

January 23-29, 2023

## Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3

“PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD”

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### Summary:

*Matthew 3. John the Baptist preaches in Judaea—Jesus is baptized, and the Father acclaims Him as His Beloved Son.*

*Mark 1. Jesus is baptized by John—He preaches the gospel, calls disciples, casts out devils, heals the sick, and cleanses a leper.*

*Luke 3. John the Baptist preaches and baptizes—Jesus is baptized, and God acclaims Him as His Son—Jesus’ genealogy back to Adam is given.*

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### Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

### How may I better understand the concept of purification?

The Bible Dictionary

provided by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints lists several helpful verses about purification, purify, and purifying. Here are a few that may infer immersions. “. . . water of purifying upon them,” (**Numbers 8:7**); “Levites were purified,” (**Numbers 8:21**); “Ashes of the (totally red haired) burnt heifer of purification for sin,” (**Numbers 19:17**) (**Heb. 9:13**); “Sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow,” (**Isaiah 1:18**); “Wash thine heart from wickedness,” (**Jeremiah 4:14**); “Many shall be purified, and made white,” (**Daniel 12:10**); “He shall purify the sons of Levi,” (**Malachi 3:3**) (**3 Nephi 24:3**); “Up to Jerusalem . . . to purify themselves,” (**John 11:55**); “Purify unto himself a peculiar people,” (**Titus 2:14**); “Ye have purified your souls,” (**1 Peter 1:22**); “Hast purified those whom I have chosen,” (**3 Nephi 19:28**); “Purify the sons of Levi, and purge them,” (**3 Nephi 24:3**); “May be purified even as he is pure,” (**Moroni 7:48**) (**Doctrine and Covenants 35:21**); “Not purified shall not abide the day,” (**Doctrine and Covenants 38:8**); “No man is possessor of all things except he be purified,” (**Doctrine and Covenants 50:28**). In a religious Jewish sense, purification is expected to be done

by immersion. Yet, Rabbis explain that immersion for remission of sins cannot be done until they have the sacrifice of a completely red-haired calf referred to in Numbers. (**Numbers 19:1-9**)

### How must I prepare for baptism?

Preparation for baptism can be likened to repent – to be purified. The “day of preparation” for Passover is when Jesus atoned for our sins, (the Gethsemane experience was on the day preceding the Passover week.) “And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” (**Luke 3:3-4**) The paths or roads leading to “Cities of Refuge,” Temple cities, had to be straight. According to the *Talmud*, (written Jewish Bible interpretations) “. . . in accordance with the requirement to especially build roads to the cities of refuge, the roads to these cities were not only marked by signposts saying “Refuge”, but the roads were 32 ells wide—twice the regulation width—and were particularly smooth and even, in order that fugitives were as unhindered as possible.” (**Sifre Deut. 180; Tosefta 3:5 (or 2:5); Makkot 10b; Bava Batra 100b**) The Hebrew word “to repent” is

*LaShuv* and also means to turn, to return to go back. The restored temple ceremonies always take us back to creation, going back to the beginning, a lesson in repentance, as we start over, every time. In that sense, the temple ordinances prepare us to return to our Father in Heaven and His son.

### **How was John the Baptist a “preparer?”**

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. 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* (commandments and blessings); 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* (written Jewish Bible interpretations) 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 (newly) 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.](#))

**Holy Spirit:** (The Hebrew words;) “*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.” “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.](#))

### **How similar to the restoration are the mannerisms of Jewish immersions?**

Jewish thought requires that the *Bet Din* (Legal counsel) should always have the presence of Levites. They will witness the total immersion of the person. “Just how to construct a *mikveh* (immersion font) 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* (Jewish religious legal interpretations) 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. That 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.

### **How extraordinary is Heavenly Father's voice being heard?**

In our present scriptures the voice of the Father testifying of His son is only recorded four times; at Jesus' baptism; "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (**Matthew 3:16-17**) The Father spoke at the transfiguration; "While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." (**Matthew 17:5**) Heavenly Father spoke at

the appearance of the resurrected Jesus in the Book of Mormon lands; "And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them: Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him." (**3 Nephi 11:6-7**) Again in our dispensation, our Father in Heaven testified in Palmyra; . . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*" (**Joseph Smith History 1:17, Pear of Great Price**) You can imagine that being at those locations, even to this day, the spirit of the Holy Ghost can be felt in great measure.

### **What can I learn from the Savior's healings?**

The accounts of so many healings by Jesus show his loving help in preparing many for the true healing of body, mind and spirit. "I learned that the physical pain and the healing of the body after major surgery are remarkably similar to the spiritual pain and the healing of the soul in the process of repentance." (**Robert D. Hales, "Healing Soul and Body," Ensign, Nov. 1998, 14.**) The cause of sickness and disease may be the mistakes caused by our sins or the sins of others. Simply, mistakes are part of mortality, and the resulting suffering may be there so we can be blessed, and sometimes bless others who are faithful in caring for those in need.