

The Gospel of John

John the Baptist was sent by God to bear witness of Christ (Jn. 1:6-8). In John 1:19-51, his testimony is described.

John's Witness to the Jewish Delegation

John 1:19-23

19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

...

23 He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

Though John didn't claim to be any eschatological figure (Jn. 1:21, 25), he did not mean to say that he was just another itinerant preacher either. His ministry was that of preparation found in Isaiah 40:3 from which he quoted (Jn. 1:23).

The Context of Isaiah 40:3

The Book of Isaiah begins by God calling upon heaven and earth to testify against His people: Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the LORD speaks, "Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me. An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand. Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him"(Isaiah 1:2-4).

Chapters 1-39 are focused on God's judgment of Israel for her rebellion. However, in chapter 40, the prophet makes a major shift introducing the theme of comfort, and verses 1-9 set the tone for chapters 40-48, or even the rest of the Book of Isaiah. After that, Isaiah speaks of the coming Servant who will bring even greater blessing to the world (Isa. 52:13-53:12), which will be consummated in a new heaven and new earth (Isa. 65-66; Kostenberger, Interpretation of the OT in NT – 425-426; Bruce, 49).

Isaiah 40:1-5

1 "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.

2 "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of the LORD'S hand Double for all her sins."

3 A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God."

4 "Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley;

5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

The one summoned to speak kindly to God's people isn't identified. This forces the readers to focus on the message rather than the messenger. His message is that the people are to prepare the way for YHWH in the wilderness and make a desert highway for their God.

In ancient times, roads were straightened and made smooth for a coming king to travel easily upon. However, so magnificent is the God of Israel that the mere filling of potholes and shaving down bumps in the road would not be sufficient to prepare the way for His return; instead Isaiah calls for the leveling of every mountain and raising of the valleys. Of course John was not speaking of a literal renovation of the land; he was telling the nation to prepare itself spiritually and morally for the coming King. If YHWH is to return, the people must prepare through repentance (Matt. 3:8). Their hearts needed to be made straight, not their surroundings.

As Young says, "When Israel was in bondage in Egypt, God went through the desert to deliver her (Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:7). Again, at their time of need, God came from Sinai to be present with His people (Judg. 5:1-5). Here is a similar picture. The command to build the road is directed to the people, but they were to do it by means of repentance. It was their iniquity that had brought them into bondage and kept God from them" (Young, Isaiah III, 27,28).

John's "baptism of repentance" (Matt. 3:11) provided the opportunity for those who desired cleansing to do so before receiving their Messiah. Yet the comfort for God's people is not found in anything that they do, but in the activity of God entering into the sphere of human activity . . . the revelation of Him in human sight (Oswalt vol. II, 50).

Note:

1. Part of the message of Isaiah is that the iniquity of God's people has been removed (Isa. 40:2). Although it doesn't tell us how, Isaiah 53 does. In John the Baptist's words, there is a Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world.
2. The preparation spoken of by the messenger of Isaiah is that the people will prepare the way *for the coming of God to His people*. When He comes, Isaiah says that the glory of God will be revealed (Isa. 40:5). The apostle John had just declared of Christ that He was God (Jn. 1:1-5), that "He came to His own (that is, His own land, or world – Jn. 1:11-13), and that "we beheld His glory, the glory of the only Begotten of the Father" (Jn. 14, 18). Now John the Baptist, by identifying himself with the messenger of Isaiah, subliminally affirms that Jesus' coming was the return of God to people.
3. The purpose of YHWH's return is not just for Israel, but also for all humanity (Isa. 40:5; 60:1-3). John also confirms the same purpose with the coming of Christ when he says, "as many as received Him (Jew and Gentile alike), to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood (not of physical descent, such as the people of Israel) . . . but of God" (Jn. 1:12-13).

John's Witness About Jesus

John 1:29-34

29 *The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*

30 *"This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'*

31 *"I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water."*

32 *John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.*

33 *"I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'*

34 *"I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."*

These verses confirm again that John the Baptist saw the purpose of his ministry as revealing Messiah to the nation of Israel (Jn. 1:31), so that they might believe in the Him through it (Jn. 1:7).

John bears witness to at least four great truths about Jesus:

1. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
2. Jesus existed before John.
3. The Spirit descended upon Jesus and remained upon Him.
4. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

1. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The day after meeting the delegation from Jerusalem, John the Baptist saw Jesus and declared Him to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. To the modern reader, the words of John are pregnant with meaning, but to those who heard him directly, the image of the sacrificial lamb was not as clear. Some think that John was making reference to the Passover lamb, for Passover was rapidly approaching and that lamb would be foremost in the disciples' minds. But the Passover lamb was not thought to be an atonement for sin. In fact, a lamb was rarely used as a sacrifice at all. John's expression, therefore, more than likely came from a different source.

John had quoted from Isaiah the day before (1:23 cf. Isa. 40:3), and it was also the book of Isaiah that was used to quell his fears at a later time (Matt. 11:5 cf. Isa. 35:5; 42:7; 61:1). We can gather from this that he knew the book well. In Isaiah 53:4-7, a major Messianic passage, a concept similar to that found in John 1:29 appears. It is most likely from this passage that John's concept of a sacrificial lamb comes. Jesus is the lamb of Isaiah, the one who continually takes away (ὁ ἀίρων - present participle) the sins of the world. Thus, Jesus' baptism signifies His identification with sinful Israel and points to the cross.

2. Jesus existed before John.

Though John the Baptist was born before Jesus (Lk. 1:57 ff), he testified that Jesus existed before him. John the Baptist is affirming the pre-existence of Jesus presented in the prologue of the book (See notes on Jn. 1:1, 10; Dods, 696). By virtue of His pre-existence, Jesus took absolute priority (Carson, 151).

3. The Spirit descended upon Jesus and remained upon Him.

Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (a fact that the apostle John assumes his readers are aware of) **so that He (Jesus) might be manifested to Israel.** At Jesus' baptism John saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus in the bodily form of a dove (Matt. 3:16; Lk. 3:22; Mk. 1:10). But significantly, the Spirit didn't just descend upon Him, it remained with Him; God gives the Spirit to Jesus without limit (Jn. 3:34).

The fact that the Spirit remained upon Jesus is significant for two reasons. First, when the Jews read the OT they saw the Spirit's coming as the fulfillment of the promise that the Spirit would be poured out on the great Davidic king (Isa. 11:1 ff.; 61:1) (Carson, 151). Specifically, it was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 42:1 where it says that the Spirit of God would be poured out on the Servant of the Lord (Messiah).

Isaiah 61:1-3

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners;

2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,

3 To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.

The coming of the Spirit like a dove was a visible manifestation of Isaiah's prediction; it was an announcement that the Messianic age was drawing near. Secondly, it was also the abiding of the Spirit that gave Jesus the ability to baptize others with the Spirit and fulfill the prophecy of the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36:25, 26.

4. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

The Meaning of the Baptism with the Spirit

Mention of the "baptism with the Holy Spirit" occurs 6 times in NT; once in each of the gospels, once in Acts, and once in the writings of Paul. Each time it appears, the Greek construction "in the Holy Spirit" (ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ) is the same. Though the Greek word "en" (ἐν) can be translated as "in," "with," or "by," when it is used with the word "baptism" it always refers to the element into which something is immersed. This means that the Spirit is not the One doing the baptizing, but the element into which the believer is placed.

The Baptism with the Spirit in the Gospels

The first time the baptism of the Holy Spirit comes up is when John the Baptist is preaching and he contrasts it to his own water baptism (Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33). In these passages the Baptism with the Spirit is still future; it is an event that will not take place until after Jesus' glorification (Jn. 7:39).

Matthew 3:11(NAS) states,

I	baptize you	with (ἐν) water	for repentance . . .
He will	baptize you	with (ἐν) the Holy Spirit	and fire.

The parallel ideas between baptism with water and baptism with the Spirit show that believers are immersed in the Spirit in a similar way that the repentant were immersed in water by John. Although there is a huge difference between water and the Spirit of God, the fact remains that Christ is said to be the One who baptizes people into the Holy Spirit.

In the historical context of the Gospels, the baptism of the Spirit is closely connected to the OT promises of the coming Kingdom. In Matthew 3:2, John was proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was near. This means that we have to look at the OT to determine its meaning.

In the OT we find the Spirit both (1) coming upon Messiah (Isa 11:2; cf. 42:1; 61:1 cf. Matt. 3:16; Lk. 4:18-19) and (2) being poured out on others (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Eze. 36: 24-29; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28; Zech. 12:10).

Though the outpouring of the Spirit in the OT is said to come from God, it's an easy jump to see Christ as the dispenser of the Holy Spirit since (1) He was just identified as God (Jn. 1:1), (2) He does the works of God (Jn. 5:17 ff.), and (3) the Spirit remains upon Him (Jn. 1:32-33 cf. Jn. 3:34).

CONCLUSION:

John the Baptist's statement in John 1:33 ties the baptism with the Holy Spirit to the events foretold by the OT prophets and connects Jesus to the Messianic Age.

Though the words "baptism with the Holy Spirit" don't appear in the OT, the idea of the pouring out (or, inundation) of the Spirit does (Isa. 32:15; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 12:10), and it is easy to see how John the Baptist would draw an analogy between the immersion with the Spirit from his own baptism performed with water.

The Baptism with the Spirit in Acts

Terminology related to the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is used twice in Acts. In Acts 1:5 Jesus speaks of the disciples being baptized with the Holy Spirit and in Acts 10:45 Peter refers to the gift of the Spirit being "poured out on the Gentiles."

Acts 1:5 makes it clear that the Baptism with the Spirit is still future and is the same thing spoken about in the gospels.

Acts 1:4-5

***4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me;
5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."***

The baptism about to take place is clearly the same one that John the Baptist predicted. Jesus' words come to pass on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two.

The Spirit's coming at Pentecost was also clearly a fulfillment of the OT promise of the outpouring of the Spirit. As the confused onlookers wondered what was happening – especially as they observed many speaking in tongues - Peter said, "This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel, 'and it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'that I will pour forth of my Spirit on all mankind.'" (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-21). In other words, according to Peter, the eschatological time (the "last days") had arrived; the promised outpouring of the Spirit had come, signaling the beginning of the Messianic Age.

Later, in Acts 10:45, Peter used synonymous terminology in relation to the Gentiles, "the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also" and it is clear that what happened to them was also the fulfillment of the Lord's promise in Acts 1:5 (cf. 11:15ff – where "the beginning" refers to the events in Acts 2).

CONCLUSION:

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit carries the same connotation in Acts as it does in the Gospels: it is clearly an OT predicted event. Christ is the agent of the baptism (Jn. 3:34; Acts 2:33).

The Baptism with the Spirit in I Corinthians 12:13

1 Corinthians 12:13

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

The last mention of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit appears in I Corinthians 12 where it is said that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is what makes the body of Christ a unity.

Except for the addition of the word "one," the terminology is the same as everywhere else so unless the context strongly suggests otherwise, the similarity of language argues for the same meaning.

Some see this verse as saying that the Spirit is the One through whom Christ accomplishes His "baptizing." This, however, seems unlikely for although "en" can mean agency ("by"), it is never used that way with the word baptism. It can just as easily be translated, "For with one Spirit we were all

baptized into one body.” Though this translation wouldn’t tell us who the baptizer is, from other passages we could again assume that it is Christ bestowing the Spirit on believers as promised in the Old Testament.

The purpose of our common experience in the Spirit is so that we are unified in Christ.

The NAS also states that we were all made to “drink” of one Spirit. Though the verb ποτίζω (potizo) most often reads “drink,” in Isaiah 29:10 it has the meaning of “pour out” or “flood” or “water” - as in irrigation. The sense of the passive verb (“made to drink – NAS) could be read as “we were all drenched” in one Spirit (Carson, Showing the Spirit, 46). The Holy Spirit is said to be poured out and those upon whom He is poured out are said to be baptized (Hodge, 254).

In the Gospels and in Acts 1:5, the baptism with the Spirit was spoken of as a future event. In Acts 2 it was spoken of as being fulfilled. Now, in I Corinthians 12 it is viewed as a past event having taken place in every believer’s life. It is evidence of participation in the New Covenant; to make the baptism with the Spirit an event subsequent to salvation (as some Christians see it) would mean that a believer can become a partaker of the New Covenant without receiving its benefits – a view that is wholly untenable.

John’s Witness of Jesus to his Disciples

John 1:43-51

***35 Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples,
36 and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"
37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.***

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

48 Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

49 Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."

50 Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these."

51 And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

John, once again, testified that Jesus was the Lamb of God which prompted his own disciples to follow Jesus. This testimony then turned into a number of “invitations” to come to Jesus (Jn. 1:40-51). The last person added to the party in John 1, is Nathanael.

Though Jesus had never met Nathaniel, He had intimate knowledge of his character and declared him to be an Israelite who is truly without deceit. Astonished, Nathanael inquired about the source of Jesus’

knowledge. Jesus' answer and Nathanael's reaction can only be understood in light of the illustration about Jacob's ladder that follows (Jn. 1:51; Gen. 28:11-17).

Jesus' comment about the fig tree is difficult to understand, but it is clear that Nathanael understood exactly what Jesus was speaking about - so much so that he felt confident that Jesus was the Son of God, the King of Israel.

The fig tree was a familiar object in Palestine, probably in leaf at this time (RWP). It was almost a symbol of home (I Kin. 4:25; Isa. 36:16; Mic. 4:4; Zech. 3:10) and a symbol of national tranquility (Bernard I, 63). The shade from its large thick leaf was certainly at a later time used for meditation and study (also Plummer, 87; Tenny, 82). It's possible that Nathanael had an outstanding time of communion with God, or even could have been meditating on his illustrious ancestor, Jacob, while he was under the fig tree (Kent, 46), and it is to this which Jesus refers. If so, this also helps explain why Jesus said Nathanael was without deceit for He was contrasting him to Jacob who was traditionally associated with deceit (Gen 27:35). Of course, Jacob was changed by God and was later named "Israel" by Him. Bruce comments that Jesus was saying to Nathanael something like, "Behold, one who is all Israel and no Jacob!"

Of course, whatever Nathanael was doing under the fig tree is only speculation (Bruce, 61), but because Jesus never met the man before we are required to understand that it was Jesus' supernatural insight; had this not been so, Nathanael would not have responded as he did (Alford, 702; and most others. Also see 2:24, 25; 4:17-19, 29; 6:70; 9:3; 11:4, 11; 13:10-11, 38 for this same supernatural insight).

Jesus then says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (Jn. 1:51).

The imagery is taken from Jacob's dream at Bethel (Gen. 28:11-15). There it says, "He (Jacob) had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it."

To see heaven open is to receive a vision of otherworldly realities (Act 10:11; Rev. 4:1; 19:11). The angels ascending and descending up and down the ladder upon Jacob became a sign of communion with God, revelation, and reaffirmation of the faithfulness of God's promises made to Israel through Abraham. In applying this to Himself, Jesus stresses the uninterrupted communion between Himself and the Father (Kostenberger, Interpretation of the OT in NT – 430).

(The ladder was probably in reality a stairway, for the word in Hebrew is related to a mound of dirt thrown up against a walled city [II Sam. 20:15] which better fits the image of a stairway than a ladder).

"When Jacob woke from His dream He declared, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. He called the name of that place Bethel . . ." (Gen. 28:17-19).

Bethel means, “House of God” – the place where God is revealed. Jesus is now claiming to be the new House of God, He is the place where God reveals Himself, where heaven and earth, God and humanity meet (Kostenberger, Interpretation of the OT in NT – 429-430). He is the new temple (Jn. 2:19-22), the new place of worship (Jn. 4:20-24), the gate of heaven (Gen. 28:17; cf Jn. 10:7 “I am the door to the sheep”; 14:6 “I am the way”). He is the culmination of all of God’s revelatory expressions (Jn. 1:14; Heb. 1:1-3), and the disciples will soon be witnesses of revelation in Him that exceeds that received by any Israelite in all their history.

In this application, the union between heaven and earth is affected by the Son. He is not only the place that God reveals Himself, He replaces the ladder, and becomes the link between heaven and earth (Bruce, 62; Tenny, 82).

“Son of Man” in the gospel of John is a title that Jesus applies to Himself, and is particularly tied to contexts of his heavenly origin and destination (Jn. 1:51; 3:15; 6:62) and His being lifted up on the cross (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:34; cf. 6:53; 12:23; 13:31). “Son of Man” also identifies Jesus as the mysterious individual in Daniel 7:13 who comes with the clouds of heaven and receives the kingdom for the Father. Having seen God, Jesus alone can give a full account of God (Jn. 1:18). Jesus taught that no one has actually gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven (Jn. 3:12-13). He who came from heaven, returned to heaven (Acts 1:2, 9) and will also come again in glory (Matt. 26:64; 16:27-28).

The present verses point to greater things to come. . . . specifically, that which takes place in an ever-escalating series of signs performed by Jesus (Kostenberger, Commentary on John).

CONCLUSION:

We began John, chapter 1 by stating that the prologue (verse 1-18) is more than just an introduction; it is the directive on how the entire book should be read and understood (Beasley-Murray, 5). In it we were introduced to the Word; He is eternal, possesses the nature of God, created the world, and is the source of life and light. The climax of the prologue is that the Word became flesh, dwelt among man, and is the medium through which God reveals Himself to man.

Now, in verses 19-51, John identifies himself as the messenger of Isaiah 40, the one sent to announce the coming of God to His people. We learn that the incarnate Word is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (cf. Isa. 40:2; 53:4-7), the One upon whom the Spirit of God remained. He is, thus, identified as both the Messiah (Isa. 42:1) and the One who dispenses the Holy Spirit as promised in the New Covenant. Although it is doubtful that John the Baptist understood the full import of all he was saying, His words speak beyond himself and reveal the nature of Christ to us.

Lastly, we see that Jesus also claims to be the new House of God, the ladder between heaven and earth, the gate to heaven.