

MATTHEW·DISTILLED (extract the essential meaning or most important aspects of)



CHAPTER (THREE) SYNOPSIS = John the Baptist (1-12) and the Baptism of Jesus (13-17). Matthew's account of these events is also recorded in (Luk 3:1-22; Mar 1:1-11 and Joh 1:19-34). There are few events within the gospels that receive coverage by more than one of its authors, much less all of its authors! Such frequency indicates that God sees John, his baptism and the baptism of Jesus as important to the Christian Faith and our Christian lives.

1. John the Baptist was:

1.1. The fulfillment of several OT prophecies regarding a future Elijah-like prophet and forerunner to Messiah (1-6 w/Isa 40:1-5; Mal 3:1-4, 4:4-6 w/2Ki 1:1-15¹ w/Mat 11:12-14 w/17:9-13; Luk 1:16-17)²

1.2. Considered by Jesus to be the greatest prophet (Mat 11:7-11)

1.3. An older (6 mos.) relative of Jesus (possibly a cousin? Luk 1:35-36)³

2. Seeing that several w/in Jesus' family were aware of His Messiahship before it was publically revealed to the world provides additional support to such claims (along w/Jesus and the NT writers' claims to Deity and sinless perfection) since if there was evidence to the contrary, family members would not only be the first to know, but hardly His disciples⁴.

3. The baptism that John performs was not novel/original, but the traditional Jewish baptism or "mikvah"⁵. Since John was part of Aaronic (priestly) line, this meant he was also qualified to perform such religious rituals (Luk 1:5-13). This is why the religious leaders did not oppose/condemn his actions (5-7).

4. John's was not a Christian baptism – a baptism conferring forgiveness of sin (i.e. justification), but simply repentance from sin (2 w/Luk 3:3 – "for (lit. toward) ...the forgiveness of sins" w/Act 19:4 w/Mat 26:28). Again, John's role was to *prepare* the way - *not be* the way, to the forgiveness/salvation granted by the Lord (thru belief in Messiah). As such:

4.1. It required that those being baptized both confess and forsake their sins (i.e. turn from lawlessness to full obedience to God's Law) as their new life commitment since this is biblical repentance (again 3 w/Luk 3:3-5 w/Isa 40:1-5 – "make his paths straight...every valley shall be filled...every mountain and hill shall be made low...the crooked shall become straight...the rough places shall become level ways and all flesh shall see the glory/salvation of God" = if one wants to receive God's salvation, then it will mean forsaking all in their life that is sinful [too high, too low, crooked, rough etc] and walking the straight and narrow path of God's Law; 6 – "sins" w/1Jo 3:4 – "sin is lawlessness" = to turn from sin therefore means to turn toward the Law; 8 – "bear fruit in keeping w/repentance" w/Dan 4:27 = practicing righteousness or justice/God's Law – Luk 3:10-14; 1Jo 3:4 w/5-10; Mal 4:4-6; Lev 5:5, 26:40; Num 5:6-7; Pro 28:13; Neh 9:2-3; Psa 32:3, 5; Eze 18:30; Act 19:18-19, 26:20; 1Jo 1:9)⁶.

¹ The parallels between Elijah and John the Baptist when comparing this account to that of Mat 3:1-12 are more than just aesthetic. Like Elijah, John did wear the clothing of prophets and priests (see Lev 7:8); however, his presence as a man of God also signaled the coming of God's fiery judgment. This time in the person of Jesus Christ. In addition, it must be mentioned that wearing animal skins was not - as some have proposed, a mark of poverty or destitution. Neither is this the connection the writer of Hebrews is making in (Heb 11:37). As such, the purpose of John's clothing was not instructive (i.e. as an example of what repentant living looks like), but rather indicative. It identified him as one qualified to speak on God's behalf.

² John's denial when asked if he were Elijah in (Joh 1:21) refers only to the literal sense. Many Jews believed that the OT prophecies regarding his future re-appearance meant he would be resurrected. John is simply denying such association or identity – not however, that he was the fulfillment of such prophecies. This can be seen by considering his response in (Joh 1:23) – a passage re: to the coming Elijah-like prophet.

³ It is possible that disciples/apostles James and John (the sons of Zebedee) were also cousins of Jesus (Mat 4:21 w/Mat 27:56 w/Mar 15:40 w/Joh 19:25 = Salome was the wife of Z., the mother of J&J and the sister of Mary). Whereas John the B. was possibly a 2nd cousin through Mary's mother (of the tribe of Aaron – Luk 1:5 = Elizabeth was of Levi/Aaron, Luk 3:30-31 = Mary's father's line was thru Judah/David meaning that Mary's re: to Elizabeth would have to be through her mother making John the B. a second cousin), James and John were 1st cousins.

⁴ Consider the number of those among Jesus' blood family who are mentioned in the NT as becoming followers/believers. Such individuals would have firsthand knowledge of both those events recorded in the NT, as well as those which are not. For instance, they would know of Jesus' childhood. If Jesus during this time or any for that matter, had sinned or done something contradictory to the Bible's claims, surely they would be aware. Given what was at stake (i.e. exile from the Jewish community), family becomes the toughest critic. Their support of Jesus therefore may be Church's the greatest apologetic.

⁵ Mikvahs have supposedly existed even before the nation Israel and were performed for various reasons including repentance. The *Midrash* relates that after being banished from Eden, Adam sat in a river that flowed from the garden as a part of his repentance process. The Jewish people or religious leaders would have never condoned his actions – nor attempted to receive such a baptism from him, were he not a part of the Aaronic line.

⁶ Josephus says that, "John the Baptist required righteous conduct if the baptism was to be acceptable to God." (*Antiquities*)

4.2. It reveals the state of God's OC religious leaders in the days of Jesus (5-7⁷; the same was true for many of God's NC people and religious leaders less than 40 yrs after Jesus' ascension – Rev 2:5, 16, 21-22, 3:3, 19⁸)

4.3. It represents the preparation (of the heart) or pre-requisite still necessary if a person is to receive Christ as Savior. (IOW): a person is NOT worthy (common vernacular = "good enough") to approach God for His grace/mercy in forgiveness or justification until they are repentant. Repentance therefore supports/establishes the doctrinal truths of: Lord Before Savior and Justice Before Mercy (1Ki 8:33-53; 2Chr 6:34-41; Psa 7:12, 51:17-19; Isa 1:27, 66:1-5; Eze 18:27-32; Amo 5:21-27; Mat 4:17, 10:37-38; Mar 1:15, 6:12; Luk 13:3-5, 14:25-35, 15:19-24, 19:8-10; Act 2:38, 3:19, 17:30)

4.4. It was not sufficient to save. (IOW): People still needed to be baptized into Jesus to enter into the New Covenant and receive His justification (e.g. Act 18:24-19:5).

5. John the Baptist's warning is also a direct repudiation of the idea that the NC relationship we gain w/God is unconditional or immutable since he:

5.1. Is preparing these Jews to enter into the NC. (IOW): It is the conditions of the NC – not the OC, that he is proclaiming (3 – "prepare the way of the Lord" = NC; Mal 3:1 – "messenger of the covenant in whom you delight" = NC; Luk 3:18)

5.2. Continues to require the condition of repentance (which incl. faithful and full obedience to God's Law), (1-2, 8; Mal 4:4).

5.3. Reveals that God's covenant people are still susceptible to a "wrath to come" (7 - "the Pharisees and Sadducees" were Jews already in covenant w/God; Heb 10:28-30).

5.4. Makes it clear that a person's covenant standing/relationship w/God can be revoked and given to others if it is not maintained through faithful fruit bearing (9-10 = God's judgment is close at hand for OC Israel. He is ready to remove those from His people who are disobedient/unjust/unrepentant and replace them with those who are obedient/practicing justice/repentant; again Rom 11:19-22; Mat 21:43)

5.5. Confirms that Jesus' NC ministry was characterized by intolerance, excommunication and eternal damnation of unrepentant/disobedient/unjust covenant members. His role as Messiah would therefore include that of Judge and Enforcer (11-12 – "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" = Not a reference to Christian baptism since the HS was not given in baptism until after Jesus' ascension; "...and fire...His winnowing fork is in His hand...the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." = The entire statement is rather an allusion to (Mal 4:1-3 and Isa 4:4). IOW: This is not about conversion but condemnation. Once more, this is the context of John's words, warning of coming judgment to OC Israel – see again v10 – "the axe is already laid at the root").

6. John's purpose in baptizing Jesus was to officially christen/coronate/anoint Him as the Messiah/Christ (Joh 1:29-34).

7. Jesus' purpose in being baptized by John was not repentance, but rather to vicariously (i.e. as a substitute):

7.1. Repeat redemptive/salvation history's deliverance via water as the new representative of God's people (Gen 22:16-18 w/Gal 3:15-16 w/Isa 42:6, 49:6-8; Israel = Exo 14 w/1Co 10:1-2; As it re: to deliverance by water consider also Gen 6:9-8:22 w/1Pe 3:20-21)

7.2. Take the sins of those who are (repentant). (IOW): He was fulfilling the role of Israel's scapegoat (13-15 – "it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" = to see that all the requirements related to making people righteous/atoning for their sin are carried out/completed; see Lev 16:1-10, 15, 21-22, 29-31, 34 w/Mat 4:1; Joh 1:29; 2Co 5:21; Isa 53:6).

8. Jesus' baptism in becoming our sin-bearer gained Him both the authority of the Holy Spirit and the Father (16-17):

8.1. Authority to forgive sins (Mat 9:1-8 w/Luk 5:21 = authority to forgive sins)

8.2. Authority to bind/loose people from/in sin's power -i.e. justice and mercy (Isa 42:1; Mat 12:22-32)

8.3. Authority to speak on God's behalf (Mat 17:5 w/Act 3:22 w/Deu 18:18-19)

8.4. Authority to grant salvation (Luk 19:9; Joh 5:26-29, 6:47-54, 10:27-30, 17:1-2)⁹.

⁷ Though modern commentators tend to zero in on the word "vipers" as the heart of John's insult against these religious leaders due to the Scripture's negative view of snakes/serpents (cf. Gen 3); it may actually be the word "brood" (lit. children) which carries the real force. According to historian Herodotus (5th cent. B.C.), the popular view in ancient times was that newborn Arabian snakes (or vipers) eat their way out of the womb thus killing their mothers during birth. (Herod. *Histories*). This coupled with the fact that ancient peoples considered such parent-murder to be one of the crimes most deserving of the fires of hell (i.e. God's wrath), means that what John is doing is far more than showing his disrespect and disdain for these men. He is also exposing how their current standing w/God was being affected by their heretical views regarding their spiritual birth (i.e. b/c they were born into the OC family of Abraham they were secure in their salvation, 9 – "Do not presume to say to yourselves we have Abraham as our father"). Instead, they (in the same manner as Arabian vipers) were destroying (or eating up) what they had gained through their spiritual birth (and standing w/God) by their unrepentant, antinomian/lawless living. As such, the state of Israel's leaders (and the Judaism they represented) was one of serious sin and heresy that – if not repented of, would result in excommunication and ultimately apostasy (cf. Mat 21:43; Rom 11:20; 1Th 2:16).

⁸ It is the pastors/religious ldrs in each of these churches that are the focus of Christ's call for repentance (Rev 2:1, 12, 18 - "To the angel of the church" = senior pastor, Rev 1:20 w/Dan 12:3). Their unrepentance may be the reason for what followed: empire-wide persecution of Christians (64-68 A.D.), since this is God's response when the leaders of the covenant community have also become corrupt (e.g. Assyrian conscription, Babylonian exile and destruction, Roman occupation and annihilation in 70 A.D.).

⁹ Jesus has conferred the same authority to His church: Forgive/Loose/Bind = Mat 16:19, 18:15-20; Speak for God = Mat 10:14-15 w/Act 15:28; Grant Salvation = Mat 28:18-20 w/1Pe 3:21.