

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 70.1%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Luke 3:1 - 2

Monday: Matthew 3:1 – 6, Mark 1:1 – 6 & Luke 3:3 – 6

Tuesday: Matthew 3:7 – 10 & Luke 3:7 – 14

Wednesday: Matthew 3:11 – 12, Mark 1:7 – 8 & Luke 3:15 – 18

Thursday: Matthew 3:13 – 17, Mark 1:9 – 11 & Luke 3:21 – 22

Friday: Matthew 4:1 – 11, Mark 1:12 – 13 & Luke 4:1 – 13

Saturday: John 1:19 – 28

Current # of email addresses in the group: 720

Happy Sabbath everyone. I hope you are enjoying the study and finding it useful in your lives. This week we get into the first series of parallel accounts. I will tend to go through one book and then only the verses from the parallel accounts that bring out something different than the account we already covered.

We will continue to do a number of word-studies this week. I hope these Greek word studies don't feel too much. I'm trying to cover important words early in the New Testament so we can build on these concepts as we move through the rest of the Bible. Additionally, I spent quite a bit of time researching what certain words meant to the Greek world before they became a religious word. I find this helpful to understand what words would have meant to the average person reading the Gospel account for the first time in the Greek world. I hope you find these helpful.

I received a handful of questions this week, which I like, but I'm finding it difficult to get to them. This program is taking me approximately 3 to 4 days to put together, in addition to my other ministerial responsibilities, and I'm just out of time. I will do my best to respond to questions as I can.

I want to again thank Elder Lud Kiramidjian who also is spending a lot of time each week editing and offering excellent additions or clarifying statements. I'm sure he also didn't realize what a time-consuming effort this would be for him too, but I can assure you, the program is better because of his tremendous help.

Lastly, I also want to say a special thank you to Ken Graham who helped me improve a particular section in Friday's reading.

I hope you enjoy this next week!

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep>

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH

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3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 110

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 743 – SUNDAY: November 23rd

Luke 3:1 – 2

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 1 - We should notice Luke's incredible attention to details and titles, that would be used by his Gentile readers to verify the accuracy of his account. This has all been verified as accurate historically.

In our previous readings, we saw Augustus (Octavius) was Caesar. Now he has been succeeded by Caesar Tiberius. Tiberius reigned from 14 to 37 A.D. He was the Caesar during Jesus Christ's adult life.

He was the adopted son of Augustus.

In his early years, he was a capable military commander, who reluctantly accepted the role of emperor and generally maintained the stability and structure Augustus had built. His reign was marked by administrative efficiency, expansion of the imperial treasury, and a cautious—often suspicious—leadership style. In the latter part of his rule, Tiberius withdrew from Rome to the island of Capri, which allowed corrupt officials to gain influence and create an atmosphere of fear and political intrigue.

Tiberius' rule had an indirect but significant impact on Judea. As emperor, he continued Rome's overall strategy of maintaining order in the provinces while extracting taxes and affirming Roman authority. Under Tiberius, Judea governance shifted between Roman prefects and local rulers like Herod Antipas and Philip. One of his most consequential administrative decisions for Judea was confirming Pontius Pilate as prefect (which we will cover in the next paragraph). Overall, Tiberius'

reign fostered a fragile stability: Rome kept peace through firm control, while Judea simmered with resentment, setting the stage for the volatile environment into which Jesus preached and was ultimately executed.

Regarding the fifteenth year of Tiberius' reign. If we simply would add fifteen to 14 A.D., we come to around 29 A.D., however, most commentaries I read, assume this is counting from when he became joint emperor.

Adam Clarke's commentary: "This was the fifteenth of his principality and thirteenth of his monarchy: for he was two years joint emperor, previously to the death of Augustus." [END QUOTE]

JFB commentary: "reckoning from the period when he was admitted, three years before Augustus' death, to a share of the empire" [END QUOTE]

This would place us around 27 A.D. which lines us for Jesus to be executed in 31 A.D.

Pontius Pilate served as the Roman prefect (governor) of Judea from roughly 25 or 26 A.D. to about 35 or 36 A.D. He was appointed by Emperor Tiberius. As a prefect, he held military authority, oversaw tax collection, and maintained public order (responsibilities that often brought him into conflict with the Jewish population). Historians portray Pilate as a harsh, inflexible ruler who struggled to understand or respect Jewish religious sensitivities. Early in his tenure he provoked outrage by bringing military standards bearing the emperor's image into Jerusalem, and later by using Temple funds to build an aqueduct. When protests broke out, Pilate responded with force, further damaging his reputation. Yet at other times he showed a political caution that suggests he feared stirring unrest significant enough to draw rebuke from Rome.

Pilate would oversee the trial of Jesus Christ. We'll see later in our reading that Pilate is caught between assessing that Jesus Christ was

innocent --- yet feeling the pressure of the Jewish people/leaders, and fearing that releasing Jesus might look disloyal to Rome. The decision to crucify Jesus shows his inability to administer true justice and his political maneuvering.

Herod Antipas was a son of Herod the Great and ruler of Galilee and Perea during the entire public ministry of Jesus. As a tetrarch (which Thayers says means “ruler over a fourth part of a country”), he governed a quarter of his father’s former kingdom under Roman oversight. Antipas is known for his ambitious building projects—most notably the city of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee which was designed to strengthen his political standing and please Rome. In the New Testament, he appears as a shrewd but morally compromised leader. As we’ll cover in more detail later, he arrested and ultimately executed John the Baptizer for challenging his unlawful marriage to Herodias. Though not as brutal as his father, Antipas exemplified the political maneuvering and spiritual blindness common among the Herodian rulers. His long reign shaped the social and political environment in which much of Jesus’ teaching and miracles took place.

Philip the Tetrarch, another son of Herod the Great, ruled the largely Gentile regions northeast of the Sea of Galilee—Iturea, Trachonitis, Batanea, and Auranitis. Unlike his brothers, Philip had a reputation for being a mild and just ruler, maintaining stability and treating his subjects with relative fairness. He promoted Greco-Roman culture through city-building, especially in Caesarea Philippi (formerly Paneas) and Bethsaida Julias, yet he did so without provoking the intense Jewish resentment that marked other Herodian rulers. Though he appears only indirectly in the New Testament, his governance contributed to the broader political landscape surrounding Jesus’ ministry and the early movement. Philip’s peaceful administration stands in contrast to the turmoil found in Judea and Galilee.

Lysanias of Abilene is the most obscure of the rulers listed in Luke 3:1. His territory, Abilene, lay northwest of Damascus in the mountain region. For many years critics claimed Luke made a mistake here, since an earlier Lysanias — executed around 36 B.C.— is mentioned in historical sources. However, inscriptions discovered near Abila confirm that a later Lysanias (or a descendant bearing the same name) ruled as tetrarch during the early first century A.D. Luke's reference shows that the Gospel writer was attentive to the political realities of the time. Naming Lysanias underscores Luke's objective to anchor the ministries of John the Baptizer and Jesus Christ in precise historical context.

Verse 2 – When we look in the Old Testament, we only ever see that God made one-person High Priest. In all instances, we see that God establishes one individual and transfers that responsibility to one individual. Additionally, we see the term used in the Hebrew is always singular. (Compare Exodus 28:1, Leviticus 16:1 – 2, 32 – 34, Numbers 20:25 – 28). Joshua 20:6, shows this appointment was until death. Additionally, we see only one Ephod to be worn (Exodus 28 & 29). Only one person is allowed to enter the Holy of Holies (Leviticus 16:17) Whenever more than one appears (e.g., Abiathar and Zadok serving together), only one is recognized by God as legitimate, while the other is a political appointment or an unofficial assistant.

There is just no concept of co-high priests.

So are there really two high priests at this time (Annas and Caiaphas) or is something else going on?

We can see in history, almost 200 years before, around 175 B.C., Antiochus IV Epiphanes openly *sold* the office to the highest bidder. This is explicitly recorded in 2 Maccabees 4:7–10 where it states: *“Jason the brother of Onias obtained the high priesthood by corrupt means, promising the king at an interview three hundred sixty talents of silver...”*

“...and he further promised to pay a hundred and fifty more if authority were given him...” [END QUOTE]

Later in 2 Maccabees 4:23–27 it details how Menelaus outbids Jason for the high priestly office, offering even more money to Antiochus IV. Jewish historian Josephus also records both of these in Antiquities 12.5.1 – 4.

This marked the first time we can see that the high priesthood was purchased like other political offices.

We also see that it went to men who were not of the priestly line.

Later (approximately 63 B.C.), when Pompey conquered Judea, Rome took control of the priesthood. They began appointing high priests, removing them as they liked, and frequently appointing men loyal to Rome. All of this worked together to destroy the idea that the high priest was a divinely appointed position by God for life.

As we move up to the time of Christ, we see Herod the Great removes and replaces the high priest at least 6 times.

Rome installs Annas as high priest in 6 A.D. And it seems that the high priest role becomes the “family business”. There was a lot of money to be made associated with being the high priest as they controlled the financial activity of the Temple. With all the activities associated with selling animals for sacrifices, exchanging money and charging exorbitant exchange rates, a big money business has been established at the Temple by this time. Annas is described by historian Josephus as “The most fortunate of men... enriched by the spoils of the people.”

After Annas, his son is high priest, followed by son-in-law Joseph Caiaphas (who holds the position from 18 to 36 A.D.). He would be followed by 4 more sons of Annas, and even a grandson. It stays in the family a long time.

So when Luke 3:2 states that “Annas and Caiaphas were high priests”, it was known well that Caiaphas was the “official” high priest, but Annas, his father-in-law, was still a powerful force and still very influential, retaining much of his influence, as the previous high priest, and seems

may still be seen by the Jewish people at the time as who should still be high priest, not Caiaphas. Either way, this seems to be why Luke is listing both as high priests.

Day 744 – MONDAY: November 24th

Matthew 3:1 – 6, Mark 1:1 – 6 & Luke 3:3 – 6

Daily Deep Dive:

Matthew 3:1 – John is called “the baptizer”. In Greek Baptistēs (Βαπτιστής) means to administer the practice of baptism (aka “a baptizer”. Baptize in the Greek means “to make fully wet”, “to immerse”, or “to submerge”. I point that out here to show that in that Greek language, the idea of “sprinkling” of a form of “baptism” would not even fit the definition of what the Greek word meant at the time, much less the symbolism of “burial” at baptism (Romans 6:4).

John came “preaching”. In Greek, this word means “heralding” or “proclaiming”. In both classical and Koine Greek a herald was a royal messenger who delivered proclamations with authority. SO this word translated “preaching” carries the nuance of authoritatively announcing a message on behalf of a king. Since it was a message from a higher authority and source, it demanded a response from those who heard the message.

Matthew 3:2 – What was the message of John the Baptizer? “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”. It’s important that we understand his message. He used the Greek word Metanoeite (Μετανοείτε). This word in Greek was in the 2nd person plural, present active imperative. This is important because the present imperative carries a continuous or ongoing force, not a one-time action. Repentance is not a one time thing we do, but is continuous and ongoing. But what is it we are really called to be doing continuously or in an ongoing manner? What did this word mean to those who heard? The Greek is formed from META (μετα) meaning “change” or

“transformation” (like used in our English word “metamorphosis”) and the second part “noeō” (νοέω) meaning “to understand, to perceive, to consider, to think, to have a mindset”. We all have things we think, what we understand, and this word in Greek means “to continuously change your way of thinking” or “in an ongoing way, to change your mindset”.

In the classical Greek, it didn’t mean to them to “repent from sins”, because there wasn’t an automatic moral or religious meaning to the word. To the average Greek person it meant to “To change one’s mind or opinion”, “To reconsider a previous decision”, “to regret an action”. In the New Testament, we see the word take on the deeper, spiritual meaning. To come to see actions and thoughts that go against God and His way, to therefore regret those actions/thoughts and to have a change of heart that leads to changed behaviors. Learning to turn away from sin, because your mind is being transformed.

This was of course always a biblical concept. In Hebrew they used the words נָחַם (nacham) which means “to regret, feel sorrow, be moved emotionally” and שׁוּב (shuv) meaning “to turn around, return to God”. These are both captured in the New Testament concept of the Greek Metanoeite (Μετανοείτε), where an individual changes their mind in such a way that they turn their whole life back towards God.

Then John adds that the “kingdom of Heaven is at hand”.

Remember, unlike the other Gospel writers, Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience who was reluctant to use the name of God out of a concern they might violate the Third Commandment of taking God’s name in vain. Matthew uses “Kingdom of Heaven” 32 times versus only using “Kingdom of God” 5 times.

The phrase, “is at hand” is often taken in the sense that it had arrived and is completed, but that’s not what the Greek word here means. The Greek ēngiken (ἤγγικεν) means “to draw near” or “to come near”, and

this particular form is in the perfect tense, indicating that it's a continuing state or ongoing result.

In classical Greek it was often used of approaching ships or armies. In Koine Greek, it commonly carried both "spatial" and "time" meanings. Spatially that something or someone was drawing near or had come near, and also that the "time had drawn near".

Jesus Christ was bringing both the message of the Kingdom of God/Heaven (as He personified that message), and the availability of the King of that Kingdom (Himself). He was the One through which humanity would be able to enter the Kingdom.

Combined with the Greek Metanoeite (repent), it was a call to put this message into immediate action, changing their lives to reflect their new and changed beliefs and commitment.

Matthew 3:3 – This verse quotes Isaiah 40:3. However, I would like to include all of Isaiah 40:1 to 5 here as I think the Bible literate would likely have thought of the entire section in its context: Isaiah 40:1 – 5 "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the LORD's hand Double for all her sins." The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see *it* together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

I would like to include something that Scott Ashley taught about this verse: "it's using a physical metaphor to explain a spiritual truth. And the physical metaphor, the picture, is this --- and the people would have understood this picture --- that when a king took office in those days, one of the first things he would do is tour his kingdom. He would

want to understand what's going on. What's the state of the union? What's the state of the kingdom? So, the king's officials would send out couriers to the villages and the cities along his planned route to tell the people to prepare the way --- in other words --- to prepare the roads for the coming king because he's coming --- he's going to take a tour --- he's going to see what's going on in his kingdom and see it all first hand. Now to use a modern analogy, same type of thing is often done if the President is coming to your local city or your town. What's going to happen? Well, the governor and the mayor are going to have the workers go out. They're going to patch the potholes. They're probably going to repave the whole street so it's nice fresh asphalt there. And that is essentially what is being said here. The king is coming. So go and fill in the potholes --- smooth out the road --- make it nice and level --- straighten out some of the curves so the road isn't as windy and twisty and narrow, and so on --- because this is how you prepare the way for the coming of the king. So that's the physical metaphor that Isaiah uses and Matthew picks up on here. But what does that mean spiritually? What is the application of this spiritually?

He tells people to repent so that they can be forgiven of their sins --- so that their hearts will be right to receive the message of salvation that the king, in this case Jesus the Messiah, will bring. And this is how John would carry out his message to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord, the Lord being Jesus Christ. It's not talking about straightening out physical roads like this. It's talking about straightening out hearts --- and straightening out human thinking --- so people will be prepared and receptive for the coming of the king. So, the question for us as members of the church is, how are we prepared for God the Father and Jesus Christ in our lives? Do they find an easy road --- that is smooth and that is open and that is inviting for them to work within us in our lives? Or do they find a road something like this one here that is rutted --- that is full of potholes and broken pavement --- and that's twisty and rocky and difficult to navigate? So that's the physical metaphor in the

spiritual lesson, the spiritual analogy that's given for us here.” [END QUOTE]

Matthew 3:4 – Why does Matthew want this information recorded about John the Baptizer?

There is an obvious connection being made between 2 Kings 1:8 where it describes the appearance of Elijah ("A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist.") and that is meant to identify John as a prophet like Elijah and an Elijah-like forerunner (compare Malachi 3 & 4).

Matthew makes this undeniable connection. He does this through symbolic clothing, diet, location, and lifestyle that the original Jewish audience would have instantly recognized.

I want to first dive into 2 Kings 1:8 to something I had never seen before in the Hebrew. The Hebrew word translated as “Hairy” is the word “šê`âr” (שֵׁעָר). It can refer to “a hairy garment” (mantel made from animal-hide) or “a man of hair” (wild-looking). The connection I had not noticed before is between this Hebrew word and Zechariah 13:4. In Zechariah 13:4 it ends with “...they will not wear a robe of coarse hair to deceive.”

Here again is the Hebrew “šê`âr” (שֵׁעָר) translated here as “coarse hair”. Adam Clarke’s commentary states: “A rough garment made of goats’ hair, coarse wool, or the coarse pile of the camel, was the ordinary garb of God’s prophets.”

Additionally, Adam Clarke adds this about Hebrews 11:37: “Sheepskins dressed with the wool on. This was probably the sort of mantle that Elijah wore, and which was afterwards used by Elisha; for the Septuagint, in 2Ki 2:8-13, expressly say: and Elijah took his Sheepskin (mantle.)” [END QUOTE]

John Gill’s commentary states: “such a hairy garment, or much like it, Elijah wore; hence he is called a hairy man, 2Ki 1:8 and John the Baptist, who came in the power and spirit of that prophet, appeared in a like habit, clothed with camel's hair, Mat 3:4 and in like manner good men, especially in times of distress and trouble, used to wander about

in sheepskins and goatskins, Heb 11:37 which seem to be the same sort of raiment:" [END QUOTE]

John's camel-hair garment unmistakably mirrors Elijah's prophetic attire. He deliberately adopted the Prophet Elijah's wardrobe to signal his role as the promised forerunner.

He's also wearing a belt around his waist just like in 2 Kings 1:8.

His diet consisted of locusts (which are a clean food in Leviticus 11:22) and wild honey. Adam Clarke's commentary states: "Such as he got in the rocks and hollows of trees, and which abounded in Judea: see 1Sa 14:26. It is most likely that the dried locusts, which are an article of food in Asiatic countries to the present day, were fried in the honey, or compounded in some manner with it."

John Gill states: "this was honey of bees, which were not kept at home, but such as were in the woods and fields;"

His diet seems to indicate his dependency on God to provide for him and the avoidance of luxury (which seems an important contrast to the high priests and the Sadducees that were wealthy elite class, far removed from the average Judean's life). John was the son of a priest (even his mother was of the line of Aaron). The priesthood status was based on the father's lineage (Compare Exodus 28–29; Numbers 3; Ezra 2:61–63). By birth, that makes John a priest. His ministry was to be intentionally outside of the Temple system. While a priest by birth, he was a prophet by God's calling. John's ministry seems to be a clear rejection of what the priesthood had become by the 1st century (corrupt).

John parallels Elijah that they both called on Israel to repent. Both confronted corrupt leadership (Herod vs Ahab).

So in all of this we see clearly in the Gospels that John was a type of Elijah (compare Matthew 11:14, 17:12–13), and the people would have picked up on the parallels. There are even more parallels between

Ahab and Jezebel versus Herod and Herodias. Maybe we will get more into this at a later time (we'll see).

Matthew 3:5 – In backing up this scripture, Jewish historian Josephus states: “Many people came in crowds to him, for they were greatly moved by his words.” (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.5.2)

Matthew 3:6 – The people were confessing their sins. What did the word translated “confessing” mean in the Greek --- and specifically before it became a religious word that we are used to?

Matthew uses the Greek exomologoumenoi (ἐξομολογούμενοι) here. Prior to becoming the religious word we use, it simply meant “To Acknowledge, Admit, or Concede”. In secular contexts it had no built-in moral meaning—it simply meant to *declare openly or admit openly*. Interestingly to me, additionally it had a secondary secular meaning of “to profess gratitude” or “to praise”. When the Psalms were translated from Hebrew to Greek in the Septuagint, many of the Psalms where it spoke about “giving thanks to God” or “confessing God’s greatness” uses this same Greek word for “confess”.

So, by this New Testament time, and with the moral/spiritual application, it meant “to openly declare or admit their sins”.

Mark 1:1 – As referenced already a couple times now, there was the Gospel of Augustus, already well known at the time that this competing Gospel is presented. The Gospel of August was a counterfeit to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

While Augustus was the adopted son of Julius Caesar, and since the Roman’s deified Julius Caesar, they believed Augustus to be a “son of a god”. Here Mark presents Jesus as the true Son of God (again counterfeit versus the true).

Mark 1:4 – Here we have another common religious word “remission” (KJV/NKJV). The Greek aphesin (ἄφεσιν) before it became a religious word meant “a letting go” or “a release”.

Before the New Testament, this Greek was used in four primary ways.

- To release from captivity or physical restraint (animals or people).
- Letting go, sending away, throwing something.
- Cancellation of obligations (legal or financial) – Release from a contract, a pledge or indebtedness
- Dismissal or sending someone away (like troops or an assembly).

When the Hebrew was taken into Greek (Septuagint), this word was used in connection with:

- Release in the year of Jubilee
- Forgiveness of sins

We can see how both Jesus and later New Testament writers build on these concepts connecting sin with debt, etc...

Luke 3:6 – Luke includes more of the Isaiah prophecy than Matthew or Mark, quoting the full Septuagint text of Isaiah 40:5 word-for-word. Some connect this line to Isaiah 52:10 (which is a valid scriptural reference), but Luke is clearly quoting word-for-word directly from the Greek Septuagint of Isaiah 40. This supports the conclusion that Luke—and very likely the other Gospel writers—regularly relied on the Septuagint. Greek was the dominant language of the Eastern Mediterranean, and Hebrew was not widely spoken among common Jews at this time, while Aramaic and Greek were.

Day 745 – TUESDAY: November 25th

Matthew 3:7 – 10 & Luke 3:7 – 14

Daily Deep Dive:

Matthew 3:7 - We've already covered the Pharisees and Sadducees in our first day of introduction to the New Testament.

John calls both of these groups in a general sense a "brood of vipers" (NKJV).

The word translated "brood" simply means "things produced". Jesus uses this to refer to "fruit" of the vine (Matthew 26:29, Luke 22:18).

When referring to mankind or animals, the idea would be "offspring".

In a figurative sense, it carried the idea of passing down of the "character" of someone. It's this figurative sense that John is using. So what was the nature or character they had and who were they offspring of?

John uses a word translated into NKJV as "vipers". The Greek echidnōn (ἐχιδνῶν), this word in the Greek culture had three main meanings.

One, was simply for a venomous snake (not just snake, but venomous).

Two, the ἔχιδνα (echidna) was in classic Greek mythology a primordial monster (existing from the beginning of time). She was half-woman and half-snake. This being was often referred to as the "mother of monsters", "Fearsome One", and "The Root of Serpents". In mythology she gave birth to many of the most infamous beasts including Cerberus (three-headed dog of Hades), Hydra, & Chimera.

This mythic background of this Greek word, gave it a double cultural meaning when applied to people of someone who was deadly, corrupt or had a monstrous side. Greeks associated the term with treachery, hidden danger, sudden attack, cunning behavior.

At the time John uses this word, it was among the strongest forms of public condemnation available.

In my mind, this Greek mythology brings together imagery of the cunning serpent of Genesis 3:1 which Revelation 12:9 & 20:2 identifies as the Devil and Satan, but also the Revelation 17 imagery of the "woman riding the beast". In many ways these religious leaders of Jesus Christ's day were of the same Babylon the Great system that has spread through our entire world down through time to today.

What was this “wrath to come” that John said these individuals were trying to flee?

The Jews would have understood this to mean “God’s Wrath to come” as connected with the “Day of the Lord”. In Isaiah it states: Isa. 13:9 “Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it.”; Isa. 13:11 “I will punish the world for *its* evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.”; and Isa. 13:13 “Therefore I will shake the heavens, And the earth will move out of her place, In the wrath of the LORD of hosts And in the day of His fierce anger.”

In Zephaniah 1:14 – 17 it states, “The great day of the LORD *is* near; *It is* near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and alarm Against the fortified cities And against the high towers. “I will bring distress upon men, And they shall walk like blind men, Because they have sinned against the LORD; Their blood shall be poured out like dust, And their flesh like refuse.”

These are just some of the scriptural references they would have known regarding God’s wrath and the Day of the Lord.

Now the imagery used here is that these venomous snakes are fleeing the wrath. Scott Ashley has mentioned that fires occasionally break out in these Jordan Valley & Judean Wilderness areas from lightning, and as the fires spread, out of all these rocks and cracks come slithering dessert vipers trying to escape the flames. That’s an interesting mental picture.

Matthew 3:8 – We spoke above about this idea of “repentance”, where individuals change their minds in such a way that they turn their whole life towards God. Here John adds that an individual should be “bearing

fruits” that are “worthy” or “befitting/congruous” with repentance. Once someone begins to rethink their actions and choices, and wants to now live differently, their lives should be showing that they are now choosing to live differently (compare Acts 26:20).

Matthew 3:9 – The Jews took a lot of pride that they were God’s special people as descendants of Abraham.

There is a well-recognized Aramaic word play that occurs in this verse. And while the Gospel was recorded for us in Koine Greek, this gives circumstantial evidence that John (and likely Jesus) often taught in Aramaic.

Now I’ve never studied Aramaic, so I’m taking the word of scholars who have.

In Aramaic the word play appears in the sentence: “God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.”

Aramaic for children: bānē

Aramaic for stones: ‘abnē

These words differ by only a small consonantal shift and sound very similar.

The pronunciation of these words are: “beh-NAY” “ahb-NAY”

The rhyme and consonant overlap would have made this memorable.

And the message would have been clear: God doesn’t need your pedigree. He can turn stones (‘abnē) into sons (bānē) if He wants to.

Interestingly, the word play exists in the Hebrew of this also.

אֶבֶן (‘*eben*) = stone

בֶּן (*ben*) = son

Rabbinic literature sometimes plays on *ben/eben* in wordplay about sons and stones, suggesting this was already a known pun in Jewish sacred rhetoric.

Matthew 3:10 – Here John moves from his previous idea of “bearing fruit worthy of repentance” and moves to a personal judgement of every tree that individually does not produce fruit is cut down and burned up. Jesus Himself would echo this teaching in Matthew 7:19, Matthew 12:33 & Luke 13:6 – 9.

Luke 3:7 – Here Luke records “multitudes” that Matthew recorded as the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Luke 3:10 – Notice the response of the people (the crowd) is to ask “what shall we do then?”. Essentially, they ask, what are the works or fruits worthy of repentance that we should be doing so we aren’t chopped down. John answers this in verse 11. His answer shows a clear principle we see throughout the Bible that I want to take a moment here to discuss, because we’ll continue to reference this often throughout the New Testament. Does God expect us to help everyone? Did Jesus Christ physically heal, feed and do miracles for everyone? No. How do we please God and know how to help others? The principle shown throughout the Bible is when the person is in our sphere (our area) of impact AND we have the means in which we can help, then God absolutely expects us to help. He never asks us to try to solve all the world’s and all people’s problems, but when we have what is necessary to help (whether money, time, resources, knowledge, etc...), and people come into our circle (our knowledge/awareness), God expects us to help. We’ll continue to develop this throughout this reading plan, but here notice the first example is someone who doesn’t have a covering garment, and they come to your attention and you have more than you absolutely need. You need one yourself, so you aren’t told to give them the one you need, otherwise you are now in need. But you are told to give what you have that you can spare. In this case, that is the extra tunic (covering garment). You might now be a bit colder and less comfortable, but you are both now in that place together, versus you comfortable, and they are in need. Same here

with the food. You become aware of someone who has no food, and you have more than you need to survive, God expects you to share. You may now be hungrier than you would otherwise have been, but you both survive and you've helped the person in your circle out of what you had to give.

Luke 3:12 – Then tax collectors come, and they too want practical help so they don't get "cut down". In verse 13 John tells them to do their job as Rome ordered (collecting taxes), but don't extract more from people than that. In other words, be fair with people.

Rome used a tax-farming structure, where wealthy individuals would bid for the right to collect taxes. They would then pay Rome up front for the taxes that would be due, and then collect taxes from the people. Anything they collected above the amount, they kept as profit.

This system built corruption into its structure. The more they squeezed from people, the more they earned. Rome rarely intervened --- as long as the money kept coming in. Tax collectors often charged more than the legal rate, invented various fees and processing costs and claimed Rome had raised tax rates when they really had not.

Additionally, as we see addressed throughout the Bible, they would cheat by manipulating scales and weights or manipulating records to show the individual had more grain, oil, etc...than was true. Travelers could face new "made up" tolls, for roads, bridges, markets, harbors, customs or military protection. Tax collectors would often hire local muscle or soldiers to threaten, and in some cases beat or detain individuals until they paid more. There are even recordings of deals between bandits and tax collectors, where bandits would terrorize travelers and then tax collectors would get them to pay for protection -- and then the two would split the profit. Lastly, tax collectors could lower taxes for friends and raise taxes for enemies. Due to all of this corruption, John simply told them to collect no more than they were appointed to collect. The job itself wasn't a problem, but they needed to be fair and just in collecting taxes.

Luke 3:14 – Now soldiers come to John to ask what they should do to please God. These local soldiers were known for corruption and brutality. I use the word “local” soldiers because these were likely not the Roman soldiers/legionnaires. Like tax collectors, these were likely local Jewish men who were part of the local law enforcement. They were under the control of the local rulers, governors, and administrators. Unlike Roman soldiers who were under the orders and direction of Rome, these were local soldiers (more similar to local police or deputies). This gave them access to the locals with very little oversight. When John responds, he uses the Greek μηδένα διασείσητε which literally means “Do not shake anyone down.” The typical method of these “shakedowns” were to demand payment, threaten to beat or arrest them, threaten to report them as rebels and to threaten to confiscate grain, oil, animals, etc... if they didn’t make the payment demanded.

John then used the Greek phrase “μηδὲ συκοφαντήσητε” which means “Do not extort through false charges.” These local soldiers could bring false charges of tax evasion, incomplete papers, accusations of insurrection or charging them for breaking some local regulation. Bribes for settling these false charges were a huge source of soldiers’ incomes. It was also common for soldiers to demand food, firewood, the use of an animal to carry them or equipment, or for the person to carry their gear (compare Matthew 5:41). They would sometimes seize someone’s personal belongings under the pretext of governmental authority, such as confiscating someone’s tools, animals, clothing, goods, etc... Sometimes they would promise to return it later after the need for it was finished, but that never happened. Beatings by soldiers were common. It’s true that soldiers made very little, even sometimes receiving partial or late wages themselves. These meager wages were ripe for breeding corruption. John the Baptizer’s message is be content with your meager wages and don’t do wrong to others.

John is clearly addressing issues that were common among tax collectors and these local soldiers.

Day 746 – WEDNESDAY: November 26th

Matthew 3:11 – 12, Mark 1:7 – 8 & Luke 3:15 – 18

Daily Deep Dive:

Let's begin first in Luke 3:15 – Luke adds this introduction that the other writers didn't capture. Due to the 70-weeks prophecy of Daniel 9:24 - 27, the Jewish people were looking for the Messiah. There was a Messianic anticipation that the Messiah would come and cast off the Roman occupation of their land and establish an everlasting Jewish kingdom. Luke clearly records that "all" the people were aware of John and his impact, and were reasoning whether he himself could be that promised Messiah.

Luke 3:16 – I'll remind you that on Monday this week I discussed that the word in Greek for baptism means "to fully immerse or submerge". I'll add a bit more here in the context of this verse. Prior to becoming a religious word, this was used in the Greek for baptizing (submerging) clothing into dye, a ship baptizing (sinking) in the water, and washing by immersion. It also carried the figurative meaning of being "overwhelmed" by circumstances. So, when we don't get caught up in the religious nature of the word today, we see John simply was saying that he was immersing them in water, but that in the context of those wondering if he was the Christ or not, that Another was coming who will immerse you "with the Holy Spirit and fire".

We can clearly see that the connection to baptism and the Holy Spirit pointed to the giving of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 on Pentecost after Jesus Christ had died, been resurrected and ascended to His Father in Acts 1. We want this baptism with the Holy Spirit --- as it is the Holy Spirit which is the down payment (promise) of our eternal life (Ephesians 1:13 – 14).

Why does John say “and fire”? This is another immersion, but we don’t want this one. We see this clearly explained in the next verse “the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire”. This is clearly laid out in Scripture as the second death through the lake of fire that completely overwhelms and consumes those who remain unrepentant (see Revelation 20:15).

In regards to John saying he was not worthy to loose the straps of the sandals of Jesus, we understand that John was demonstrating that he’s not able to be compared with the Christ. He didn’t want anyone to put him anywhere near the same level as the Messiah. In servant ranks and tasks, untying someone’s sandal was considered one of the most demeaning jobs possible in the Jewish and Greco-Roman world. Rabbis taught that their disciples could serve in many ways, but not in the task of removing his sandals. That job was reserved for the lowest of slaves/servants. This is actually captured in the Mishnah (“All manner of service a slave performs for his master, a disciple should perform for his teacher, except for the loosing of his sandal”). Matthew 11:11, Christ Himself will say “**among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist**”, yet here we see that John wants everyone to clearly understand, he’s not worthy to do the very lowest of acts for the Messiah by comparison.

Luke 3:17 - In the 1st century, winnowing was a familiar image. After grain was harvested, it was brought to a threshing floor (a flat, hard, elevated surface) exposed to steady winds. The farmer would first thresh the wheat by beating or trampling it to break the kernels free from the husks. Using a winnowing fork (a large wooden pitchfork), he would toss the mixture of grain and chaff into the air. The heavy wheat would fall straight back to the floor, while the light chaff—the worthless, hollow husks—would be carried away (and separated) by the breeze. The farmer would repeat this process over and over until only the true useful grain remained. It was a vivid picture of separation,

distinction, and final sorting of two groups. The gathering of the wheat into His barn reflects God's salvation and protection, while the burning of the chaff "with unquenchable fire" points to irreversible judgment (lake of fire).

Luke 3:18 – On Monday, for Matthew 3:1/Luke 3:3, we talked about the word used there in the Greek translated "preached" which meant to "herald" or "proclaim" on behalf of a king. Here in Luke 3:18, we have a completely different word also translated "preached". Here it's the Greek euēngelizeto (εὐηγγελίζετο) which is closely related to the Greek word for "gospel" or "good news" (euangelion - εὐαγγέλιον). This word here means "announcing the gospel" or "proclaim good news".

This word used here in this verse for "exhortation" is from the same Greek word-family where Barnabas is called the Son of Encouragement. Exhortation is a good translation, but so also would be, "to encourage", "to comfort", or "to urge strongly". In all of this, John was encouraging, and strongly urging action by proclaiming the Gospel (Good News)!

Matthew 3:11 – Here instead of saying "unloosed" like we saw in Luke, Matthew records, "whose sandals I am not worthy to carry" (NKJV).

John Gill's commentary on this difference states: "which amounts to the same sense, since shoes are unloosed in order to be taken from, or carried before or after a person; which to do was the work of servants among the Jews."

Day 747 – THURSDAY: November 27th

Matthew 3:13 – 17, Mark 1:9 – 11 & Luke 3:21 – 22

Daily Deep Dive:

Matthew 3:14 – 15: John responds likely how anyone understanding that he is a sinner, and here is God's Son, the Messiah, and He wants John to baptize Him? John realizes that he needs to be baptized by Jesus for his own personal sins. But Jesus is sinless. Why does He need to get baptized?

"Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

No human has ever lived under the law and been perfect besides Jesus Christ. He therefore is the personification of righteousness. We see two places in Jeremiah, that He is literally called "The Lord our Righteousness" (Compare Jeremiah 23:5 – 6 & Jeremiah 33:15 – 16).

The word used here in Matthew 3:15 for "fulfilled" comes from the root word plēroō (πληρώω) which means "to make full", "to complete by filling". For Christ to bring all righteousness to its completely full sense, He had to do EVERYTHING right. Even the slightest thing not right in its fullest sense would mean that He wasn't perfectly righteous. Just as it was right for Him to be physically circumcised under the Abrahamic Covenant, so too was it right for Him to be spiritually circumcised as would be required for His followers called by His name and to lead by example (compare Colossians 2:11 – 13).

Matthew 3:16 – 17: Matthew, Mark and Luke all record two specific things that I want to notate here. First, heavens (plural) were opened. Both Matthew and Luke use a simple verb meaning "to open". However, Mark uses a different word that means "to split, tear, rip, rend apart". This contains a more violent and sudden nuance. By the use of this word, it appears Mark wanted those reading his account to feel this dramatic moment. All three of these same Gospel writers use the same verb that Mark uses here for "splitting/tearing/ripping" when the veil in the Temple, before the Holy of Holies, was "rent" (Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38 & Luke 23:45). Mark uses the same idea here, that the heavens were ripped/torn apart.

Mark seems to capture the heart of Isaiah 64:1 where it states "Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! ..." In this moment they hear a voice claiming Jesus as God's Son. We've already talked about Immanuel meaning "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). In this moment, God (the Word) has literally come down to us.

Secondly, in this moment, God makes the Holy Spirit visible, and in these three Gospel accounts, they describe it as if it looked like a physical dove fluttering down and coming upon (alighting upon) Jesus Christ. This moment brought fulfillment to the following prophecies of Isaiah:

- Isaiah 11:2 – “The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.”
- Isaiah 42:1 – “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”
- Isaiah 61:1 – “The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;”

Not only has John the Baptizer declared the identity of Jesus, but here God serves as a Witness that Jesus is His divine Son, beloved and pleasing to Him (compare Psalm 2:7). He now has the authority to carry out His ministry.

I want to add that in John 5:37 Jesus stated “**And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.**”

With permission from Scott Ashley, as a supplement to this week’s readings, I’m attaching an additional 7-page PDF this week from Scott Ashley where he looks at the voice from heaven and how that works with John 5:37.

Day 748 – FRIDAY: November 28th

Matthew 4:1 – 11, Mark 1:12 – 13 & Luke 4:1 – 13

Daily Deep Dive:

Matthew 4:1 – By God’s very design, Jesus was led into the wilderness where He was to be “tempted” (NKJV). The word translated “tempted” in Greek is peirasthēnai (πειρασθῆναι). Prior to becoming a religious associated word, it was used in the following ways:

- in relation to a person, an idea or an object to determine its quality, truthfulness or ability.
- A general challenge of skill or strength, such as warriors testing each other, or an examiner testing a student.
- Testing of tools, weapons, medicines or strategies for their effectiveness.
- To be attempted.

Generally, when applied to a person, the idea was simply that something or someone is put through an experience that reveals what is true of them (a test of quality, loyalty, strength, reliability, or character). Very simply it was a “proving test”.

Hebrews 4:15 uses the word-family (different word tense) to say: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin.” Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, has gone through the same “proving test” that we also go through. Christ did this perfectly, and we are so thankful that He did, because it allowed Him to pay our penalty for sin.

Here we are also introduced to the term “devil” (διαβόλου - diabolou) for the first time. The term originally in Greek was not a title of an evil being. It was a common Greek word meaning “a slanderer”, “accuser”, “one who speaks falsely to harm another”. Aristotle used the term regarding a person who “twists facts” to deceive a judge or audience. Here God allows Satan, known by these qualities, to put Jesus through a series of “proving tests”. In this moment, Jesus would be tried and tested to be revealed to handle these tests without missing the mark/without sinning. Satan the Devil, had hoped to have something that he could use to slander Jesus Christ. He failed.

Matthew 4:2 – We should notice that even the Son of God, first drew close to God through fasting.

For anyone wanting to dive deeper into this often-neglected spiritual power tool, I gave two sermons on this in early 2023:

<https://www.ucg.org/sermons/christian-fundamentals-fasting-101>

<https://www.ucg.org/sermons/christian-fundamentals-fasting-102>

I always laugh when I read “afterward He was hungry”. Yeah, I would imagine He was after fasting 40 days. Perhaps one of the Bibles’ biggest understatements. It also shows that He felt hunger just like the rest of us while fasting. He was fully human and needed food just like the rest of us. The Greek can mean extreme hunger, near starvation, that He was literally famished. However, here God miraculously sustained Him as He drew close to God as God had previously done for Moses and Elijah. Now, is it a coincidence that Jesus Christ, Moses and Elijah all fasted exactly 40 days? No. Any Jew hearing that Jesus Christ fasted 40 days, would have immediately thought of these two people. In Deuteronomy 18:18 the Lord had prophesized: “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.” They would also have thought of 1 Kings 19:1 – 8 where Elijah went without food for 40 days. These were two great prophets of God.

Matthew 4:3 – Here it calls Satan the Devil the “Tempter”. This is same root word that we talked about in verse 1 about “tempted”. But here Satan is identified as the one carrying out this “proving test”.

Before we dive into the temptations, I want to address up front that people will be critical of the Gospel accounts due to the fact that the temptations recorded in Luke and Matthew are in a different order. This is intentional. Matthew records the order as: Bread → Temple → Kingdom. Luke records the order as: Bread → Kingdom → Temple. We in the Western cultures are used to a story told through Chronological

order. However, in Eastern culture they often teach according to the message they are emphasizing utilizing a topical order. Matthew, speaking to a Jewish audience, is emphasizing Jesus as the King of the Kingdom. He ends with the Kingdom temptation. Luke however has a very Temple centric focus. He begins with Zacharias in the Temple. Luke ends in the Temple. For Luke the Temple temptation is last because Jerusalem is the theological climax of his writing.

The NKJV Bible, as well as almost everyone other translation I looked at begins this first temptation with “IF You are the Son of God”.

Often this has been used to show how Satan was trying to “get under Jesus skin” or “try to stir up pride in Jesus Christ”. Most would agree that it’s ridiculous to assume that Satan would not have already clearly known the identity of Jesus Christ, after all, if humans heard the voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism declaring Him the Son of God, then certainly Satan would have heard/known this as well. So then the assumption from there is that since Satan knew, then this is an attempt by Him to further tempt Jesus to sin. That’s how I read the passage in English as well.

However, after looking at the Greek here closely, and spending a lot of time this week studying into it, I no longer believe that is the case. I would like to present another possibility, and the one that I now believe is the most likely. In both Matthew 4:3 and 4:6, the Greek says “Εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ Θεοῦ...” It uses εἰ + indicative which denotes what in Koine Greek is called a “first class condition”. This is a grammatical structure that presents a condition that is assumed to be true for the sake of the argument. The speaker treats that condition as true in order to make their next point. In English we would typically say, “Since that is true, ...” Greek does not use this “first class condition” to say “IF (and I’m casting doubt on whether that is true) You are the Son of God...”. You can find the same Greek form (“first class condition”) used in the following:

Matthew 6:30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith?

Luke 12:28 If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more *will He* *clothe* you, O *you* of little faith?

Matthew 7:11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Luke 11:13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Matthew 12:27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges.

John 7:23 If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?

John 10:35 If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken),

John 13:14 If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

John 13:32 If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

I use a lot of examples here of this Greek "first class condition" (and this isn't a comprehensive list of the New Testament) to demonstrate that in every one of these cases, the "if" means "since". In each of these, you could replace "if" with "since".

For example, in the case of Matthew 12:27, a few verses before in verse 24, the Pharisees had said that Jesus casts out demons by Beelzebub and then in verse 27, Jesus essentially says, "Since I cast out demons by

Beelzebub (and that's where I get my power and authority to do so), who does that mean your sons cast them out?". Christ is saying, let's assume for a minute your argument is true. Then how would this also be true?

Before I move on from this deep dive into Greek "first class conditions". I want to thank Ken Graham who has previously studied Greek in higher education for sharing his thoughts and providing to me more examples from scripture. I reached out to him today after doing my research this week, and shared with him my conclusions. He shared many of these scriptural examples, that I highlighted above, from a clause in the "BDAG (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament" where "if" can be translated "since". Ken Graham also included a note that he "would cautiously suggest that "since" might be better for our understanding in Mat. 4:3". The BDAG Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament is considered the "gold standard" Greek to English Lexicon. In further looking at this lexicon this evening, it sites Matthew 4:3 as "expressing a condition thought of as real".

While most Bible translations use the word "if", just as they do in all the passages I included above, the International Standard Version (ISV) of Matthew 4:3 says "Since you are the Son of God,". The Wuest Bible, which takes the Greek and uses as many words as they believe is necessary to capture the correct Greek meaning states in Mathew 4:3 "In view of the fact that you are Son of God". I personally now believe this is the most accurate way to understand Matthew 4:3 and 4:6.

In the first temptation here, Satan commands Jesus to try to do a miracle that would be self-serving.

In the Greek, Satan is not asking a question, or testing the identity of Jesus, or even issuing a polite suggestion. Instead, it's written in the "aorist imperative", "command", "speak", "give the order" "so that these stones become bread." It's 100% a command with forceful

language. It's not exploratory, or hypothetical, nor a test of identity. It's as if Satan is saying "Use Your power. You're the Son. Command it to be done."

Satan wants Jesus to listen to him, not to trust His Father. Satan wants Jesus to act apart from God's Will. To focus on the physical over the spiritual.

Christ responds with God's Word. And this is an important lesson for all of us when we face temptation and trials (proving events). We too should base our response on God's Word. Here Jesus quotes a portion of Deuteronomy 8:3 where it says "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

By His response, Jesus shows He looks to the Father, who allows hunger for a purpose, and that He will not elevate the physical over the spiritual. This scripture directly opposed what Satan wanted Christ to do in every way.

Matthew 4:5 – Regarding this "pinnacle" that the devil took Jesus to, the Adam Clarke's commentary states: "It is very likely that this was what was called the στοα βασιλικη, the king's gallery; which, as Josephus says, "deserves to be mentioned among the most magnificent things under the sun: for upon a stupendous depth of a valley, scarcely to be fathomed by the eye of him that stands above, Herod erected a gallery of a vast height, from the top of which if any looked down, he would grow dizzy, his eyes not being able to reach so vast a depth." - Ant. I. xv. c. 14." [END QUOTE]

I learned from Scott Ashley that somewhere around 1968 Professor Benjamin Mazar was excavating around the Temple area and found a very finely worked stone with a Hebrew inscription that said clearly

“The place of trumpeting for...”. The rest of the inscription was broken off. Josephus talks about a place atop the temple platform where a priest would blow a trumpet to announce the beginning and end of the Sabbath and the Holy Days. This location where this trumpet would have been blown was around 120 to 130 feet up and looked over nearly all the city of Jerusalem.

There are other ideas as well, and ultimately, we aren’t sure where this pinnacle was that Christ was taken up to.

Matthew 4:6 – Again this would be better translated “since” (not “if). Similar to verse 3, Satan again issues an “aorist imperative” command to “throw Yourself down” and this time Satan adds scripture into the mix. While Satan quotes from Psalm 91:11 – 12, I’ll paste from verse 9 for the sake of the full context. Psalm 91:9 – 12 states: “Because you have made the LORD, *who is* my refuge, *Even* the Most High, your dwelling place, No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. In *their* hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.” [END]

Satan is essentially stating that “since you are the Son of God, and therefore obviously the Most High is Your dwelling place, certainly the Most High would never let anything bad happen to you, and remember how Psalms says His angels will protect you.”

This is also proof that Satan knows what the Scriptures say.

It’s interesting that Satan seems to purposely omit the part in the middle, which says “to keep you in all your ways”. That’s the whole point of why God give His angels charge over us.

Jesus again quotes from God’s Word in Deuteronomy 6:16. I again want to include the greater context of the quote, because it more specifically addresses serving other gods, but should specifically obey only God.

Deuteronomy 6:14 – 18 states “You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who *are* all around you (for the LORD your God *is* a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the LORD your God be

aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth. "You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted *Him* in Massah. You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. And you shall do *what is* right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you," [END QUOTE]

Matthew 4:9 – In John 14:30, Jesus Himself refers to Satan as the “ruler of this world”. Satan has real authority over this world. Jesus never contradicts Satan that He could have given Jesus authority over the kingdoms of this world. In Luke 4:6 – Luke records the Devil as saying “for *this* (authority) has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish”.

Here Satan reveals what He is truly after. He wants Jesus, and ultimately all of mankind, to bow down and worship Him. Satan is offering Jesus a way to authority and power under him without having to be sacrificed and die.

Matthew 4:10 – Since this is the first time we’ve come across the Greek word for “Satan” (Satana - Σατανᾶ·) in the New Testament, I’ll mention that the Greek word is simply a transliteration of the Hebrew (שָׂטָן — satan). The meaning is “adversary, accuser, opponent, one who obstructs or opposes.” It can be used for the specific angelic being Lucifer, or it can be used in a more general way denoting someone who acting as an “adversary”. It’s used in this more general way in 1 Samuel 29:4 and 1 Kings 11:14.

For a third time, Jesus responds to Satan’s temptation with a scripture from Deuteronomy. Here he references Deuteronomy 6:13 where it says “You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him...”

Matthew 4:11 – Here the Devil leaves (compare James 4:7) and God sends angels to “minister” to Jesus. This word “minister” in the Greek

is a form of the word diakoneō (διακονέω) and it means to “to serve”, “an attendant”, “to wait upon someone”. This is the verb of the word that we get the noun of “deacon” or “deaconess” from. I’ve heard more than one person in the church say that the term “deaconess” is unbiblical. That’s not true. This term is applied in Romans 16:1 about “Phoebe our sister, who is a “servant” (diakonon – δίακονον) of the church. So here Matthew 4:11, God sent angels to serve and attend to Jesus Christ.

Mark 1:12 – Mark includes that “immediately” after Jesus Christ was baptized, the Holy Spirit “drove” Him into the wilderness.

Mark 1:13 – He makes no mention of fasting, and seems to just sum up that all of this happened over a 40-day period. He does include a new detail that isn’t included in Luke or Matthew that Jesus was with wild animals. This detail makes it clear that Jesus is in a uninhabited part of the land, separate from other people during this period of time.

Luke 4:2 – Both Luke and Mark include that Jesus was tempted FOR 40 days. Its perhaps probable that we do not have recorded in the Gospel accounts all of the temptations that Jesus went through. For Hebrews 4:15 to make the statement “was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin” it’s possible that not all of the temptations are included, but only some representative temptations for our education and that through the entire 40 days, Satan put Jesus through many tests. Adding to that likelihood, is how Luke ends his record of these events with “when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.”

Here the word “every” in the Greek is panta (πάντα) and it means “all,” “every,” “every kind of,” “the whole.” It certainly doesn’t mean every possible temptation ever, but means the “full range of temptations”.

Day 749 – SATURDAY: November 29th

John 1:19 – 28

Daily Deep Dive:

John 1:19 – As Josephus recorded, John has created quite a stir (he's very popular). The religious leaders in Jerusalem dispatch a group to figure out who is this guy.

John 1:20 – John used a common mode of Jewish phraseology to refute any idea that he was the Messiah (a well-known Hebrew idiom carried into Greek). He emphasized his point by 1) repeating the idea, 2) stating a positive, 3) then reinforced with the negative opposite and 4) restating the positive again.

This is not redundancy to the Jewish ear, it signals strong, formal, solemn affirmation.

It's a form of Hebrew legal speak, intended here by John to remove any possibility for misunderstanding or deception.

To claim to be the Christ was both legally & religiously serious, and politically dangerous. John used language that was considered "airtight" in Jewish testimony style.

John 1:21 – The Jews were looking for "THE" Elijah to come before the Christ (compare Malachi 4:5). They also were looking for a prophet like Moses (compare Deuteronomy 18:15, 18).

John was a type of Elijah, but he wasn't "the" Elijah. He's dressed like him, he was a type of him, but again, he was not Elijah. Scripture doesn't record how Elijah died but he was taken up into a whirlwind into the sky and disappeared from the people (2 Kings 2:11). Now we know he didn't go to heaven where God is at that time because Jesus makes that very clear in John 3:13. Additionally, we see Elijah later send a letter to King Jehoram of Judah in 2 Chronicles 21:12 – 15. But due to 2 Kings 2:11, and no recording of his death, in the 1st century A.D. there

were Jews that still believed Elijah was alive and would literally return. Jews at their Passover Seder meal still set an empty chair and an untouched cup of wine for Elijah in anticipation of the return of Elijah to announce the Messiah. I could share more about this, but the point is they were looking for “the” Elijah, which John was not. So John says “No I’m not”.

They also don’t ask him, “are you a prophet”, they ask, “are you THE Prophet?” This is in reference to Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18 which are talking about Jesus Christ, and John isn’t THE Prophet, so again, he answers “No”.

John 1:23 – In answering their question about who he is then, John quotes Isaiah 40:3. We covered that previously, so I won’t go into it again.

John 1:24 - The Pharisees were well versed in the law and tradition --- and so this lets us know that they knew the scriptures well.

John 1:25 – Baptism (immersion) at this time was self-administered, done for ritual purity or before entering Holy spaces --- and also done to Gentile converts. But no one at this time baptized other Jews as a sign of repentance. As this was new, it looked like a prophetic act and end-time warning. The Pharisees wanted to know by whose authority was he doing such a thing. In their minds, if John was performing national purification, he must be either the Messiah, Elijah or the promised Prophet. To these Pharisees, John doing these baptisms was extremely offensive. They believed they were already God’s covenant people by birth and that both their lineage and Torah observance made them righteous --- and that purification was something they controlled, not something done to them by some wild guy in the wilderness. While being the son of a priest, John bypassed the recognized priesthood, the Temple area and its activities, the Pharisees’ authority and traditional ritual purity customs.

John 1:28 – We'll end this reading week, discussing a passage of scripture that would be easy to read over and miss. The Gospel of John makes sure we know exactly where this was occurring. Why?

Bethabara is a Hebrew origin word. It means a "house of the crossing" or "place of the crossing". This is very significant as the Bible has already defined a specific crossing of the Jordan event when Joshua and Israel crossed over into the Promised Land. By Jewish tradition, and recorded by Josephus (Antiquities 10.17.5), this was the very same location where Joshua and Israel had crossed into the Promised Land opposite of Jericho.

Why did John choose to baptize here versus anywhere else?

The Apostle Paul understood something that we should clearly understand. Paul wrote to the congregation in Corinth and said in 1 Corinthians 10:1 – 5: "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness."

We learn from this passage with the cloud above (water vapor) and the sea all around, that the crossing of the Red Sea was a type of baptism for Israel, and that they ate the spiritual food (manna) and the miraculous water from the Rock. All of this was designed as rich symbolism of our Savior Jesus Christ. But Paul ended that essentially all these Israelites that crossed the Red Sea died after 40 years of wandering. Then the next generation, they too, crossed over a river (the Jordan River) miraculously, with rich symbolism of the Ark of the Covenant going before them and miraculously making a way for them to cross into the Promise Land (compare Joshua 3:3 -4, 11 – 17). It

seems that this very spot where John was baptizing was the spot where the new generation of Israel went through a baptism by crossing the Jordan.