

## BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

by Mario Seiglie

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### **LUKE 3-4 & MATTHEW 3-4 JOHN THE BAPTIST'S MINISTRY; JESUS BAPTIZED**



In the last Bible Study, we ended with Jesus Christ growing up in Nazareth and following the profession of his father, a craftsman—the term is *tecton* in Greek--and includes working with wood, metal and stone. The equivalent Hebrew term is *haras*, and is used in 1 Chron. 4:14, “Seraiah begot Joab the father of Ge-Harashim, for they were *craftsmen*.” It was a well respected profession, requiring skill and an understanding of mathematics.

It appears Joseph, Jesus’ father, died before Jesus began his ministry, for when the family is later mentioned, it is always just Mary and Jesus’ siblings.

For the first 30 years, Jesus prepared for his ministry, and so did his cousin, John the Baptist. While Jesus was in Nazareth, John the Baptist was used to going to Jerusalem, where his father officiated as a priest in the Temple.

Unfortunately, at this time, the priesthood as a whole became very corrupt--ever since Herod the Great died and his son Archelaus was deposed by the Romans. The high priest’s family, the house of Annas, built a political alliance with the Romans and had a lucrative enterprise with the moneychangers. They took a large cut of the profits from them, who charged exorbitant prices to the pilgrims coming to offer sacrifices in the Temple. This is the main reason Jesus overthrew their tables at the Temple precinct and called the place a den of thieves.

F. F. Bruce mentions: “The office [of High Priest] was not so powerful, of course, as it had been in the heyday of the Hasmonean dynasty. On the other hand, it was no longer subject to the humiliating impotence that had been its lot under Herod and Archelaus. The high priest was the unquestioned representative and spokesman of the nation not only to the provincial governor, whether of Judea or of Syria, but to the emperor in Rome. But there was one limitation to his authority that his predecessors had not known during the three centuries and a half that separated Cyrus the Great from Antiochus IV.

“For the first thirty-five years of the provincial administration of Judea, the high priests were appointed and deposed by Roman governors, who in this as in other respects took over the prerogatives of Herod and Archelaus. In spite of official statutes against bribery and extortion, Roman provincial governors found it difficult to resist the temptation to engage in such practices when so many opportunities

presented themselves; and such an opportunity was provided by this arrangement for making and unmaking high priests. It is not surprising that from A.D. 6 onwards the high-priesthood came to be practically the preserve of a small number of wealthy priestly families, adherents of the party of the Sadducees, anxious not to do or allow anything which might compromise them in the eyes of Rome or endanger the existing settlement.

“Annas became the head of one of the most influential high-priestly families in the closing decades of the Second Temple. Five of his sons, one son-in-law and one grandson became high priests at various times after him. He himself retained the high-priesthood from A.D. 6 to 15...and remained the power behind the throne for many years after. The apostle John suggests that while Caiaphas (Annas’ son-in-law) was the officiating high priest in the year of Jesus’ death [he ruled from A.D. 18 to 36], Annas played a leading part in the preparations for arraigning Jesus before Pilate. Luke ascribes to him a leading part in the earliest attempt by the Sanhedrin to repress the apostles’ preaching in Jerusalem” (*New Testament History*, 1972, p. 64-65).

Alfred Edersheim comments in his *Life and Times of Jesus*: “The whole of this traffic--money-changing, selling of doves, and market for sheep and oxen--was in itself, and from its attendant circumstances, a terrible desecration; it was also liable to gross abuses. But was there about the time of Christ anything to make it specially obnoxious and unpopular? The priesthood must always have derived considerable profit from it. Of course, not the ordinary priests, who came up in their ‘orders’ to minister in the Temple, but the permanent priestly officials, the resident leaders of the priesthood, and especially the High-Priestly family....Of the avarice and corruption of this High-Priestly family, both Josephus and the Rabbis give a most terrible picture. Josephus describes Annas, the son of the Annas of the New Testament, as ‘a great hoarder up of money,’ very rich, and as despoiling by open violence the common priests of their official revenues.”

No wonder John the Baptist, who came from a priestly line, eventually left Jerusalem for more remote places. Apparently, he couldn’t stomach what the Jerusalem priesthood under the Sadducees and the corrupt leadership of Annas had become.

Luke 3 begins mentioning Annas and other governing leaders: "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod [Antipas] being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip [Herod Philip] tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Lk. 3:1-3).

It was common in those days for Gentile proselytes to be 'baptized' into Judaism. They first needed to accept the Jewish faith, be circumcised and since they were ceremonially 'unclean,' they needed to take a ritual bath to be purified and then offer a sacrifice at the Temple. They would then legally become Jews. This is why we hear the discussion carried out in John 3:25-26, "Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about *purification*. And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him.'"

What John introduced was the novel concept of baptizing *the Jews themselves*--not just Gentile converts—to prepare to accept the coming Messiah. These instructions came directly from God. We read, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe...The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me. I did not know Him, but that he should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing'" (John 1:6-8; 29-31).

The Jewish leaders objected to this type of baptism for Jews because they regarded the Jews as already ritually pure and saved through Abraham's righteousness. We read, "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come! [This reflected the corruption of the priesthood and of the Pharisees]. Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'" (Luke 3:7-9).

Regarding John's appearance, we read, "Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey" (Mt. 3:4). This was the same clothing used by the prophet Elijah (2 K. 1:8), and John was prophesied to be a type of Elijah (Lk. 1:17).

With respect to his food, we read in *Expositors*: "'Locusts are large grasshoppers, still eaten in the East. Wild honey is what it purports to be, not gum from a tree. Both suggest a poor man used to wilderness living, and this suggests a connection with the prophets. Both Elijah and John had stern ministries in which austere garb and diet confirmed their message and condemned the idolatry of physical and spiritual softness. John's impact was enormous, and his crowds came from a wide area.'"

The Bible says, "So the people asked him, saying, 'What shall we do then?' John gave them three examples of overcoming some common sins—self-centeredness, the love of money and of power. He said, 'He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.' Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than what is appointed for you.' Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, 'And what shall we do?' So he said to them, 'Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages'" (Luke 3:10-14).

*Expositor's* explains, "The crowd, which is mixed, in contrast to the groups of tax collectors and soldiers, is told to share clothing and food with the needy. Those who had broken the biblical law of love needed to demonstrate their repentance in this kind of sharing. The tax collectors were part of a despised system because their work and associations rendered them ritually unclean and because they regularly extorted money, they were alienated from Jewish society and linked with 'sinners.' Since these abuses arose out of individual greed, a radical change in the practice of the collectors themselves was required. The soldiers were not Roman but Jewish guards, assigned to internal affairs. The very nature of their work gave them opportunity to commit the sins specified. Soldiers could use threats of reprisal to extort money from the people."

John then mentions three types of baptism—baptism of water, baptism of the Spirit, and baptism of fire. The baptism of water is what he fulfilled. The baptism of the Spirit is what happens with the laying

on of hands to receive God's spirit, and the baptism of fire is the type to avoid—in the final judgment it means being thrown in the lake of fire.

Then, John baptizes Jesus Christ and God's Holy Spirit descends in a visible manner. Some depict this as a dove, but it doesn't say this. We read, "And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form *like a dove* upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:21-22). In other words, it descended in a fluttering manner, but not as a dove.

Jesus explained why He was being baptized in Mt. 3:15, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." He was giving an example for us to follow, not because He needed to repent of anything, for He was already righteous. The apostle John mentioned, "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6). This is the principle why we keep the Sabbath and eat clean foods—for Jesus did it too.

Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led by the spirit to be tested in the wilderness. He was "tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry" (Luke 4:2). Notice this was a forty day ordeal—not only a physical fast, but a spiritual battle of tremendous significance!

*Expositor's* points out, "God led Israel into the desert; likewise the Spirit led Jesus. In the former case, God tested his people. Now God allows the devil to tempt his Son. It is important here to distinguish between three kinds of tempting:

1. Satan tempts people by luring them to do evil. God never does this nor can He himself be tempted in this way (James 1:13). Further, not all temptation comes directly from Satan; often it comes from our own lower [carnal] nature (James 1:14-15).

2. People may tempt (test) God in the sense of provoking him through unreasonable demands contrary to faith. This is what Israel did in the desert and what is probably referred to in Jesus' quotation of Deuteronomy 6:16.

3. God tests (but does not tempt) His people, as He did in the desert (Deut 8:2). All three kinds of testing are involved in the parallels between the desert experiences of Israel and Jesus. Although God already knows all about us, He reveals the thoughts and intents of our hearts through our response to Him in times of trial. Thus He tested Israel in the desert to 'see' whether the people would obey (Ex. 16:4)."

Some ask if Jesus could really be tempted and sin. We read in Heb. 4:15, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points as we are, yet without sin." So Jesus' temptations were of the same type as ours, hence, it *was* possible for Jesus to have sinned.

There are three main categories that Satan used to try to tempt Jesus. They were the same as the Devil used against Eve and are described in 1 John 2:15-17.

1. Temptations of the flesh – Eve saw the forbidden fruit was "good for food." These are our fleshly desires, the evil lusts that are pleasurable to our senses but are illicit, or against God's laws of love. Jesus was tempted to unlawfully produce a miracle of food to satisfy His hunger without God's approval, but He resisted it using God's Word.

2. Temptations of lust of the eyes – the sins of vanity – to wrongly impress others with one's own importance. Eve saw that it was "pleasant to the eyes." Jesus was tempted when shown all the kingdoms of the world and told they could all be His. How impressive would that be!

3. Temptations of the pride of life – everything that produces a haughty, prideful attitude. Eve saw that the fruit was "desirable to make one wise." Satan tempted Jesus to use His miraculous powers to throw Himself off the top of the Temple and soar into the air. This would have produced great pride in Jesus, but He resisted the temptation by again quoting the Bible, "It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God. Now when the devil had ended all temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time'" (Luke 4:12-13).

After Jesus soundly defeats Satan, He formally begins His ministry. We read, "Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all" (Luke 4:14-15). Next study – read John 1:19-4:1.