretas IV.

Somehow, Antipas' first wife discovered the plan, and fled to her father. Aretas took the whole deal

as an insult, and a few years later attacked and defeated Antipas in a battle.

But John the Baptist took offence at this incestual marriage, and let off steam about it. This is why he was thrown into prison - Matthew 14:3.

Later Herodias would connive to have John killed as retribution for stirring up the people against her behavior - Matthew 14:1-12.

Antipas was greatly fascinated with the ministry of Christ, and longed to see His miracles.

- (1) And when Pilate had custody of Christ and understood our Lord to be a citizen of Galilee, he sent him to Antipas, for it was under his jurisdiction. Herod Antipas was there for the feast of the Passover.
- (2) Luke 23:8-12 records what happened. "(8) Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. (9) And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. (10) And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. (11) And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. (12) Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other."
- (3) Antipas identified himself with the Jews by treating their enemy as his enemy also. He may also have been outraged that Christ gave him no show.

A review of the life of John the Baptist.

His ministry.

John the Baptist's ministry was the fulfillment of prophecy; it signified and pointed to the arrival of the Messiah.

John the Baptist had a ministry from God to prepare Israel for the millennial kingdom and its king.

The ministry of John the Baptist had nothing to do whatsoever with the church. In essence it is in its own watertight compartment apart from the church. It drew its precedence from the dispensation of Israel.

John drew his sense of destiny from an Old Testament prophecy concerning his ministry. Isa 40; Mal 3:1. "Prepare the way for the Lord."

Since John and Jesus were cousins, it is likely that they knew one another as children and young men. John knew exactly who the Messiah was, and probably long before he ever preached his message.

John began his ministry of repentance and baptism in the Spring of 26 AD

You must understand that John was the greatest prophet of the age of Israel. His person and message were greater even than Isaiah or Jeremiah or any other. Our Lord testified to this in Matthew 11:11.

John had a great following; he was wildly popular among the people of Israel and even among some Romans.

His mission was to point the way to one even greater. From the seeming greatest to the even greater.

Long after John was gone, people still gravitated towards his ministry, even to the exclusion of Christ. In some ways, people still do, whenever they are legalistic and place great value on outward acts of piety.

His downfall, John 3:26-31.

Verse 26: "And they came to John and said to Him, 'Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, about whom you yourself have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.'"

- (1) These guys are out of fellowship about losing their ministry to Christ and His disciples.
- (2) Their concentration and focus is entirely on John, in the first part. 'He who was with you...' 'About whom you have testified...'
- (3) But then they notice that this ministry is tapering off and they do not like it. "He is baptizing [sneering tone], and all are coming to Him."
- (4) But something else. Christ has now begun His own ministry. Why is John still at work? Why has John not ceased now that Christ has begun? Perhaps this is John's one flaw. He did not know when to hang it up.

Verse 27: "John answered and said, 'No man can receive a single thing unless it has been given to him from heaven.'"

- (1) This is a hard line grace answer. The real man in question is Jesus Christ.
- (2) It reveals the unasked question of the disciple-Jew alliance: Why Christ and not John?
- (3) John tells them: All are going to Christ because it comes from heaven.

Verse 28: "You yourselves witnessed me saying, 'I myself am not the Christ, but that I have been sent ahead of Him.'"

- (1) Again, John draws attention to Christ, and his relationship to Christ. Here he reprises his role as the way-paver, even for some of his disciples.
- (2) The conclusion is that John says the right things, but that he has appearance of being self-centered. If John was doing the right thing at this time, this would be a marvelous statement; but since he is not, we may call it somewhat self-centered.
- (3) John has applied his mission in this way: he sees himself as the one who must prepare the way for every individual in Israel. That before anyone goes to Christ, they must go through him.
- (4) He sees a continuing role for himself in Christ's kingdom. He is the screener, the way paver, the man who prepares the hearts of all for Christ, even as Christ is on the scene.
- (5) Christ is there to be seen face to face; His ministry is in the open. Why should Israel go through a human being to see Him?

Verse 29: "The who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, the one who stands and hears him rejoices with joy through the sound of bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine has been made full."

- (1) The bride at this point is Israel; the groom is Christ; the friend is John.
- (2) The friend is what we would call the best man. In the Jewish wedding, the friend would stand next to the bridegroom and hear his vows. At this he would rejoice, as any best man would.
- (3) John says:

- (a) That he does not have the prize at this wedding of all weddings: Christ does. The bride is Israel.
- (b) But that he still rejoices for Christ, and that the joy of hearing Christ's voice has been made full at this time.
- (c) Again, though, there is hint of bitterness. John perhaps has indulged in self-pity here. Oh, he is not the bridegroom, and he does not get the bride, but at least he vicariously experiences the bridegroom's joy. "Even though I do not get Christ's joy, I am happy for him. My limited joy has been made complete."
- (4) Why the negative assessment of John's statement? Because of his actions. If John had ceased his ministry at the beginning of Christ's ministry, then these statements could have been taken in the most positive light possible. Now because of John's action, they have the appearance of tarnish and rust. There is a dark side to them.
- (5) John may say this marvelous thing, but it seems as though he is still in love with the bride, and dating her though she is walking down the aisle.

Verse 30: "It is necessary for that one to increase, but for me to diminish."

- (1) Note the two verbs that reflect the necessity.
 - (a) The first is AUXANO, to grow. This verb described the growth of living things, of plants and trees, of children. It shows a gradual growth over a period of time.
 - (b) The second is ELATTOO, to shrink. This too is a verb of gradual change. It describes the action of shrinking over time, of growth in reverse.
- (2) What John has done here is nothing less than put a spin on the events of the past few days. But let's look again at the facts!
 - (a) In verse 23, people are coming out of nowhere to be baptized by John.
 - (b) In verse 26, they are all going to Christ.

- (3) This is not a gradual growth and diminishment! This is an all at once radical change!
- (4) But why does John put his spin on these events? It can only be because he wants to hold on to the following and the ministry that he thinks he has.
- (5) John sees his accession as gradual; what has already happened was immediate and absolute.
- (6) John uses a rather impersonal mode of reference to Jesus Christ. It is the far demonstrative pronoun, EKEINON.
- (7) In fact, in this entire discourse, John uses the word Christ only once, and never the word Jesus.
 - (a) In verse 27, John says, "a man cannot receive a single thing." The application is Jesus.
 - (b) In verse 28, John says, "I myself am not the Christ." But the real focus of the sentence is John, through his use of the intensive pronoun.
 - (c) In verse 29, John employs a short parable, where Christ is the bridegroom, but Christ is never mentioned by name.
 - (d) In verse 30, John uses the far demonstrative.
- (8) Jesus was John's own cousin. They were family, and yet John the Baptist uses only titles and roundabout ways to describe our Lord.
- (9) John uses emphatic, intensive, and self-centered modes of expression to describe himself.
- (10) Apparently, all the popularity and approbation had gone to John's head. He would lose that same head about a year later.

What follows now is an injection of John the Apostle's. He inserts his own discourse, and in a way it concentrates on what the Baptist has just said. In opposition to John's self-centered words, the Apostle concentrates very much on the person and character of Christ.

Verse 31: "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all."

- (1) A. Now for John the Apostle's editorial comment. He tells us in this verse that what the Baptist has just said is cosmic propaganda, and entirely wrong.
- (2) First is Christ. Christ comes from above, and is above all. He is above the selfishness and pettiness of the Baptist. He is above all human flaws.
- (3) Second is the Baptist. He is from the earth and he speaks the worldly point of view. Make no mistake. John paints the Baptist here as he is: worldly and trapped in the cosmic system. Spouting forth to his last few followers the propaganda that he hopes will keep them.
- (4) Third is Christ again, and you can see immediately John the Apostle's desire to keep his gospel centered on Christ, and above all in its own right. John needed to get out the truth on the last days of the Baptist's ministry, but did so in such a way that was objective and did not linger on the sad details of the demise of this great prophet of Israel.
- (5) Knowing what we now know now will make it easier to understand why in a few more days John will be thrown into prison, and his enigmatic message to Christ once there.

When John is in prison, he really loses his focus, and his faith.

Luke 7:18-35: "(18) And his disciples reported to John about all these things. And summing some two of his disciples John (19) sent to the Lord, saying, 'Are you the coming one or do we expect another?' (20) And after they appeared beside Him the men said, 'John the Baptist sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the coming one or do we expect another?' (21) In that hour He healed many from illness and disease and evil spirits and to many blind He freely gave to see. (22) And after formulating an answer, He said to them, 'After you arrive proclaim to John what you saw and heard; blind men see again, lame men walk, lepers are cleansed and deaf men hear, dead men are raised, poor men are evangelized. (23) And blessed is anyone who does not stumble over Me. (24) And after the messengers of John left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, 'What did you go out into the desert to witness? A reed stirred by the wind? (25) Really, what did you go out to see? A man wearing white

clothes? Behold those in glorious clothing and possessing luxury are in the palace. (26) But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes I say to you, and more than a prophet. (27) He is the one about whom it has been written, 'Behold I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' (28) I say to you, among those born of women, no one is greater. But the least in the kingdom of God is greater than him.

John the Baptist has lost his perspective from Jesus. This is because he hears all these great things about Christ, and yet he does not see Christ as the Messiah.

And why is that? How could you deny Christ as the Messiah when you hear all of these things about him?

It had to do with personal circumstances. John was in prison, put there by his enemy and the enemy of Israel. That in John's mind Christ had done nothing to free him (which was the law of volitional responsibility), nor to free his people from the Herodian tyranny was enough to deny Jesus as the Messiah.

This is the classic cosmic rationale.

- (1) John was suffering because of his own stubborn efforts in clinging too long to his ministry, and his shift of focus from the Pharisees to the Herodians.
- (2) But John refused to see that in his state of spiritual blindness, and so he shifted the blame to Jesus.
- (3) He concluded that Jesus could not be the Messiah, because He had not freed him, when that was so obviously what any Messiah should do.
- (4) Suddenly God was not God because John had not gotten his way. And because of his spiritual malfunction, John had become like his worst enemies, the Pharisees.
- (5) John must indeed have been suffering from spiritual blindness.

Herod hears the news of Jesus. "During that time Herod the Tetrarch heard the news of Jesus, for His name became perspicuous, and he was going through difficulty because of the things said by some: and they were saying, 'John the Baptist is risen from death,' and, 'for this reason the miracles

are working in Him,' and 'He is Elijah,' and still others, 'He is a prophet like one of the [old-time] prophets.' ”

What makes Herod Antipas nervous is that he has recently ordered the beheading of John the Baptist, and indeed this was carried out in his presence.

How utterly out of touch is this man with the spiritual doings in his kingdom!

The name of Jesus had become PHANERON, 'per-spicious.' The fame of Christ had grown throughout the land, and it was only two years previous that John the Baptist had much the same kind of fame.

Herod was going through a difficulty in his life, DIEIPOREI. The original verb is APOREO, which means to be at a loss, uncertain, full of doubt.

This is perhaps an understatement.

The uninformed were claiming that John the Baptist had risen from death, or he is Elijah, or he is a prophet like one of the old-time prophets.

These speculations are somewhat old. Folks had been talking the same way about Christ ever since His ministry had begun.

And you should certainly note that they are rationalizations on the true nature and ministry of Christ.

People will go to great mental lengths in order to deny that Christ is the Messiah, and the Son of God and Savior of the world.

For our own generation, there are many more explanations of Christ, and all are shams that avoid the true issue of His life.

The issue of Christ's life is the character of God.

- (1) The conscience of God contains His norms and standards for thought, word, and act. This is righteousness. When the righteousness of God is expressed toward others, this is justice. The conscience of God evaluates all of His perception and experience, inward and out, with Himself and with others.
 - (2) The motivation of God is the complex of thought that moves Him to action. This is the interaction of His conscience with His perfect perception of the true needs of others. The true needs of others causes God to intervene on their behalf.
 - (3) The analytical ability of God is expressed by the term grace. Grace is not just what God does for us, but how He does it as well.
 - (a) God both perceives our problems and provides for their solution perfectly.
 - (b) God is absolutely proficient at problem solving. His approach concentrates on His thinking, His Merit, and His power. He recognizes the value of human volition, and integrates what He knows will work with the possibility and responsibility of human will.
 - (c) So God analyzes what He knows will work, and proposes it to the human race.
 - (4) God's mind is in a perfect state of organization. Order is the perfect application of grace expressed in the plan of God.
 - (a) Let's examine this portion of God's character in a little more detail.
 - (b) In warfare there is a desperate need for victory; therefore strategists have over time developed certain immutable principles related to the attainment of victory. These we may apply as though they are from God, because God is the best of all at war.
- He understands the principle of objective.
 - The objective constitutes the guide for the interpretation of orders, for the formation of decisions, and for the employment of the means available.
 - God has a set objective for every human life. This is understood as predestination. The objective is completed love for Him, love for Him in any situation in life. This is spiritual maturity. Therefore, every part of grace is aimed at this objective.
 - This in turn fulfills His objective, which is vindication in the angelic appeal trial.
 - He understands the principle of offensive.
 - Offensive action is the only means by which a decision is gained in warfare. The offensive increases the effectiveness of the force that adopts it because it raises morale, permits concentration of effort, and allows freedom of action.

- Our application of this principle is to gain and perpetuate spiritual momentum inside His plan.
 - Spiritual momentum is defined as the demand of truth, the spiritual necessity of moving forward. One days' spiritual growth demands, makes necessary the next.
 - You take the offensive whenever you learn and apply the truth. This is the means by which you attain the objective.
 - Offensive means having right priorities and setting aside the distractions of life.
- He understands the principle of mass.
 - Mass defines combat power. The concept includes the numbers, the weapons, the tactical skill, the fighting ability, the resolution, the discipline, the morale, and the leadership of the fighting force.
 - Successful employment of mass means putting maximum mass at the proper time and place to achieve the objective.
 - Mass for the Christian means the combination of divine power and human concentration toward the application of truth during undeserved suffering.
 - Mass means that all of the appropriate elements of grace come together at the point of attack to produce maximum love for God.
- He understands the principle of economy of force.
 - The economy of force is the efficient means by which military mass is deployed in a main effort. Men and means are directed in such a way that there is no compromise to the main effort, and as little as possible elsewhere.
 - Economy for the Christian means focusing your life on the point of attack, which is spiritual growth.
- He understands the principle of movement.
 - This refers to the maneuver of combat arms and their support. This means to bring military mass into close contact with the enemy to secure a decisive result, and to put the mass where it can attack with maximum advantage. This always has the idea of being in the right geographical location for the achievement of the objective.
- The movement of the Christian focuses on the geographical will of God. And the geographical will always has to do with the objective. You must always place yourself geographically at the point where you will have the maximum opportunity to fulfill God's plan.
- He understands the principle of unity of command.
 - Unity of command is more than cooperation (see principle #10). It is the responsibility of each command toward fulfillment of the objective under a single commander.
 - Each command has a single commander who is responsible for the direction of his command toward the objective. Each command is to remain unified under that commander.
 - In the spiritual realm, this is the church under the headship of Jesus Christ, and the local church under the headship of the pastor.
 - In the local church, the pastor is responsible for directing his flock toward the objective of spiritual maturity, mature love for God. The responsibility of the flock is to remain unified under that command in humility.
- He understands the principle of surprise.
 - Surprise in some form is essential to obtain maximum effect in battle with minimum loss. Surprise occurs in many categories of military activity: time, place, direction, force, tactics, and weapons.
 - God has applied the principle of surprise with regard to progressive revelation, having portions of His truth concealed, even to the angels, and even to His Son.
 - Our application of surprise is in the content of our soul. We have the right to privacy as Christians, and this privacy of the priesthood extends to the angelic realm; we think in our own souls apart from the intrusion of any creature save God Himself.

- With privacy, we have the advantage of surprise during testing, so that there is a progressive revelation of our hearts through the course of our lives.
- He understands the principle of Security.
- Security is defined in military science and tactics as all measures which are taken to guard against observations, surprise,, and hostile interference with effective maneuver. Security is designed to gain and maintain the power of freedom of action.
 - Eternal security is what God does for us in order to make us free. At the moment we believe, we may have the confidence that our salvation remains secure forever.
 - Dismantling the cosmic complex and keeping it at bay is what we must do to keep our offensive operation of spiritual momentum secure.
 - Because sin entangles us on the course to our destiny, we must keep its power to a minimum in our lives. When sin is minimized, we maximize our freedom of action, especially related to our spiritual advance.
- He understands the principle of Simplicity.
- Simplicity means that all military plans, at any level of command, must be simple and free from complicated maneuvers. Orders have to be direct and free from contingencies. Frequent changes of plan should be avoided, and the unity of command should be observed.
 - “But the greatest commandment is this: to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and might.”
 - That is elegantly simple. Love God.
 - We love God through our pursuit of the word.
 - We love Him through our application of the word.
 - We love Him through expressing praise and thanksgiving.
 - We love Him through spreading the word in ambassadorial function.
- We love Him through depending on Him when we are helpless.
 - We love Him through our enduring love for Him in both the distractions of prosperity and the darkness of adversity.
 - As long as you love God as He truly is, you will be within the bounds of the simplicity of His plan.
- He understands the principle of cooperation.
- By cooperation is meant that all elements of a mission work together for the achievement of the objective. This includes the principle of teamwork. Cooperation within a command is attained when everyone interprets his orders in an intelligent manner, and executes them in accordance with the spirit and the intent of the authority issuing them.
 - Between independent commanders, cooperation is attained by each working for a common objective without reference to personal ambition.
 - This is the necessity of virtue love in the local church. The mission of the local church is for each individual of that body to achieve the objective of mature love for God
 - Therefore, personal ambition must be set aside, along with every form of illicit judgment. Forgiveness must go out toward failure, and tolerance toward idiosyncratic behavior.
 - There must also be virtue in the great body of Christ when two people from different local churches are in contact with one another.
 - They must always approach the differences in the ministry with virtue, so that there is no undue bickering and inordinate competition.
- (c) Chaos always comes about as a result of sin and wrong priorities in life; order enters in when truth is applied. Satan brings chaos, and God order.
- (5) Now God has the absolute and infinite power to bring about the desire of His will. This is His sovereignty.
- (a) God has volition, and since He is perfect, God’s volition always acts in a right manner.

- (b) God's will is always supreme over creature volition. It is God's sovereign choice, however, to allow creatures free will.
 - (c) There is often a gap between desire and execution. God's willpower always bridges that gap.
 - (d) People of good character always have willpower. Understanding justice and love and grace and order is useless without bringing it to bear by means of will.
- (6) The temperament of God is immutable, and therefore He does not change. This characteristic applies to His willpower when it is tested, and we call it faithfulness.
- (a) Faithfulness is willpower extended over time.
 - (b) Faithfulness is not affected by adversity, nor is it distracted by prosperity.
 - (c) God loves us both when we sin and when we love Him. He is faithful even when we deny Him.
 - (d) Faithfulness is a desirable characteristic in creatures. Indeed we must have it in order to fulfill God's plan, and to succeed in any endeavor in life.
 - (e) Illustration: this ministry.
- (7) God has integrity in communication.
- (a) He is forthright, clear, sufficient, and honest when He communicates.
 - (b) And of course He always keeps His word. This is His veracity.

There are often attacks against the character of Christ, but just as often, and perhaps even more often, there are attacks against the hypostatic union. The cults will either attack the deity or the humanity of Christ in such a way as to undermine His mediatorship and His example for the behavior of men.

Jesus Christ was and the Son of God, the Savior of the World. He was both fully man and fully God. He died as the mediator between God and man.

Herod's paranoid response: "But Herod after hearing [these things] was saying, 'I personally beheaded John; but who is this man concerning whom

I am hearing such things? The one whom I beheaded, John, he is risen. For this reason the miracles are working in him.' And he kept on seeking to see Him."

See the section on the beheading of John the Baptist.

So Herod hears of Jesus, and remembers his personal involvement with the beheading of John the Baptist. He even tells a little fib; that he personally beheaded John, when in fact it was the royal executioner who actually did the deed.

But Herod certainly saw the head on the platter, and recognized it as belonging to John the Baptist. He knew objectively that the man was dead.

The next part of his thinking is with regard to Christ. "Who is this man concerning whom I am hearing such things?"

The delegation of John's two disciples had returned to the household prison, and reported to John about what they saw and heard from Jesus. Did Herod hear about this? Surely he would be able to see that there were two different men here!

Later, John was gruesomely murdered at the decree of Herod.

And after this, Herod concludes that John has risen. Herod has a colossal complex of guilt. His conclusion was that John had risen from the dead, and that God was out to get him.

Guilt is the true producer of all ghosts; Herod manufactures this ghost from his guilt, and partly from his desire to hear the message of the Baptist.

But now it is too late, and Herod fears the God of the Jews, thinking that this will be an awful end to his life in some way. Remember that "fear involves punishment" - 1 John 4:18.

Guilt can become the motivating factor in your life, impelling you toward many foul actions. Indeed, many people in this world are enslaved by a guilt complex.

There are two actions which resolve the problem of guilt in the life of any believer in Jesus Christ.

- (1) The ability to relate his sins to the atonement of the cross, and realize that the burden of sin was borne by Jesus Christ.
- (2) The establishment of spiritual momentum as the good faith measure of pure motive and proper attitude toward grace.

According to Herod's reasoning, having risen from the dead John now has the gifts of miracles and healings.

And then Herod does something curious: He keeps on seeking to see Jesus, whom he thinks is John. This is remarkable. He wants to see this man who has risen from the dead.

Perhaps Herod wants to make a positive identification, so as to absolve his guilt.

Perhaps Herod wants to kill him again.

Perhaps he desire to gain his forgiveness.

But what is again truly remarkable is the unbelief about Jesus. Herod would rather believe that the ghost of John the Baptist has risen to torment him than he would accept that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews.

There had been quite a propaganda campaign just before the time of the first advent. False messiahs and failed leaders galore. Indeed the shadow of the messiah loomed over the Herod family as much as anyone.

10. This blinded them to the hand of God in the life of Christ. Only a few who looked for the true and the good could see Him as He truly was.

The Beheading of John the Baptist

Matthew 14:3-12

Mark 6:17-29,"

Exposition.

The Reason for John's Imprisonment.

Herod sent out men to arrest and seize John the Baptist. He was then chained and placed in prison.

It was this incident that caused Jesus to go through Samaria on His way to Galilee. It was on account of this that He spent time with the Samaritan woman at the well, and brought the town of Sychar into His kingdom. This is narrated in Matthew 4:12 and John chapter four.

Herod Antipas had married Herodias, his sister in law and niece. She had left Philip the Tetrarch, Herod Antipas' half brother, for him.

Herodias was just a little bit older than Christ, now about 34-35 years of age. She hated John the Baptist because he had preached against her immoral and incestuous behavior.

John preached, saying OUK EXESTIN, 'it is not right.' This was by John's reckoning against the very laws of nature, and so it was.

This was more than just sex, it was a capital crime according to the law of Moses. Leviticus 18:16 defines this marriage as incestual: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness." Verse 29 defines the punishment as requiring a 'cutting off from the people.'

So here is this ruling family over Galilee; they are only half-Jewish, which made them the target of awful prejudice from the racist Jews. They are incestuous, in direct contravention to the law of God. They should be executed under capital punishment, but this ruling family lives above the laws of the Jews.

Now John the Baptist has virtually joined the party of the Pharisees in their crusade against this kind of immorality.

John has lost the focus of his ministry since the rapid ascension of Christ's popularity.

According to Josephus, John was no longer baptizing for the remission of sins, but preaching that his baptism cleansed the body, while righteous behavior cleansed the soul. John had moved to legalism in an attempt to retain his following.

John is immensely popular, so that Herod Antipas and Herodias fear the people will turn against them if they listen to the strident sermons of this man.

10. Therefore they must stop him, and he is seized and chained and thrown into prison. It is clear that John is imprisoned at the royal quarters.
11. In the royal quarters there was a certain royal steward by the name of Chuza. His wife was named Joanna, and it turns out that she is a believer in Jesus Christ.
12. A steward was an OIKONOMOS, a manager of the royal household. All logistical matters were a part of his domain.

When Herod ordered the seizure and imprisonment of John the Baptist, the matter was delegated to Chuza.

While John was in prison, his care was the responsibility of Chuza.

13. If we were to construct a probable course of events it would be like this:

John is imprisoned. He is befuddled by his imprisonment and the end of his ministry. So much so that he has doubts that Jesus is truly the Messiah.

But after John sends his disciples and they return with the news of the healings and miracles, his doubts vanish like a desert mist, and he is once again on the path to his destiny. This transpires over the course of not more than a few days.

It is after this that John turns his contact with Chuza and his family into a gospel opportunity, and Chuza's wife Joanna becomes one of the women's auxiliary in support of Christ's ministry.

14. "For Herod continually feared the crowd, because they held him as a prophet, and knowing him as a righteous and holy man, he kept him safe, and after hearing about him he was very perplexed, and he gladly heard him."

Herod gladly heard John the Baptist. The adverb is *HADEOS*, which means glad in a cheerful but not ecstatic sense.

Herod was not overflowing with joy when he heard John the Baptist, but he did so cheerfully.

And Herod really did listen to the Baptist, as indicated by the genitive case of *AUTOU*. When the verb *AKOUO* takes its object in the genitive, there is a sense of listening more carefully, and even obedience.

There is a distinct possibility that Herod believed at this point. But even if he did it was swiftly forgotten.

But then Herod Antipas' birthday came around, and it turned out to be a fateful day.

The word *EUKAIROU* designates this as not only a special day due to it being the time of Herod's birthday, but also a fateful day in the history of Israel. They were about to lose their greatest prophet of all time.

Now there were great festivities planned for the day, and dignitaries, both civilian and military had arrived to participate.

There were *MEGISTASIN*, people of great standing. That is, famous people from around the land. Maybe Simon the Magician was present, up from Samaria; maybe others who had gained fame during that time.

There were *CHILIARCHOIS*, that is, the high-ranking Roman military officers who were stationed in Galilee. A chiliarchos was literally, a 'ruler of a thousand.' The modern battalion commander is about right for this rank - perhaps a colonel. Well, there were more than just one of these.

There were *PROTOIS TES GALILAIAS* - the 'first men' of Galilee. These were the public leaders, the people on the 'A' list at all the parties.

Now there would be tax-gatherers - men who knew Matthew. There were Romans. No question that there would be some from the leaders of the Sadducees, the religious group that believed in social assimilation and living for this life alone.

With the reputation of the Herodians, it would certainly be an interesting proposition to go to one of their birthday parties; who could tell what kind of degeneracy would be encountered? Perhaps these guests would be nervous indeed.

At some point in the festivities, the daughter of Herodias came in to dance. Her name was Salome.

The name Salome does not appear in the Bible. Rather, Josephus mentions her in his histories of the Jews.

Salome is identified as a *KORASIOU*. This is the diminutive form of *KORE*, which describes a young woman, usually a virgin. From this we can conclude that Salome was very young, perhaps barely a teenager, or perhaps even just short of that.

The most probable type of dance of the day was the *PANTOMIMUS*, a "solo enactment of a popular story theme in stylized mimicry, often with dramatic and sensual movements and postures" .

There would be a tremendous amount of charm in the story-telling and sensual dance of this girl. Indeed, if she had learned anything from her mother, it would be sexual allure, considering the reputation of Herodias.

Herod was exceedingly pleased with her; and who knows the reaction of the guests? The Sadducees would have gulped it down like some sumptuous after-dinner fare. The Romans would react with more stoicism. But none would desire to offend at this grand event.

Now the rest is a nightmare - an awful revelation of the degeneracy of this family.

Herod is pleased with the dance of Salome. The verb is ERESEN, from ARESKO, which means to take pleasure in a person or thing.

Now Herod was pleased, but there may have been ulterior motive; Salome is the daughter of Herodias by Herod Philip. He certainly would desire to please this little girl and so gain by the praise.

His praise turns out to be effusive. He offers her up to half of his kingdom as a reward for her dance.

- (1) Herod most likely feels safe in this proposal, since this girl is his step-daughter, and so the kingdom will remain with him.
 - (a) This is not the first time in Bible history that such an offer has been made.
 - (b) Beckon back to the time of Esther; Esther pleased King Xerxes so much that he offered her anything she desired, up to half of his kingdom.
 - (c) The irony in all of this is that the book of Esther contains the account of an anti-Semitic plot.
 - (d) It is ironic because the request from Salome is going to require the death of the greatest man of the age of Israel. And that is about as anti-Semitic as you can get!
 - (e) You see, at the banquet of Xerxes, Queen Esther begged for her life, and for the life of her people, the Jews. She begged for life, knowing that Haman had hatched a plot to destroy them.
 - (f) But this Salome will be quite different. She begs for the death of the greatest man of all the age of Israel. By Christ's account, John is greater than Moses or Elijah, Isaiah or Daniel or Zechariah. Greater than any prophet in the 1400 years previous.
- (2) But this is going to play out in tragedy, and you can almost feel the dread as Salome leaves the room.
- (3) Well Salome goes back to her mother, and asks her just what would be good to ask, and immediately you get the impression that these two have hatched a plot.

- (4) And you know by her request that Herodias is an evil woman. It wasn't enough for her that John was cast into prison at her command; it was her measure of revenge to take his life.
- (5) And indeed this was revenge, for she had a long-standing grudge with this prophet of God, and she was going to see it through.
 - (a) This was not only a failure to forgive, which is the case for every grudge; it was a failure to forgive when the suffering was deserved.
 - (b) That's why this is tragic from every angle. John the Baptist lost his focus, and moved his ministry from Christ to the Herodians; Herodias hated what he had done, unveiling her evil before all the people so that she was completely hated by them.
 - (c) Leviticus 19:18 puts it very well: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord."
 - (d) Instead, vengeance belongs to the Lord, and be confident that He will repay.
 - (e) Luke 6:37, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."
 - (f) Whenever you fail to forgive, you have committed a failure to orient that other person's sin to the cross.
 - (g) Truly you are attempting to bear the burden of the cross, which was already carried by Jesus Christ Himself.
 - (h) And you should know that it is common for those with guilt complexes to hold grudges against others.
 - (i) But Herodias didn't just demand the execution of John. She demanded that his severed head be brought on a platter to be seen by all these birthday guests.

· And so it is clear that her motivation not only includes revenge against John, but also against Herod Antipas, her husband.

· She knew that this request would bring great shame upon him before all of his honored guests. She knew that they would say nothing of the incident - nothing to his face, that is.

- She knew how this would fester within Herod, and how he would eat away at himself over it.

- She was motivated to destroy this man whom she had been so anxious to marry not so long ago. Probably less than a year. This reveals a great hatred.

- To Herodias, men are a way to gain power; men are weak before her charms, easily manipulated; but never are men to be trusted, never to be loved. She is chained to their power in a male-dominated society, but she overcomes by means of their weakness.

(j) “And after entering immediately with speed before the king, she asked, saying, ‘I want right away in order for you to give to me upon a platter the head of John the Baptist.’”

- Mark portrays the speed with which things happened after the agreement between mother and daughter.

- The girl enters the dining room META SPOUDES - with speed. In fact, Mark’s gospel even says EUTHUS - ‘immediately.’ This adverb shows decisiveness and swiftness to conclusion.

- And more than this - Salome makes her demand, and demands that it be done EXAUTES ‘right away.’ This is literally, ‘from this point in time.’

- So included in the demand is the timing of the act. Salome wants that head immediately.

- It snatches the breath away to realize the soul of this young girl. For she has added the speed and the demand for immediate action all by herself.

- It tears out the heart to realize what utter degeneracy she has at her young age. How decisive she is toward this callused and heinous request!

(6) Herod does not want to do this.

(a) There are two reasons why he rationalizes the necessity of the act.

- First, because of his oath. He feels he must have integrity toward his word.

- Second, because of the dinner guests. He feels that to renege on the oath would be to lose face before all of these dignitaries, both Roman and Jewish.

(b) But of course this is an act of utter immorality, and entirely aside from the holy character of God.

- There is a verse that is the perfect counterpoint to this whole incident. 1 John 5:14, “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

- Well Herod Antipas had no standards, and so you could ask anything of him, and he would give it, even if it was evil.

- There is no limit from the throne of grace. You may have it all if it is according to God’s will.

- But God’s ability to answer your requests never extends to the realm of evil. His integrity will not allow it.

(c) Herod has an absence of self-esteem to do the right thing.

- You must have a detachment of will in order to bring about what is right in your life.

- That is, your decision-making process must be apart from worldly factors.

- You cannot make decisions on the basis of what other people think, or what the world demands.

- Herod, the ruler of this region, the man of highest rank present, does not have the self-esteem to eat his pride and tell this little girl that she is wrong to request what is evil.

- He is afraid of what these lesser-ranking persons are going to think of him. He sees breaking this oath as a weakness, when in reality the girl has broken the oath before him.

- She has broken the spirit of integrity within the oath, and therefore abrogated Herod’s necessity toward veracity.

- Self-esteem comes from a sense of what is right, and especially who is important.

- If you see yourself as God sees you, then you will gain resolve in staying on the side of right.

- But Herod was more worried that his dinner guests would see him as a weak man, than whether he should do the right thing.

- It would have been so easy to say to take the girl aside and tell her that this could not be so.

· This would not be the end of Antipas weakness. In the Passover after next, Antipas is in Jerusalem when the trial of Jesus takes place. As a courtesy, Pontius Pilate sends Christ to Antipas, deferring to his rulership of Galilee, Christ's home province.

- Luke 23:8-12, "(8) Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. (9) And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. (10) And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. (11) And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. (12) Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other."
- So Herod has a chance to set Jesus free and redeem himself of his weakness against John the Baptist. He fails, and as a result, Jesus would die.

(d) That this young girl could even make this request of her uncle indicates that she is a monster-child.

· No one ever says no to Salome. She knows how to tantrum; she knows how to manipulate; she knows how to pout.

· If Herod says no to Salome here, he risks a nuclear tantrum. He would rather have some prophet die than undergo that.

· Even if he should insist on the wrongness of it, he knows that he will pay dearly for it.

· Herod has made this magnanimous offer to his niece because of the dinner guests. He wants to impress them with the greatness of his generosity.

· Now she asks of him something awful. But he cannot lose out on his scheme to impress them, so he goes through with it.

So Herod sends for the executioner to follow through with the request.

(1) The prison was a part of the palace compound; it would take a while for the executioner to walk there, summon John to a suitable place of execution, place his head upon a platter, and then return to the girl.

(2) You can perhaps imagine John in his prison cell. Resting, praying, exercising - all according to a daily regimen. And in comes the executioner with sword. It is time.

(3) John has barely time to think and pray - the briefest of prayers comes from his lips and then the infamy is performed.

(a) It is at that moment that his soul is placed into an interim body, and he is transferred to Paradise in Hades.

(b) There he meets the presence of God face to face and comes to know the truth about himself and about Jesus. He has left the sinful flesh behind.

(c) There he receives the reception of a hero as the greatest prophet in the age of Israel.

(d) You can perhaps imagine a delegation of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Moses and David, Elijah, Elisha, and Samuel stand at the forefront. All around are Hosea and Amos and Zechariah; Habakkuk and Zephaniah and Malachi. There also are Nahum and Joel and Jonah. Obadiah, Haggai, and Micah stand there, all stand in respect.

(e) All these great men desire to question the Great One, the one who prepared the way for the Messiah. All of them defer and listen humbly as John tells of his personal contact with the one who will be King of kings and Lord of lords.

(4) And then jump forward in time to just a year and a little more later.

(a) It is another day in paradise. There is worship, and there is conversation. Conversation, I think, to which the angels would long to listen.

(b) The men there speak of their times and their longing for the Messiah and the details of his life.

(c) Suddenly there is a grumbling in Torments, across the Great Gulf Fixed; the everyday moan of the damned is momentarily silenced, and an impossibly bright light appears. John, Elijah, and the rest rise again with a thrill and gather to the edge of the Gulf.

- (d) Could it be? Who is it? Is it... Yes. Yes it is! A stunned silence follows His words, and then He approaches across the Gulf. The great crowd of Old Testament saints gathers around the Savior.
- (e) And in that time He pronounces that the work of salvation is done. A shout! A cheer goes up, and every knee bows and every tongue there confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord.
- (f) It is now time to leave this Paradise and go on to Heaven, and the Savior leads them all in a victorious procession. What triumph and what joy! What purity of worship.
- (5) But back at the palace, back at the birthday party again, as the stunned guests sit and lay at the remains of their dinners, in comes the executioner with John's head on a platter.
- (a) You can only imagine the horror of the dinner guests as they see this spectacle before them.
- (b) Even the hardened CHILIARCHS of the Roman Army must be appalled at what they observe here, for the palace is no place for this kind of violence.
- (6) Herod and Herodias ruled Galilee for ten more years or so, until Herodias schemed to gain her husband true kingship through the Roman emperor.
- (a) Gaius became disgusted with the scheming of this woman, and he distrusted Antipas greatly.
- (b) Instead of kingship, Gaius gave Antipas exile to Gaul, and in Lyon. Herodias chose to join him, even after being offered exemption from the exile of her husband. From that moment they are never mentioned again by the chroniclers of history. But in a way they are.
- (c) They lived in Lyon, in central Gaul, in the middle of a different nowhere from Tiberias in Galilee.
- (d) A century and a half later, Lyon became famous for its persecution of Christians - persecution unto death. The heritage of Herod Antipas and his niece/sister in law/wife lived on.
- (7) And then one day, Herod Antipas dies; and also Herodias and Salome in their times. And they go to Torments in Hades.
- (a) There they three reside for centuries, full of fear and anticipation; still the hatred reigns in their souls.
- (b) And one day there in Torments they hear a commotion - an assembly is called, and all are forced to attend. Herod Antipas and his second wife and her daughter grudgingly gather around a man, and Herod has some shreds of recognition.
- (c) Here is the man that he always wanted to see, standing before him even now. Herod Antipas leans forward in spite of himself, to listen again.
- (d) But there is no speech this time; only a massive figure in chains, chains of darkness, so that the figure is obscured. Yet Herod knows with fear that this figure is Satan, the great hope of the sinfully enslaved. And the chaining of the Great Enslaver represents the total defeat of their false hope. Herod and Herodias and Salome are crushed at this moment, and the agony of what is to come in a 1000 years is multiplied greatly.
- (e) The 1000 years passes with the agonizing emotion of the anticipation of something truly awful. And then Herod Antipas is called before the Great White Throne, and he finally gets his audience with Christ.
- And yet Herod is completely humble before this King of kings and Lord of lords. He cannot stand before this throne as king; he cannot demand from Christ an accounting of His ministry.
 - There before Herod Antipas is the evidence of his folly in the nail holes in the hands and feet of the Savior of the World.
 - Herod is no longer the one to be feared, the one in control.
 - The sentence is passed, and he is cast into the Lake of Fire for an eternity of pain. So he will exit the scene of history.
- A Transitional Passage.
- The Translations:
- Mark 6:30, "And the apostles gathered before Jesus and reported to Him all the significant things they did and taught."

Luke 9:10a, "And after the apostles returned they gave an account to Him of the significant things they had done."

Harmony: "And after the apostles returned, they gathered before Jesus and reported to Him all the significant things they did and taught."

Exposition.

So a period of time has passed since Christ sent out the disciples to preach to the towns in Galilee.

There is no record of what Christ was doing at this same time; perhaps the exact same thing.

The disciples gather back to Christ and give a report on the significant events of their lives - what they did and what they taught.

They did miracles and performed healings; they taught about the Kingdom of Christ. They told Him of the responses of the crowd - of victories and defeats along the way.

How they must have loved to see Him listen; how they must have glowed when He approved, and even when He made corrections.

Christ gave them also the camaraderie of mutual experience. They were now truly fellow-workers in the gospel. He is developing initiative and leadership in them by this way. They know now that they are like Christ in His work.

Our lives should be like this through prayer.

We should often report the significant events our lives to God the Father.

The victories and defeats, and the concerns which we encounter along the way.

We should also note the significance of our mutual experiences with Christ. That is, we should realize that nothing we have encountered has eluded the experience of the Son of God.

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