

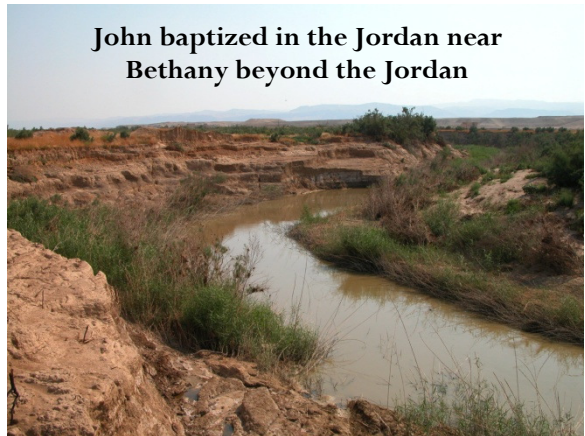
He Came to His Own

In Lesson 7, the particular manner of Christ's coming was emphasized. Attention was given to the fact that Jesus was not recognized by those who we might think would give praise and laud to a king. We highlighted the fact that our Lord was welcomed by Gentiles and lowly shepherds. In a similar way, the introduction of Christ's ministry was not greeted by the most noted scribes and theologians. John 1:11 says that Jesus came to his own. When we think about the first coming of Christ, our thoughts immediately go to the Nativity. However, John did not have that in mind. We know this because John 1 does not discuss the birth of Christ, but his introduction into public ministry. The second half of John 1:11 tells us that when Jesus came to his own people, they did not receive him. Although the title of this lesson is borrowed from this verse, we will see this theme throughout the entire life of Christ. When Jesus came on the scene, his introduction was anything but typical. The first example of this is John the Baptist.

The Forerunner

When you read about the Essenes, it was mentioned that many have thought that John the Baptist belonged to their community. Most of the reasoning behind this is because John the Baptist came from the same area, and lived an obscure life. Whatever interaction John may or may not have had with the Essene community, the New Testament is absent from a mention of them. As to the motives of the sectarian community, the text of Scripture gives no indication that John had any purpose other than what the prophet foretold: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight!" (Isaiah 40:3). John lived in the wilderness as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. But you must also remember that John was a Nazarite (Luke 1:15-16). The original description of a Nazarite comes from Numbers 6:1-21. The word Nazarite means "one who is separated for the Lord." This is why they abstained from particular foods, alcohol, touching dead bodies, and the cutting of hair. This is also why John the Baptist ate locusts and honey. If he had hunted and killed animals, he would have violated his vow. We are also told that John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). You already know that John is frequently referred to as Elijah in other parts of the Gospels. But none of those references suggest that John was a reincarnation of Elijah. It is more appropriate to consider the identical roles of each prophet. Both men lived in the wilderness, and were not ashamed of their crude and uncomfortable way of life. Both men boldly preached repentance and were badly treated by the rulers to whom they preached. Elijah was taken up to heaven, which may suggest that his ministry was incomplete. This may be helpful in understating why John is identified with him. At the end of Old Testament

**John baptized in the Jordan near
Bethany beyond the Jordan**



THE LIFE OF CHRIST: LESSON 9

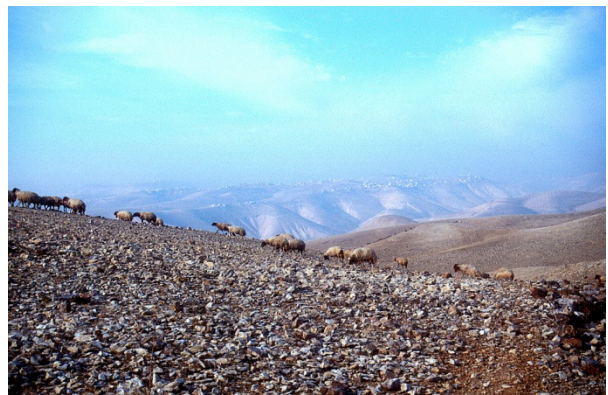
history, Malachi wrote the following: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of Yahweh comes" (4:5). John the Baptist broke the silence of the intertestamental period. Everything about him makes it clear that he is the quintessential Old Testament prophet. When he was approached by the Jewish leaders, he was asked if he was the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet (John 1:19-21). These were distinct figures in the Jewish mind that would appear in the last days. "The Prophet" is a likely reference to Deuteronomy 18. However, we know from the rest of the New Testament that this is the same person as the Christ. Although John did validate his identity with Scripture (John 1:23), he did not meet the expectations of the leaders. We are given a clear picture of John's lifestyle from his clothing to the food he ate. However, it was not anything having to do with his unusual lifestyle that brought offense to the authorities. It was his message.

The Baptism

Many students ask the same question that John asked as to why Jesus needed to be baptized. Jesus' answer may not seem clear, but it is the most fitting: "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). What does this mean? John baptized preaching repentance and denied baptism to hypocrites. Did Jesus need to repent? Certainly not. There have been an enormous amount of explanations of this. However, it seems to make the most sense to explain this in light of what we already know about how Jesus lived. You remember our discussion on the Lord's obedience to his parents. He did so because it was in line with God's purposes, not because he was a foolish child who needed parental guidance. For a Jew to do what was right at that moment in time, was to be baptized. Jesus shows his approval and identification with the message and mission of John the Baptist. As it was John who asked the question, it was him who needed an answer. It is possible that the baptism was private. Part of that is also related to the appearance of the Spirit, and the voice of the Father. We have no indication that any other people saw this. The Son gave his approval of the kingdom, and the Father and the Spirit gave their approval of the Son.

The Temptation

It is remarkable that the Spirit led Jesus into the Judean wilderness to be tempted by Satan. If you observe the text carefully, you will see that the Spirit is not the one who does the tempting (see James 1:13), but it is the devil. However, God had his purpose in this. Remember the discussion on the growth of Christ. Jesus had just been baptized and identified with the kingdom of God. He is about to embark on his public ministry. It was necessary for him to grow so that he would perfectly fulfill the purpose of his ministry. As you can see in each temptation, should he have failed, his whole ministry would have failed. There is a theological question that is commonly asked. It goes like this: "Though Jesus never sinned, was it a *possibility* for him to do so?" There are many who have tried to answer this question positively and negatively. My favorite answer was given by a professor I once had named C.W. Smith. He was a southern man, and said something like this: "He had to be a man with all infirmities without sin. Sinlessness is the point—not capability—he did not!"



THE LIFE OF CHRIST: LESSON 9

Another observation that Dr. Smith made was that temptation grew more intense for Jesus as time continued. One might generally think that temptation becomes easier over time. However, Jesus never gave in to temptation. We give in, and therefore become used to it. Jesus did not give in even for a split second, and it came back harder every time. We see this in the temptation in the wilderness, as well as in Gethsemane when Jesus was praying (Matthew 26:39). I will not spell everything out for you here, but rather provide some thoughts which you can explore.



The pinnacle of the temple overlooks the Kidron Valley



Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness. // Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness.
Adam disobeyed in a splendid garden. // Jesus obeyed in a desert inhabited by wild beasts.

The devil tempted Jesus with food and a kingdom.
How would this have compromised his mission?

The First Disciples

At this point, we find the first disciples of Christ. John the Baptist had not yet been arrested and was giving direct attention to Jesus. In response, Andrew followed Jesus. But before he did this, he went and got his brother Simon. When Simon met Jesus, he was given the name “Cephas” (Peter) which means rock. You will see that these two did not continue to follow Jesus. Later on, Jesus called them again. On the next day, he found Philip, who also followed Jesus. Philip found Nathaniel, but he was initially skeptical. Nathaniel’s comment reminds us of the reputation of Nazareth. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 2:46). It was not a well admired place. Andrew, Simon, and Philip were from Bethsaida, but Nathaniel was from Cana. His comment may reflect how his town viewed Nazareth. When Jesus called Nathaniel an “Israelite in whom there is no deceit,” it is most likely connected with his comment in John 2:51. Angels going and coming from heaven is an obvious reference to Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28. Jacob’s name means, “he cheats.” Jesus called Nathaniel an Israelite, and Jacob’s name was changed to Israel. It is likely that Jesus is emphasizing that Nathaniel has no guile. As such, he acknowledges who Jesus is when he discovers that Jesus knew what he was doing. Even so, he will see “angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” In other words, he is yet to see the divinity of Jesus.

The First Miracle of Christ

Tradition teaches that Nathaniel was the groom in the wedding at Cana. Nevertheless, we do not know, and it is not the point of the miracle. This miracle is fitting for the setting of Christ’s initial ministry. Jesus’ comments to his mother are the strongest indicator of this. When Mary told Jesus that they were out of wine, his response may appear to be rude in our English translations. However, when he said “woman,” he was using a respectful term, similar to when we say “Mrs.” or “ma’am.” Jesus would have found out that they had no wine whether his mother informed him or not. As it had



THE LIFE OF CHRIST: LESSON 9

been normal for Jesus to submit to his parents, so it is possible that Mary is expecting Jesus to follow her instruction. With equal likelihood, it is possible that Mary was depending on Jesus to solve the problem. Jesus was Mary's firstborn son. Therefore, he would have been responsible for the family. He must have been an excellent provider. Regardless of whether one of these situations is the most valid, or a combination of the two, Jesus makes it clear that things are not the same anymore. His primary mission is not focused on his earthly family. Though his hour had not yet come, his face was set to accomplish what the will of his Father was. Knowing this, it is fascinating to know that Jesus chose to manifest his glory at a party.

Now, you might be wondering about an issue related to "wine," so I will address it. The Greek word for wine in this passage is *oino*- (oy-noss) which means wine, and cannot mean just juice from grapes. So yes, it was wine with alcohol. Water was often added at varying proportions. Nevertheless, one could still drink too much watered-down wine as the phrase "have drunk freely" (2:10) comes from a verb form that means "to get drunk." Many people argue that consuming alcohol is a sin. That does not seem to be consistent with what happened at the wedding at Cana. However, I have told you this so that you understand what the passage says. Drinking alcohol is not a sin. Drinking alcohol is a sin if you are under the legal age limit, or become intoxicated by it.

The Cleansing of the Temple

When you hear the word "cleanse," what do you think of? I think of soap. For those not familiar with this narrative, the "cleansing" of the temple would unlikely invoke Jesus overturning tables. This account is another one of the few narratives I was familiar with as a child. I had trouble thinking about Jesus being angry and making the place a mess. But in order to understand what is going on, we need to realize that Jesus is not impulsively reacting like we would. The historical context of this situation needs to be explained. Since the dispersion of the Jews, substantial travel was required to participate at the Jerusalem Passover. The ability to purchase sacrificial animals was very helpful for those traveling a long distance. Additionally, money had to be converted to what was acceptable for purchases and the temple tax. Money changers typically charge an interest, and therefore made a profit. This business enterprise had been taking place in the outer court of the temple. The place of worship had become a place to make money. You can understand Jesus' rage even more fully when you understand that the temple ultimately signified him (John 1:14; 2:19). How often do you quote a Bible verse when you are fuming with anger? Well, Jesus referred to two texts in this situation. Look up Jeremiah 7:11 and Zechariah 14:21.



Meet Nicodemus

In Lesson 5, it was mentioned that there are several Pharisees in the New Testament that are commended. Nicodemus is one of these. He is to be commended for coming to Jesus, and acknowledging that Jesus is from God. However, Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was telling him. You must understand that Nicodemus was a very highly respected teacher. As John 3:1 states, he was "a ruler of the Jews." It would have been a public embarrassment for Nicodemus to approach Jesus and acknowledge him as a teacher from God. Remember what you have learned about Jesus' social status. Pay special attention to what Jesus was teaching. Nicodemus could not

THE LIFE OF CHRIST: LESSON 9

understand how someone could be born again. How can one pass through the womb a second time? Jesus was not talking about a second physical birth. To be born again is a spiritual birth. If you are going to see the kingdom of God, you need to be born again. If God does not give new life, you will not even understand what the kingdom is about (3:6-9).

Mrs. Samaritan

As we close this section, Jesus met a Samaritan woman, whose name we do not know. Most of the culture shock that would have taken place for the woman, and for Jesus' disciples has been already explained to you. John 1:4 says that Jesus "had" to pass through Samaria. It is obvious that he was on a spiritual mission to save many people there. That should not be overlooked. As it was stated in Lesson 5, the Jews would normally travel around Samaria. However, if Jesus had done this, he might have risked being arrested. Herod Anitpas had imprisoned John the Baptist around this time (Luke 3:19-20).

Mapping the Initial Ministry (Map 3)

This map assignment will be simple. You need to go through the lesson and your Bible reading to identify where the following events took place. There is not a location on the map that does not require one or more labels. Take the liberty of adding portions of Scripture to enhance the map. Impress your mom.

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| 1. John's baptisms | 5. The Wedding at Cana (Oh, come oooooon! Can it get easier than this?!) |
| 2. Jesus' temptation | 6. Passover and cleansing of the temple |
| 3. Home of Andrew, Simon, and Philip | 7. Mrs. Samaritan |
| 4. Home of Nathaniel | |

Reading Assignment:

Acts 1-12

James

Greek	Pronunciation	English	Part of Speech
eipon	aye-pon	I said	verb
oí hoi to	ha, hey, ta	the	adjective
wra	hora	hour	noun
písti~	pistis	faith, trust	noun
pisteuw	pis-tay-oo-o	I believe, have faith	verb
gunh	goo-nay	woman, wife	noun