

JANUARY 28-February 3, 2019

Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3

“Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord”

Summary: *John the Baptist preaches in Judaea—Jesus is baptized, and the Father acclaims Him as His Beloved Son.*

Jesus is baptized by John—He preaches the gospel, calls disciples, casts out devils, heals the sick, and cleanses a leper. John the Baptist preaches and baptizes—Jesus is baptized, and God acclaims Him as His Son—Jesus’ genealogy back to Adam is given.

Christ is the Word of God—He created all things and was made flesh—John baptizes Jesus and testifies that He is the Lamb of God—John, Andrew, Simon, Philip, and Nathanael believe in Christ and follow Him.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

How does a forerunner prepare the way?

Immediately preceding Jesus’ life, another

series of events paralleled the political and economic events of the time. A prophet was preparing the way for a deliverer. His effort was to teach the people to have faith in the true redeemer, repent, and make covenants so that they might receive the Holy Spirit which the redeemer would give them.

What are the “First Principles” of Judaism?

In Judaism, Faith, Repentance, Baptism (immersion - Mikveh) and the Holy Spirit are viewed as follows.

Faith: “In the Bible there are no articles of faith or dogmas in which the Jew is commanded to believe. Belief in God’s existence and infinite ability is taken for granted and is the basis of the Bible. This is the importance of the story of the Exodus from Egypt; the Children of Israel witnessed God’s wonders and passed on the record of their own personal experience to their

descendants. The biblical word *emunah* (and its other forms) which is often translated as “belief” really means “trust” or “confidence,” which is something quite different.”

“Judaism insists on belief, faith and good deeds (which are also called *mitzvot*); but by themselves they are not enough. The actual observance of the *mitzvot*, notwithstanding the fact that it may occasionally cause inconvenience, is a prime doctrine of Judaism.”

(*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Repentance: “A unique aspect of the Jewish faith is that although God rules the world with absolute justice, He is also merciful and forgives sins against Him. The doctrine of repentance is based on this belief.”

“Although Judaism sees sin as a most serious matter, even the sinner is not without hope. One of the most important theological doctrines of both the Bible and the Talmud is that if a sinner repents his bad deeds, God will forgive him. Repentance consists of several stages ---

firstly the sinner must reflect on his actions and realize that he has indeed done the wrong thing. He must then make up his mind never to do it again, and confess his sin. This confession is not made to any other human being but is made by the sinner directly to God. On this basis the two confessions *Ashamnu* and *Al-Het* were introduced into the prayers for the Day of Atonement which is a special occasion for repentance and forgiveness. However, even when a sinner has done all these things, his repentance is still not final until he has been exposed to the same temptation and withstood it. Of course, he should not deliberately put himself on that spot again."

"Repentance in Hebrew is known as *teshuvah*, which literally means "return," and signifies a return to God. A person who repents his sins is known as a *ba'al teshuvah*. Many rabbis of the Talmud believed that the real *ba'al teshuvah* is greater even than a person who has never sinned and they furthermore said that when a person repents out of love of God (and not just out of fear of divine punishment), all the sins he had committed are considered to be *mitzvot*. This is perhaps the most comforting doctrine that Judaism has given to the world."

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Conversion - Immersion: "A convert to Judaism is considered a new-born child, and, from the halakhic point of view, he has no father or mother. Thus, if a whole family converts, the children and the parents start their lives as Jews with no legal relationship. Because of this state of affairs, converts are always named as though they were the sons of Abraham, the first Jew. A husband and wife who convert must also have another wedding ceremony in order to be married under Jewish law."

"A potential convert (or proselyte) is first questioned by a court (*bet din*) of three rabbis. They usually begin by trying to persuade him to give up the idea of joining a nation which has been, and today still is, severely persecuted. If the candidate still affirms sincerely that he is ready to "accept the yoke of the commandments," he or she must undergo a period of instruction in Judaism, in its laws and practices. After thorough study, when he understands the *mitzvot* and is ready to begin his life as a Jew, the candidate is ready for the rituals of conversion. For both males and females the *bet din* oversees their immersion in a ritual bath (*mikveh*)."

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Jewish thought requires that the Bet Din should always have the presence of Levites. They will witness the total immersion of the person.

"Just how to construct a *mikveh* in accordance with the numerous legal specifications involved constantly posed a technological problem of great seriousness, and over the generations rabbinic thinkers were repeatedly challenged to come up with novel solutions to this unusual problem which demanded a rare combination of technologic and halakhic ingenuity."

"Briefly the basic legal requirements are these: 1) A *mikveh* must not be filled with water that has been drawn (i.e., has been in a vessel or a receptacle), but with water from a naturally flowing source; spring water or rainwater are the ideal sources, but melted snow and ice are also permitted. 2) The water must be able to flow into the *mikveh* freely and unimpeded (any blockage renders the water "drawn water") and must reach the

mikveh in vessels that are not susceptible to ritual uncleanness. 3) The minimum size of the *mikveh* is of a vessel which has a volume of "40 *seah*," variously estimated at between 250 and 1,000 liters (quarts). 4) The *mikveh* must be watertight and must be constructed of natural materials on the spot, for otherwise it is deemed itself to be a "vessel" and renders the water in it "drawn water." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

John, a Levite, was administering immersions in a classic Jewish environment. The water source came from springs (living water), it flowed freely (Jordan River), it exceeded the minimum amount of water needed, and it was a natural setting. Jewish tradition also includes a requirement that the Mikveh should be below ground level. The Jordan River, where John the Baptist was immersing people, is at the lowest place on the face of the earth, near the Dead Sea.

Holy Spirit: "*Ruah ha-Kodesh* (holy spirit) is often used as a synonym for prophecy. However, according to some rabbis, unlike prophecy, there are some types of *ruah ha-kodesh* which also can be attained by doing good deeds." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

The possession of the "Holy Spirit has been used to describe various righteous teachers and sages. ". . . Luria already had a reputation as a man of striking personality who possessed the holy spirit." ". . . Nahman was the great-grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, and his mother was said to "possess the holy spirit." ". . . Phinehas is known to have traveled to redeem captives, and on one journey a river in flood parted for him, so as not to delay his mission. He constructed the famous "ladder of saintliness" in which Caution (against evil) leads through Eagerness (for good), Cleanliness, Purity, Asceticism, Holiness,

Humility, Fear of God, Attainment of the Holy Spirit (divine inspiration), ultimately to the Resurrection of the Dead."

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What did John the forerunner teach?

John prepared the way, was a forerunner of the Savior, Jesus of Nazareth. John taught that recognition of the Messiah came through Faith, Repentance, Baptism by immersion for the forgiveness of sins and the Gift of the Holy Ghost.

How was John, a religious evangelist?

John the Baptist was the son of the priest, Zacharias, who's lot it was to administer the offering at the incense altar of the Jerusalem temple one year, and received a remarkable vision that in his and his wife's advanced age, she would conceive and bear a prophet son, John. That son would prepare the way for the Messiah. The anger, persecution and subsequent slaying of Zacharia, slain between the temple (Holy of Holies) and the altar (Matthew 23:35), carried over to the harassment of John by Pharisees and Saducees.

What is the main difference between Pharisees and Saducees?

Pharisees believed in life after death, the Sadducees did not. Could you say that's the reason they were "Sad, you see?"