

Focus #2: The First Months of the Public Ministry of Jesus

I. "He came unto His own . . ." (Jn. 1:11a)

(The emergence of Jesus into public life; a time of relative obscurity)

A. The ministry of the forerunner (Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18) #14

1. Concerning the man, John the Baptist

- John the Baptist is now about 30 years of age; the Gospel records have been silent concerning him since the time of his supernaturally enabled birth.
- John the Baptist was a PROPHET; he conducted himself as a prophet, and he spoke with the boldness and authority of a prophet. Having heard no prophetic voice for more than 400 years, the nation of Israel responded hungrily to the ministry of this man.

"...dressed in the rough sack-cloth customarily used by the poor, made of camel's hair and bound about his loins with a leather girdle. His food which was the simple diet of the ascetic, learned perhaps through contact with the Essenes or more probably after the example of Elijah, was of locusts, a kind of insect, and wild honey taken from the clefts of the rocks in this rugged wild desert country. He was a bold and fearless spirit, calling the people to repentance. He held aloof from the common life and was a dweller in the desert where he had been reared." (Shepard, 60)

- The character of John the Baptist
 - His Appearance: Practical- wearing clothes but far from comfortable or fashionable (John here evokes the image of Elijah) 2 Kings 1:8.
 - His Diet: Locusts were an allowed food (Leviticus 11:22).
 - His Character: (Humble, Firm, a concern for the people, righteous)

"...not a reed was shaken by the wind, but unbendingly firm in deep and settled conviction; not ambitious nor self-seeking, but most humble in his self-estimate, discarding all claim but that of lowliest service, and pointing away from himself to Him Who was to come, and Whom as yet he did not even know. Above all there was the deepest earnestness, the most utter disregard of man, the most firm belief in what he announced. For himself he sought nothing; for them he had only one absorbing thought: the Kingdom was at hand, the King was coming-let them prepare."

2. Concerning the message preached by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3)

- Remember that John the Baptist was the "forerunner" of the Messiah; he was sent to prepare the hearts of Israel to receive their Messiah, who was soon to appear.

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- The message of John the Baptist may be summarized under 3 points:
 - 1.) The KINGDOM is at hand; the KING is soon to arrive!
 - 2.) Therefore, REPENT and prepare yourself to receive this blessed Messiah
 - 3.) Come and be BAPTIZED as testimony that, in the midst of this wicked and perverse generation you have turned from your sin and accepted the truth concerning the Messiah, and that you are anxious to identify with this promised, soon-coming Christ.

3. Concerning the method utilized by John--IMMERSION of those who accepted his message

- John had been instructed by God to utilize this technique (John 1:33).
- A difficult question: Did baptism have any prior significance in the minds of the Jews?
- IMPORTANT: It was well understood that John's baptism did not accomplish repentance or acceptance of the individual before God; that rite was a testimony to the fact that such repentance--and thus, acceptance before God--had already become a reality in the individual's life (Luke 3:4-8).

Cp. Josephus, Ant, cviii, 5, 2.

"John... commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that washing would be acceptable to him, if they came to it, not in order of putting away of some sins, but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified before-hand by righteousness."

4. Concerning the ministry of John the Baptist, and its impact

- John appeared some months before Jesus, when he was about 33 years of age.
- Beginning near the Dead Sea, in the Judean wilderness, John traveled up the Jordan Rift, until he came to Bethabara ("Bethany beyond Jordan") where Jesus came to be baptized by him.
- The response of the Jews to the ministry of John the Baptist was overwhelming (Matthew 3:5,6; Luke 3:7, 15).
- Reasons for this tremendous response to John's ministry and preaching
 - This was a time of great expectation; a number of factors had come together to convince the nation of Israel that her John was a genuine prophet, a voice from God; it had been a long time since a prophetic voice had been heard in Israel.
 - The nation of Israel was absolutely desperate for the appearance of Messiah.

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- John made a specific demand, and would accept only real obedience, even from the spiritual "leaders" of the Jews.

B. The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23) #15

1. An important and difficult question: Why was Jesus baptized?

- Some deficient responses
 - 1.) John and Jesus plotted the event to gain attention for Jesus as He set in motion His ingenious plot of deceit and chicanery to convince the nation of Israel that He was indeed their long-awaited Messiah.
 - 2.) Jesus came to be the representative of a sinful race; thus He deigned at this time to symbolize His own purification from sin.
 - 3.) Jesus intended His baptism to be a picture of His future death, burial, and resurrection. He knew that it was going to be difficult to get His followers to accept this concept, so He seized upon this opportunity to introduce the idea at the very inception of His public ministry.
 - 4.) Jesus' baptism was an act of ceremonial purification unto righteousness, because Jesus was here commencing His ministry as our Great High Priest.
 - 5.) The sacramentalist view - "He did not so much get cleansing from baptism as impart cleansing to it. He sanctified the blessed sacrament in the future."
- It is my persuasion that there are two mistakes commonly made in considering this question, "Why was Jesus baptized?"
 - 1.) John's baptism is too often considered first of all and thus necessarily a "baptism of repentance." In fact, it was that only secondarily. It was primarily a baptism of IDENTIFICATION - with the announced kingdom. However, in the case of sinful men to whom John preached, such identification with the Messianic King and His Kingdom demanded repentance first of all.
 - 2.) The attempt is made to find some ulterior motive in Jesus' submission to the baptism of John. According to the New Testament record, there was no such ulterior motive.
- The simple reason Jesus went to be baptized by John--Matthew 21:25

2. The events of Jesus' baptism

- Jesus traveled to the Jordan River specifically to be baptized by John the Baptist.
- Jesus waited until all others had departed (Luke 3:21), then came to John for baptism.

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- John hesitated, but submitted when Jesus instructed him (Mk 3:14, 15).

Notice this was the first time Jesus and John the Baptist had ever met face to face (John 1:31,33).

- Notice that each Person of the triune Godhead was involved in this event:
 - The Father- spoke audibly from Heaven (Matthew 3:17)
 - The Son- was being baptized (Matthew 3:16)
 - The Spirit- was seen descending on Jesus as a dove (Matthew 3:16)

IMPORTANT: As Jesus emerged from the waters of the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. It is my conviction that this is the "theocratic anointing" of Jesus, and by this means Jesus--in His Kenosis--was equipped to set out on the mission He had been given to offer the Kingdom to the nation of Israel.

C. The 40 day temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13) #16

1. The TIME of this temptation--immediately after His baptism (Mt 4:1; Mk 1:12)

2. Concerning the PURPOSE of God in the temptation of Christ

- Notice that it was God who initiated this encounter, and not Satan (Mt 4: 1).
- The point: It is not Satan who traps Christ in the wilderness; rather, it is the Father who deliberately places His Son in open conflict with Satan, in order to establish Jesus' identity and power.

3. The specific temptations used by Satan against Jesus

- TEMPTATION #1--Turn stones into bread relieve hunger! (Jesus: Deuteronomy 8:3)

(Compare Genesis 3:6a, 1 John 2:16a ~ the lust of the flesh)

- TEMPTATION #2--Cast yourself down angels will bear you up! (Jesus: Deuteronomy 6:16)

(Compare Genesis 3:6c, 1 John 2:16c ~ the pride of life)

- TEMPTATION #3-- Worship Satan receive the kingdoms of the world! (Jesus: Deuteronomy 6:13)

(Compare Genesis 3:6b, 1 John 2:16b ~ the lust of the eyes)

4. Notice the contrast between the temptation of Adam by Satan (Genesis 3) and the temptation of Christ by Satan

- **THE TEMPTATION OF ADAM**
 - The devil challenged Adam; it was Satan who took the initiative.

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- The devil emerged victorious. (That is, victory was won for a time by Satan; it was not established as victory was established as ultimately secure, secure or permanent.)
- Adam had every possible advantage (paradise, food, companionship, every need met).
- Adam responded to human desire, fell into sin.
- Adam stood at the head of the race of men; that race fell into sin with him.
- **THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST**
 - Christ challenged the devil; the Spirit led Christ into the wilderness, and there the devil was compelled to tempt Him to sin.
 - Christ emerged finally and fully victorious; though not yet entirely won.
 - Christ was at the most serious disadvantage, wanting every human comfort and need (hungry, alone).
 - Christ trusted in the Word of God, stood true to God, resisted sin.
 - Christ stood as the Head of all those who believe and lifted that number to forgiveness and life.

5. The temptation of Christ as related to the character of the God-Man

a. The issue: the IMPECCABILITY of Christ.

- Definitions:
 - 1) peccable- He didn't sin, but could have sinned.
 - 2) impeccable- He didn't sin, and could not have sinned.
- As fully man He could be tempted; as fully God He could not sin.

b. The suggested answers:

1.) Jesus was ABLE NOT to sin - because of the Spirit's enablement and the absence of a sin nature in Jesus.

THUS, His sinlessness is the result of His will.

2.) Jesus was NOT ABLE to sin - because of His essential deity.

THUS, His sinlessness is the result of His character.

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D. The forerunner's testimony before a Sanhedrin committee (John 1: 19-28) #17

Note:

1.) It is at this point that the Synoptics jump to the Galilean Ministry. It is only the fourth Gospel, which records the events of the next several months of Jesus' ministry. (Compare your PROPOSED HARMONY.)

2.) John seems to be consciously relating his account to the Synoptics, especially in the first days of Jesus' ministry after the Temptation. Note carefully the chronological references in John 1:29, 35, 43, 2:1, and then again in 2:12-13. Indeed, John 1:29-2:11 seems to constitute a day-by-day account of the first week of Jesus' public ministry.

3.) This event (item #17) seems to have transpired sometime shortly after, perhaps even on the final day of, the 40-day temptation. In other words, sometime shortly after Jesus endured the 40 days of temptation by the devil, John the Baptist was interrogated by the Sanhedrin committee, as recorded in John 1:19-28.

1. The situation: The Sanhedrin, the official body of government among the Jews, sent a delegation to investigate this one called "John the Baptist."

"The Pharisees and Sadducees who had presented themselves as candidates for baptism and been so scornfully rejected, had quitted the scene of their humiliation and carried a report to the Sanhedrin. It is an evidence of the impression, which he had made upon them that the rulers did not straightway take vengeance on the audacious prophet. They feared him: they thought it possible that he might be the Messiah or the Messiah's herald. And therefore they resolved to dispatch deputation to interview him, and ascertain what he claimed to be."

- The responsibility of this committee: determine what John claimed concerning himself, devise a scheme to either gain control of his ministry or neutralize it entirely.
- Two inferences can be drawn from the fact that this committee of Sanhedrinists had been sent to interrogate John the Baptist.
 - John's ministry had sufficient impact (It had been effective).
 - The Sanhedrin were beginning to fear him.

2. The interview of John the Baptist with the Sanhedrin committee (John 1:19-27)

- The first question: "Who art thou?"

Note: In answer to this, John appeals to Isaiah 40:3.

- The second question: "Why baptizest thou, then?"

Note: To answer this question, John turns tells of one, even now abiding in their midst, in whose authority he has come.

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E. The Baptist's identification of Jesus as Messiah (John 1:29-34) #18

NOTE:

- 1.) These verses (John 1:29-34) constitute an official statement, made under self-imposed oath, concerning the identity of this Jesus of Nazareth.
- 2.) The time setting: "the next day" (1:29) after the interview with the Sanhedrin committee
- 3.) The essence of the Baptist's testimony in this passage: "I have been long time telling you that Messiah was soon to come; I swear to you that his Jesus of Nazareth is He!"
- 4.) From all that we know of this day--the spirit of anxious expectation with which Messiah was awaited, the oft appearance of false a Christ, the distorted concept of Messiah which had become so popular, and the excitement generated by two miraculous births and then by the ministry of the Baptist--it is not difficult to understand why such a careful and emphatic designation of the true Messiah was felt necessary.

1. Notice the ways in which John lends strength to his testimony concerning Jesus the Christ:

- He appeals to his earlier testimony (1:30).
- He carefully discounts the possibility of any collusion between himself and this One whom he is identifying as the Messiah (1:31,33).
- He deliberately casts his testimony in the form of a solemn oath, such as would be given before a judge in a court of law (1:32,34).
- He appeals to the heavenly testimony as to the Messianic identity of this Jesus: he calls God to witness on behalf of his statement (1:32).
- He reminds his hearers that the identity of this One had been specially revealed to him by God (1:33).

THE POINT: This is a solemn testimony, issued by the forerunner in the presence of witnesses, and reinforced carefully by appeal to other evidences.

The essence of this testimony: "Behold- there He is- the Lamb of God, the One of whom I have been speaking, come to take away the sin of the world."

Important: This record of John's testimony on the day after the 40-day temptation is intended to be representative. That is, this is the testimony borne by John the Baptist everywhere he went after he had baptized Jesus.

2. Notice what John the Baptist reveals here concerning the person and work of the Messiah:

- He is the "Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world! " (1:29)
- "After me comes . . . he was before me!" (1:30)

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- "The same is he which baptizes with the Holy Spirit. " (1:33)
- "This is the Son of God!" (1:34)

F. The gathering of the first apostles-to-be (John 1:35-51) #19

NOTE:

1.) The time setting of this narrative: a period of about a week, very early in Jesus' public ministry, very shortly after His baptism/temptation

2.) The background of this passage: John the Baptist is carefully instructing those who had followed him to now follow Jesus (1:35-37).

We may assume that the testimony and instruction, which John gives here was given many times, as the Messiah whom John had come to announce had now arrived.

3.) There were undoubtedly multitudes who identified with Jesus at this time, men and women who had already accepted the message of John the Baptist and now were happy to believe his testimony that this Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah whose soon arrival he had been heralding. This record is representative of several months of ministry of John the Baptist and of Jesus. These 5 (or 6) disciples are probably mentioned because with the passage of time they become part of the 12 apostles and we get to know them quite well.

1. ANDREW and JOHN (John 1:35-39)
2. SIMON PETER (John 1:40-42)
3. PHILIP (John 1:43,44)
4. NATHANAEL (John 1:45-51)
5. JAMES (the son of Zebedee)

G. Emergence into public notice - the miracle at Cana (John 2:1-11) #20

1. The setting of this miracle:

- The place - Cana of Galilee
- The time - six days after the interview of John the Baptist with the Sanhedrin committee, very early in the public ministry of Jesus
- The home - that of a member of Jesus' extended physical family

2. The dilemma - the wine had been completely consumed before the days of feasting were expired (John 2:3a).

"None except those who know how sacred in the East is the duty of lavish hospitality, and how passionately the obligation to exercise it to the utmost is felt, can realize the gloom which this

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incident would have thrown over the occasion, or the misery and mortification which it would have caused to the wedding pair." (Farrar, 76)

3. The conversation between Mary and Jesus (John 2:3-5)

- Why did Mary approach Jesus concerning this matter?
- The reply of Jesus to Mary (2:4,5) is not nearly so harsh as it sounds in our translation.

1.) The term of address - "Woman"

"He does not call her 'mother' because, in circumstances such as these she was His mother no longer; but the address, 'Woman,' was so respectful that it might be, and was, addressed at the tenderest moments to the most fondly loved." (Farrar, 77)

2.) The rebuke - "What have I to do with thee?"

Almost all commentators seem to suggest that our Lord refused here to be guided by a mother's direction, that he wished her to understand that he was breaking off from her control and from that silent submission which he had hitherto willingly yielded." (Pulpit, 82)

3.) The correction - "Mine hour is not yet come."

"Our Lord did not tell Mary that he would not work a miracle. But He would have her to know that she must not expect Him to do mighty works to please His relatives after the flesh. He would only work a miracle, upon this or any other occasion, when the fitting season for it, the time appointed in God's counsel, had arrived."

4. The miracle (John 2:6-10)

5. John's analysis of the SIGNIFICANCE of this miracle (2:11)

- It was the beginning of Jesus' signs.
- It manifested forth His glory.
- It caused His disciples to believe on Him.

H. The early transfer from Nazareth to Capernaum (John 2:12) #21

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II. "Jesus came . . . preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Initial crises and ministries in Judea and Samaria; Jesus is gaining the attention of the nation)

NOTE: It will perhaps be helpful to review the movements of Jesus from His baptism to this point. Recall that the events of this period of Jesus' ministry are recorded only by John; the Synoptists all move quickly and immediately from the Temptation of Jesus to the opening of the Galilean Ministry.

However, in the Gospel of John we discover that Jesus did not in fact go directly from the Temptation to the Galilean Ministry; there was a period of several months in that interim during which Jesus' activities might be summarized as follows:

- 1.) After His baptism in the Jordan River (probably near the Dead Sea) and the immediately subsequent 40-day temptation, Jesus returned to the place of His baptism, where John the Baptist was still preaching. There, Jesus was publicly heralded as the Messiah by the Baptist, and there Jesus gathered His first disciples (#18, 19, 5a & 6a above).
- 2.) Jesus traveled with His small band of followers to the Galilean city of Cana for a wedding feast; there He performed His first miracle and began to attract some attention among the people (#20, 7a above).
- 3.) Briefly to Capernaum, where He resettled His family and established the Headquarters for His Galilean ministry to come in a few months (#21, 8a above).

THIS IS WHERE WE ARE AT THIS POINT IN OUR STUDY.

The balance of this lecture will cover the remaining months before the great Galilean ministry.

- 4.) Jesus returned to Judea, arriving in Jerusalem at Passover time (John 2:13).

He cleansed the temple at this time. He then lingered in Judea for several months, gathering to Himself those who had accepted the message and baptism of John. As official antagonism grew strong, however, He departed Judea and returned to Galilee to commence His very important 18-month ministry there.

A. Jesus asserts His messianic authority by cleansing the Temple (John 2:13-22) #22

1. The wickedness encountered by Jesus: part of the Temple area (the Court of the Gentiles) had been set aside by the Jewish authorities, and merchants and "money changers" had been allowed to "set up shop" here.

2. Jesus' reaction: John 2:13-16

Notes:

- 1.) How was it that Jesus was able to make such a bold move against the leaders of Judaism; why was it that the duly constituted authorities in charge of the Temple did not arrest and punish Jesus?

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2.) What very specific segment of the leadership of Israel was Jesus confronting and offending here?

3.) After the cleansing of the Temple, as Jesus goes into the countryside and gathers disciples to Himself, and then as He in a few months travels to Galilee and offers Himself as Messiah, what specific segment of Jewish leadership is He THEN confronting and offending?

3. The significance of the cleansing of the temple - it was a bold and dramatic claim to Messianic identity and authority.

B. Jesus is interviewed by Nicodemus (John 2:23-3:31) #23

1. A preliminary question: Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus?

1.) Some: Nicodemus was an official spokesman of the Sanhedrin; they had dispatched him to interrogate Jesus and to discern what ought to be their "official" reaction to Him.

2.) Better: Nicodemus seems to have been, or at least eventually to have become, an honest enquirer, one who had seen the miracles of Christ, who had witnessed the events at Passover, who had compared what he saw in Jesus to the OT Scriptures, and who now had contrived to come face-to-face with Jesus Himself- all of this in the spirit of honest "seeking after God" which God has promised to reward.

Note: In this connection, notice the close connection in John's argument between John 2:23 and John 3:1.

Compare the other references to Nicodemus in the Gospel of John:

2. Notice the effect which the miracles of Jesus had had upon Nicodemus (3:2).

3. As Jesus dealt with Nicodemus, He stressed again the SPIRITUAL REQUIREMENTS - faith and the consequent rebirth - which all must fulfill in order to gain entrance into the kingdom of God.

C. Jesus joins forces with John the Baptist (John 3:22-36) #24

1. The Background of this event: even after Jesus had commenced His public ministry, John the Baptist had continued preaching in the Jordan Rift, calling upon the Jewish nation to acknowledge and accept this King who had now actually appeared and was Himself ministering in the land of Judea. Only this element of John's ministry had changed: he was no longer announcing a coming Messiah, but rather a present Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

2. The Crisis which arose (John 3:25-26): Sometime after the cleansing of the temple, as Jesus was ministering in Judea and John the Baptist continued to minister in the Jordan Rift, there was an attempt to drive a wedge between the two. A dispute arose about the comparative efficacy and/or popularity of the ministry of John and that of Jesus. In fact, some of the loyal followers of the Baptist brought the question to him- they seemed to have been grieved that Jesus, the announced Messiah, was enjoying greater fruit and notoriety than was John, the announcer of the Messiah.

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3. The Response of John the Baptist (3:27-36): in the strongest terms possible, John the Baptist insisted that one greater than himself had come, and that in the words of John himself, "He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease!"

Note-The flow of John's narrative would strongly suggest that these words represent the final and "official" retirement of John the Baptist in his ministry as the forerunner to the Messiah. When John saw that his disciples were so thoroughly attached to him that they were offended by the greater popularity of the Messiah Himself, he (John the Baptist) knew that it was time for him to finally step aside.

D. Jesus leaves for Galilee via Samaria (Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14; John 4:1-45) #25

1. Jesus reasons for leaving Judea (Mt. 4:12; Mk, 1:14; John 4:1-4) #26

Because of the crescendo of antagonism against Christ on the part of the Jewish leaders. Because the disciples of John the Baptist were finally and fully convinced that this Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and that they ought to follow Him.

2. Jesus deals with the woman at Jacob's well (John 4:5-42) #27

NOTE: It is important to understand the awful antagonism, which existed between Jew and Samaritan (cf. 4:9) Given this, it is amazing and remarkable that Jesus would pass through Samaria, and that He would engage in friendly conversation with a Samaritan woman. As Jesus engaged the attention of this spiritually destitute woman, He excited in her a hunger for spiritual things (4:10-15), made clear the seriousness of her moral condition (4:16-18), pointed out the utter futility of her present religious endeavors (4:19-24), and finally pointed her to Himself as the only answer to the needs and desires of her soul (4:25-26).

3. Jesus' arrival in Galilee (John 4:43-45) #28

NOTE: It is at this point that the Synoptists resume the account of Jesus' ministry (cp. Mt. 4:12; Mk 1:14; Luke 4:14). Jesus had spent 8-12 months in Judea, but only the fourth Gospel records anything of that period. Now the Lord returns to Galilee, there to commence an 18-month ministry of proclamation and demonstration.