

EXPLANATION OF 43RD BIBLEBOOK

JOHN 3 (A.D. 70-95)

INTRODUCTION

John 3:1-21 describes Jesus Christ revealing himself to Nicodemus.

John 3:22-36 describes how John the Baptist begins to withdraw.

OUTLINE

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EXPLANATION

(I) 3:1-21. Jesus instructs Nicodemus.

a. Regeneration is absolutely necessary (3:1-8).

3:1. Now there was (viia) a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

3:2. He came (viaa) to him (Jesus) at night and said (viaa) to him, "Rabbi, we know (by intuition and reflection)¹ (vira) that you are a teacher who has come (vira) from God. For no one can (vipn) do (vnpa) the miraculous signs which you are doing (vipa) unless (if not) God is (vspa) with him.

3:3. Jesus answered (viao) and said (viaa) him, "I tell (vipa) you the truth, if a man is not *once for all* born (vsap) anew and from above (locally)², he is cannot (vipn) to see³ (vnaa) the Kingdom of God.

3:4. Nicodemus said (vipa) to him, "How can (vipn) a man be born (vnap) being (vppa) old? He cannot (vipn) a second time enter into (vnaa) the womb of his mother and be born (vnap).

3:5. Jesus answered (viao), "I tell (vipa) you the truth, unless (if not) someone is once for all born (vsap) from water and Spirit, he can (vipn) not enter (vnaa) into the Kingdom of God.

3:6. That which is born (vprp) of flesh is *always* (vipa) flesh, and that which is born (vprp) of the Spirit is *always* (vipa) spirit.

3:7. Do not be amazed (vsaa) that I said (viaa) to you, 'You must (vipa) *once for all* be born (vnap) anew and from above⁴.'

3:8. The wind blows (vipa) where it wills (vipa). You hear (vipa) its sound, but you do not know (by intuition or reflection)⁵ (vira) from where it is coming (vipn) or to where it is going (vipa). So it *always* is (vipa) with everyone who is born (vprp) of the Spirit."

The real thing Nicodemus wanted to know was: "What good thing must I do in order to enter the Kingdom of God?" His unspoken question was: "How do I get eternal life? How do I get saved?"

Jesus answered him with a riddle. A riddle is a saying with a hidden meaning. Jesus said, "No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again".

To be born again means to be born from above, from God's Spirit. The word 'born again' literally means *to be born from above*, that is, from him who comes from heaven⁶. It also means *to be born anew*, that is, to be born all over again spiritually after you have been born physically⁷. In John 3:6, Jesus says, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit". To be born of the flesh means to be born physically with a sinful human nature. To be born of the Spirit means to be born spiritually with a new spiritual nature.

To be baptised with water is the sign and seal of being baptised with the Holy Spirit. In John 3:5, Jesus says, "No man can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of *water and the Spirit*". In Matthew 3:11 we also read about

¹ G: oida

² G: anóthen

³ G: idein, aorist infinitive of 'horaó

⁴ G: anóthen

⁵ G: oida

⁶ John 3:31

⁷ Galatians 4:9, "all over again"

water and the Spirit. John the Baptist said, “I baptise you with water ... but Jesus Christ will baptise you with the Holy Spirit”. The meaning is that people are only born again by the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives. People are born again when the Holy Spirit uses the preaching or teaching of the Word of God to regenerate people⁸.

People are never born again by the baptism with water by a human being. The baptism with water is *the sign* or pictorial presentation of the reality, namely, of the baptism with the Spirit. The baptism with water is also *the visible seal* or confirmation of the invisible baptism with the Spirit. Only when the baptism with water signifies that you have been born again by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, does the sign have meaning. Because we no longer read in John 3:6,8 about the birth of water, but only of the birth of the Spirit, it proves that the one great essential is being born of the Holy Spirit!

To be born again by the Holy Spirit is an absolute necessity and a sovereign work of God. Like all the Jews, Nicodemus believed that people could save themselves by perfectly obeying the law of the Old Testament and a host of man-made religious regulations. Now Jesus surprised him by teaching him that salvation is a gift from God and not a work earned by man! Jesus teaches him that in order to be saved, a person must be born again by the Holy Spirit and not by the works of law⁹.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again’ (3:7).” Nicodemus should have known from the Old Testament that his human nature is corrupt¹⁰ and absolutely unable to save himself¹¹. He should not have been so surprised at the teaching of Jesus.

He also says that the wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. In the beginning stage, salvation is a sovereign act of God and man is completely passive. Nobody on earth can direct the wind. It acts with sovereign independence. Likewise, nobody on earth can direct or control his own salvation. The Holy Spirit of God acts with sovereign independence from man. Regeneration is a sovereign work of God over which man has no more control than he has over the wind¹².

b. The Kingdom of God (3:3,5)

The Kingdom of God *in general* is the eternal kingship of God over everyone and everything¹³.

The Kingdom of God *in particular* is the realm in which the rule or kingship (lordship) of God through Christ is recognised and obeyed and in which the grace of God prevails. The Kingdom of God expresses itself in four areas:

- *in the salvation* of believers¹⁴ and God’s rule *in their hearts and lives*¹⁵
- *in the constitution and growth of believers as a Church* on earth¹⁶
- *in the influence (the good works) of believers in every area in the world*¹⁷
- and finally *in the new heaven and the new earth*¹⁸.

Entering the Kingdom of God is the same as receiving eternal life or being saved. Thus, a comparison between John 3:3-8 and John 3:16-17 teaches that the sovereign act of God (being born again) precedes any act of man (to believe) (1:12-13; 6:44,37; 17:6)¹⁹. Even to believe is a sovereign gift of God²⁰!

In its initial stage the process of changing a person into a child of God precedes his conversion and faith. This is also the teaching of John 1:12-13 and John 6:44,37 and John 17:6.

c. The earthly and the heavenly things (3:9-13).

3:9. Nicodemus answered (viao) and said (viaa) to him, “How can (vipn) these things happen (vnad)?”

3:10. Jesus answered (viao) and said (viaa) to him, “You are (vipa) the teacher of Israel and these things you do not understand (know by observation and experience)²¹ (vipa)?”

3:11. I tell (vipa) you the truth, that which we *effectively* know (by relation, intuition and reflection)²² (vira) we *constantly* speak (utter)(vipa), and that which we *effectively* have seen (vira) we *constantly* testify (vipa), but still you (plural) do not accept (vipa) our testimony.

⁸ 1 Peter 1:23

⁹ cf. Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16

¹⁰ Genesis 6:5; Job 14:4; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9

¹¹ Isaiah 43:10-11

¹² cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Titus 3:3-7

¹³ Psalm 145: 13; 146:10

¹⁴ Mark 10:24-27

¹⁵ Luke 17:20-21

¹⁶ Matthew 16:18-19

¹⁷ Romans 14:17; Matthew 25:34-40

¹⁸ Matthew 25:34; Hebrews 12:22-24; 2 Peter 3:10-13

¹⁹ Acts 16:14

²⁰ Acts 13:48; 18:27; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; Hebrews 12:2; 2 Peter 1:1

²¹ G: ginóskó

²² G: oida

3:12. If I have spoken²³ (viaa) the earthly things to you (plural) and you do not believe (vipa), how will you (plural) believe (vifa) if I speak (vsaa) the heavenly things to you?

3:13. No one has ever ascended (and dwelt there)(vira) into heaven except the Son of man who once for all descended (vpaa) out of heaven.

In John 3:11 Jesus says that John the Baptist and he himself knew and testified about the heavenly things. But the Pharisees and Nicodemus did not accept their testimony. Jesus could say this, because with his penetrating eyes he could look right into the heart of Nicodemus and see his hesitation to believe what Jesus was teaching (cf. 2:25).

The earthly things. In John 3:12, Jesus says, “I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe”. He had been speaking about things, which are heavenly in character and in origin, but *take place on earth*.

For example: the earthly things are: the coming of the Messiah to his own people (1:11), the death and resurrection of the Messiah (2:19), the proclamation of the good news to the Gentiles everywhere in the world (3:16-17) and especially baptism with water and baptism with the Spirit (regeneration)(1:33; 3:3-8).

Already in the Old Testament God said, “I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws”²⁴. Regeneration takes place in the sphere of human experience on earth. Therefore anybody, who knew the Old Testament and reflected on his own natural inability to please God, would have understood the necessity of being born again!

But although regeneration of people by the Holy Spirit is clearly taught in the Old Testament and by Jesus in the New Testament, the majority of Jews rejected it. Nicodemus and people like him thought that these earthly things were incredible. So how would they ever believe when Jesus spoke to them about the heavenly things?

The heavenly things. The heavenly things are things that *take place in heaven*, especially God’s eternal plan of salvation, which Jesus explains in John 3:13-18. Only the Son of God has always been in the presence of God and knows all the decisions that were made in heaven. No man has ever gone into heaven to find out what the heavenly things are. Only Jesus Christ has come from heaven, knows the heavenly things and reveals the heavenly things. God’s heavenly plan is *to save his people*, not only believing Jews, but also believing non-Jews (Gentiles) from every nation in the world. God’s heavenly plan is *to save them through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ*. God’s heavenly plan lies completely outside the range of man’s knowledge until it is revealed to man²⁵. Jesus Christ not only reveals God’s heavenly plan, but also executes and fulfils it for man!

d. The lifting up of the Son of Man (3:14-15).

3:14. Just as Moses once lifted (viaa) up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must *once for all* be lifted up (vnap).

3:15. so that everyone who *continually* believes (vpaa) in him may *continually* have (vspa) eternal life.

The Old Testament type and the New Testament reality. The heart of God’s plan of salvation was partially disclosed in the illustrations (types) of the Old Testament. It was only fully disclosed when their fulfilment (antitype), Jesus Christ himself, fulfilled them! In the Old Testament the illustration (or type) of God’s plan of salvation was the lifting up of the bronze snake on a pole in the desert²⁶ (1446-1407 B.C.). The fulfilment (antitype) of God’s plan of salvation would be the lifting up of the Son of God on the cross! Also king David²⁷ (1000 B.C.) and the prophet Isaiah²⁸ (740 B.C.) prophesied that Jesus Christ would be crucified!

The resemblance between the type and the reality. There is a resemblance between the illustration in the Old Testament and the fulfilment in the New Testament. In both cases, death threatens as a punishment for sin. In both cases, God himself with sovereign grace provides a remedy. In both cases, something or somebody must be lifted up in public view of everybody. In both cases, only those, who look at the thing or the Person that is lifted up with a believing heart, are saved.

The reality transcends the type. But as always, the fulfilment far transcends the illustration. In the Old Testament, the people faced physical death, but now because of their sin everybody in the world faces spiritual, physical and eternal death! In the Old Testament, the snake that was lifted up had no power to heal; it was only a symbol. But Jesus Christ has real power to heal, real power to save and real power to destroy those who reject him!

The reality is a divine must. The lifting up of Jesus Christ on the cross is presented as ‘a must’. Jesus says that he must be lifted up. His lifting up on the cross is not one of many remedies in the world, but it is *the only possible remedy* for sin in the world! Other religions ask, “Why must Jesus Christ die?” Jesus Christ must die, because only by the death and resurrection of Jesus can the demands of God’s righteous and holy anger against sin as well as God’s love be met!

²³ G: eipon, second aorist of ‘legó’

²⁴ Ezekiel 36:25-27

²⁵ Matthew 11:25-27; 1 Corinthians 2:7-10

²⁶ Numbers 21:8-9

²⁷ Psalm 22:16

²⁸ Isaiah 53:5

The lifting up of Jesus Christ refers first of all to his lifting up on the cross, but is never isolated from his lifting up in his resurrection from the dead, in his ascension into heaven and in his enthronement in heaven²⁹. Although Christ is lifted up in the sight of all people, he does not save all people.

e. Salvation (3:16).

3:16. For so (in this way) God loved (viaa) the world that he *once for all* gave (viaa) his one and only Son, so that whoever continually believes (vppa) in him should not be lost (vsam)(aorist), but continually have (vspa) eternal life.

God's love. The verb 'loved' (past tense) points to one act of God. God's love is the one, great, central fact and reality in the Bible. It shows that God's love reached back to eternity, was expressed throughout history and bears fruit in the present in our lives. The love, with which he chose us before the creation of the world, finds its highest possible expression in the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, and is now shown in our salvation when we believe.

The world. The word 'the world' has several different meanings in the Bible and in the Gospel of John³⁰. Here in John 3:16, the word 'world' refers to the world (group) of lost people, without distinction with respect to race or nationality. It refers to people alienated from the life of God, laden with sin, exposed to judgement and in need of salvation, from every tribe, nation and language on earth, without implying that it refers to every single individual.

However, the world is here not viewed as the realm of evil, which is openly hostile to God, to Christ and to Christians, as in John 15:18. God 'hates' (in the sense of God 'does not choose') evil and therefore God does not love the 'world' (group) of evil people that hate God, Christ and Christians³¹. God loves the 'world' (group) of lost people, without distinction with respect to race or nationality.

The one and only Son (of God). John 3:16 proves that Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God the Father before he took on the human nature. Therefore the term 'the only begotten Son' describes the eternal relationship of God the Son to God the Father and God the Spirit before he also became a human being at his first coming. It is an expression of Christ's Trinitarian Sonship, that is, it expresses the fact that Jesus Christ is unique in kind, the only example of its category, the One and Only. God the Son (Jesus Christ) proceeded from God (originated from God, went out from the very presence of God, went out from the very divine being of God). Jesus Christ is God from eternity (1:14,18)³², but took on the human nature in time (1:14)³³.

The fact that God gave his only-begotten Son means that God gave his most precious gift to die as an offering for our sin. God the Father gave God the Son out of self-sacrificial love (3:16)³⁴, but also God the Son gave himself willingly (10:17-18)³⁵ to die as a sacrifice on the cross to make atonement for the sins of all people who believe in him – "his sheep" (10:11).

Believe. Only believers obtain eternal life. Jesus is speaking of all those people who receive him with *abiding* trust and confidence. The verb 'to believe' is in the present continuous tense and thus shows that it does not refer to those, who once made a gesture of faith, but later stopped to believe and slid back. The faith of such people was only *intellectual faith*³⁶ or *emotional faith*³⁷ but was not *saving faith* (3:16). True faith continues to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ every day and will persevere to the end. Although the Gospel is preached to people of every tribe, nation and language in the world, not everyone who hears the gospel believes in Jesus Christ³⁸. But whoever believes, whether he is a Jew or a Gentile, receives eternal life the moment he believes³⁹.

Eternal life. True believers receive eternal life. 'Eternal life' is to personally know and fellowship with Christ⁴⁰ from the moment you believe. It is a new life that includes assurance of salvation, fellowship with God, peace, joy and love for God in the heart, and purpose and fulfilment in this life! It is not only a life that is different in quality from the life that characterises this present age, but also a never-ending life! It is the assurance that you will definitely share in the wonderful life in the new heaven and on the new earth in the future age of glory after the second coming of Christ.

f. Condemnation (3:17-18).

3:17. For God has not sent (viaa) his Son into the world to condemn (vsaa) the world, but to *once for all* save (vsap) the world through him.

²⁹ Acts 2:33

³⁰ cf. 1:10

³¹ Psalm 5:4-6; 11:5; Romans 1:18

³² cf. Romans 9:5; Colossians 1:19; 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 2:8; 1 John 5:20

³³ Philippians 2:5-8

³⁴ Romans 3:25-26

³⁵ Mark 10:45

³⁶ James 2:19

³⁷ Luke 8:13

³⁸ Romans 14-18; Hebrews 4:2

³⁹ Romans 1:16

⁴⁰ John 17:3

3:18. He who believes (vppa) in him is not condemned (vipp). He who does not believe (vppa) is condemned (virp) already, because he has not believed (vira) in the name of the one and only Son of God (i.e. he is already in the continuing state of condemnation, because he has refused to enter into the continuing state of faith).

The Jews believed that only they were exclusively God's chosen nation. They believed that the Messiah would *not* condemn the physical nation of Israel, but only the physical Gentile nations, because these nations were oppressing Israel. However, the prophet Amos warned the Jews that the final judgement day would also be for the Jews⁴¹!

Jesus teaches that God's salvation plan includes all the nations of the world. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Like John 3:16, 'the world' here means *the world (group) of lost people in every race, nation and language*. God's plan was not only to save people from the punishment of sin, but also to save people from sin itself and give them everlasting life.

Jesus teaches that the issue of salvation or condemnation is determined in this present life. While the main purpose of the first coming of Jesus Christ was to bring salvation, it does not mean that the main purpose of his second coming will be to bring condemnation.

John 3:18 says, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe *stands condemned already*, because he has *not effectively believed* in the name of God's one and only Son". Nobody will have to wait for the final judgement day to receive his judgement. *The decision whether you will be saved or condemned is made now in this life!* On the final judgement day all people who believe in Jesus Christ will not be condemned⁴². Because they have already been forgiven, no sentence of condemnation will be read against them! However, on the final judgement day all the people who have done evil will rise to be condemned⁴³. This does not mean that they will only be judged and condemned on the last day, but rather that their condemnation will be publicly announced on the last day and then executed! All people, who have rejected Christ by not believing in him, do not need to wait for the final judgement, as if the verdict will be postponed until then. All unbelievers stand condemned already! John 3:36 says, that God's displeasure and settled indignation rests on all people, who disobey Christ by refusing to accept him by a true and abiding faith.

After your death, there will be no second chance to believe in Jesus Christ! The issue of salvation and condemnation is determined in this present life!

g. The divine verdict (3:19-21).

3:19. Now this is (vipa) judgement (divine verdict or decision)⁴⁴: The light (Christ and his revelation) has *effectively come (vira) into the world, but the people have preferred (loved) (viaa) the darkness to the light, because their deeds were continually (viia) evil.*

3:20. For everyone who *continues (as a habit) to practise (vppa) what is foul (moral wrong and worthless)⁴⁵ constantly hates (vira) the light, and continually refuses to come (vipn) to the light, so that his (evil) deeds would not at some time be exposed (vsap).*

3:21. But everyone who *continues (as a habit) to do (vppa) the truth keeps coming (vipn) to be face to face to⁴⁶ the light, so that it may be manifested (vsap) that his works are (vipa+) effectively produced⁴⁷ (+vprp) in God.*

Certain people are doomed because they have hardened their hearts and refused to receive God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ revealed God: he made God's attributes visible to man (1:3-4). Jesus Christ earned salvation by his complete holy and righteous life and by paying the penalty for man's unholy and unrighteous life. Jesus Christ proclaimed the kingship of God and exhorted people to repent and believe⁴⁸. Jesus Christ did everything necessary to save man.

All people who reject Jesus Christ, who continue to live in the darkness, already stand doomed (3:18)⁴⁹. The Light (Jesus Christ and his truth) drives away all darkness. But whoever refuses to come to the Light will remain in darkness. Whoever stays away from the Christian meetings and neglects to read his Bible, hates the Light. He hides in the darkness, because he does not want the Light to expose the darkness in him. But all people who come to the Light prove that God in Christ is working in them! They will prove the reality of their faith by the new life they live.

Thus, all people in this world stand or fall depending on their relationship to Jesus Christ (1:18,36)⁵⁰.

⁴¹ Amos 3:2

⁴² John 5:24

⁴³ John 5:28-29

⁴⁴ G: krisis

⁴⁵ G: phaulos

⁴⁶ G: pros

⁴⁷ G: ergazomai

⁴⁸ Mark 1:14-15

⁴⁹ 1 John 3:6-9

⁵⁰ Luke 2:34

(II) 3:22-26. The connection between baptism with water and the purification rites.

3:22. After these things, Jesus and his disciples came (viaa) into the Judean countryside (region), and there he stayed (viia) with them and baptised (viia).

3:23. And John was (viia+) also baptising (+vppa) at Aenon near Salim, because there was (viia) much water there, and (people) were arriving (viin) and were baptised (viip).

3:24. for John had not yet⁵¹ been (viia+) thrown (+vprp) in prison.

3:25. So there arose (viad) a dispute between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of purifying⁵².

3:26. And they came (viaa) to John and said (viaa) to him, "Rabbi, he who was (viia) with you on the other side of the Jordan, to whom you bore testimony (vira), look, he is baptising (vipa) and all are going (vipn) to him.

Jesus and John had parallel ministries of preaching and baptising. *During the first year of Christ's ministry Jesus Christ and John the Baptist had parallel ministries of preaching and baptising people with water (4:1-2). John baptised people at Aenon near Salim (in the province of Decapolis across the Jordan from Samaria)(3:23). Jesus and his disciples probably baptised people at the shallow places in the Jordan River close to Jericho in the province of Judea.*

Jesus did not baptise people with water, but his disciples did (4:2). This shows that Jesus Christ was much greater than John the Baptist: he baptised people with the Spirit⁵³ and he baptised them with water by means of his disciples⁵⁴! This happened from about May to December A.D. 27 when John the Baptist was arrested⁵⁵. The Jews were glad that John had been imprisoned, because he always preached that they needed to repent. But their joy did not last, for they heard that Jesus and his disciples were making even more followers than John! The expression "all are going to him" (3:26) is a figure of speech: a hyperbole (an exaggeration), because the word 'all' must be limited to its context.

Baptism with water as a purification ritual. The Jewish priests and Levites from Jerusalem regarded the baptism of John the Baptist as a purification ritual (1:25)⁵⁶. Also John the Baptist and his disciples regarded the baptism with water as a purification ritual: "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"⁵⁷. Thus there arose a dispute between the disciples of John the Baptist and a Jew about the Jewish purification rites (3:25).

When a non-Jew desired to join Judaism, he took a bath (by pouring water on or over himself), he was physically circumcised and he promised to keep the Old Testament Law⁵⁸. This ritual was called 'the proselyte baptism'. The argument of the disciples of John the Baptist was probably that they accorded the baptism of their teacher, John the Baptist, greater purification significance than the proselyte baptism of the Jews and the baptism which the disciples of Jesus performed. That is why they could not understand why more people went to Jesus to be baptised with water. Thus, the baptising with water⁵⁹ (3:23,26) of John the Baptist and of Jesus is here connected to the Jewish purification ritual⁶⁰ (3:25).

Christian baptism with water is the visible sign and seal of the invisible baptism with the Spirit. While the baptism with water of John the Baptist revealed the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to Israel (1:31) and thus prepared them to receive Jesus Christ and his work of salvation, Christian baptism with water is the visible sign and seal that the invisible baptism with the Spirit (regeneration) had really taken place⁶¹. Christian baptism with water is the visible sign and seal of the invisible washing away of sins⁶², that is, of the complete forgiveness of sins, also called justification.

(III) 3:27-36. John the Baptist testifies about Jesus.

a. Jesus must grow greater (3:27-30).

3:27. John replied (viao) and said (viaa), "No man can (vipn) receive (vnpa) anything unless it is⁶³ (vspa+) given (+vprp) to him from heaven.

3:28. You yourselves are witnesses (vipa) to me that I said⁶⁴ (viaa), "I am (vipa) not the Messiah (the Christ), but I am (+vipa) the one sent (vprp+) ahead of him' (i.e. as his forerunner).

3:29. He who has (vppa) the bride is (vipa) the bridegroom. Now the friend of the bridegroom, who stands (vpri) and hears (vppa) him, rejoices (vipa) with joy (i.e. is full of joy) through the voice of the bridegroom (i.e. at hearing his voice). Therefore, this joy of mine is now full (virp).

⁵¹ G: oupó

⁵² G: katarismos

⁵³ Mark 1:8

⁵⁴ cf. Matthew 28:19

⁵⁵ Matthew 4:12

⁵⁶ Hebrews 6:2

⁵⁷ Mark 1:4

⁵⁸ cf. Hebrews 6:2

⁵⁹ G: baptizo

⁶⁰ G: katarismos

⁶¹ Acts 10:44-48

⁶² Acts 22:16

⁶³ G: éi of eimi

⁶⁴ G: eipon, second aorist of legó

3:30. He must (vipa) continually increase (vnpa); I must continually decrease (vnpe).

John the Baptist answered the question about Jesus making more disciples and baptising more people than himself by proclaiming that Jesus Christ must become greater and he himself must become less. John the Baptist knew that his God-given task was only to be the forerunner of the Messiah⁶⁵; that he belonged to the Messiah and rejoiced in his teaching. Now that the Messiah has come, the forerunner must withdraw (3:27-30)!

⁶⁵ Isaiah 40:3; Mark 1:1-3

b. Jesus bears testimony from heaven (3:31-33).

3:31. He who comes (vppn) from above is (vipa) above all; he who is (vppa) from the earth is (vipa) from the earth and speaks (vipa) from the earth. He who comes (vppn) from heaven is (vipa) above all.

3:32. What he has seen (and this remains before his eyes)(vira) and what he has heard (viaa)⁶⁶, to this he continually bears testimony (vipa). But again and again no one accepts (vipa) his testimony (i.e. on a whole people keep rejecting his testimony – but there are exceptions:).

3:33. He who does accept (vpaa) his testimony has once for all certified (as a seal does on a document)(aorist) that God always is (viaa) true (i.e. he attests that what God said about Jesus is true).

John the Baptist is from the earth, but the origin of Jesus is heaven. John the Baptist testifies about what he saw and heard at Christ's baptism with water, but Jesus Christ testifies about what he has seen and heard in heaven itself (3:12-13)! The testimony of John the Baptist was sometimes tainted by sinful doubt and fear⁶⁷, but the testimony of Jesus Christ was always convincing and consequent. That is why the one, who comes from heaven (Jesus Christ), is above all on earth (3:31-32a)!

There are always people who reject the testimony of Jesus Christ, namely, that Jesus is the Son of God. But everyone who accepts the testimony of Jesus Christ about the truth in heaven and on earth (3:12-13) also accepts the testimony which God gave about Jesus at his baptism, namely, that Jesus is the Son of God⁶⁸. The person who accepts the testimony of Jesus certifies that God is truthful (3:32b-33). The reverse is also true: the person who rejects the testimony of God about Jesus makes God out to be a liar⁶⁹!

c. Jesus received the Spirit without any limit (3:34).

3:34. For he whom God has sent (viaa) speaks (vipa) the (authentic) words of God, for it is not by measure (but in fullness) that he (God) gives (vipa) (him) the Spirit.

This means the same as what Paul says in Colossians 2:9, "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."

The Gospel of John often says that God sent Jesus Christ (3:17,34; 5:36,38; 6:29,57; 7:29; 8:42; 9:7; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3,8,18,21,23,25; 20:21). God has sent Jesus Christ and *the testimony of Jesus Christ is the very words of God*⁷⁰. John the Baptist was an ordinary prophet⁷¹ who received the Holy Spirit in a limited measure. But Jesus Christ is not an ordinary prophet like the other prophets⁷², because Jesus Christ received the Holy Spirit in all its fullness, without limit (1:32)⁷³. This means that Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible Triune God. Jesus Christ is the Holy Spirit⁷⁴ and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ⁷⁵.

d. Jesus holds the whole wide world in his hands (3:35).

3:35. The Father continually loves (vipa) the Son and has effectively given (vira) all things into his hand (i.e. under his control).

God the Father loves God the Son and has placed everything in his hands (3:35; cf. 13:3). God has revealed himself completely in Jesus Christ (14:6)⁷⁶. God has spoken his last and final word in and through Jesus Christ (12:49)⁷⁷. God has given authority over everyone and everything on earth to Jesus Christ⁷⁸. God saves people only through Jesus Christ (3:16,18,36; 6:37; 14:6; 17:2)⁷⁹. God will resurrect the dead through Jesus Christ (5:28-29) and judge the world through Jesus Christ (5:22).

e. Everyone stands or falls with respect to Jesus (3:36).

3:36. Whoever continually believes (vppa) in the Son continually has (vipa) eternal life, but whoever keeps on disobeying (or whoever refuses to believe) (vppa) the Son will certainly not see (vifd) life, but God's wrath continually remains (vipa) on him."

Therefore the final testimony of John the Baptist is, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever is disobedient to the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

⁶⁶ cf. 1 John 1:1

⁶⁷ Matthew 11:2-3

⁶⁸ Matthew 3:17

⁶⁹ 1 John 5:10

⁷⁰ Hebrews 1:1-2

⁷¹ Matthew 11:13

⁷² Acts 3:22-26

⁷³ cf. Colossians 2:9

⁷⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

⁷⁵ Romans 8:8-10

⁷⁶ Matthew 11:27; Colossians 1:15,19; 2:9

⁷⁷ Hebrews 1:1; Revelation 22:18-19

⁷⁸ Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-23

⁷⁹ Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11-12

To believe means to believe continuously and with perseverance. To be disobedient also means to persist in disobedience. God's holy and just wrath against the unholiness and unrighteousness of unbelievers⁸⁰ will continue to rest on unbelievers. All three verbs are in the present continuous tense. This ends the testimony of John the Baptist about Jesus Christ. Therefore everyone stands or falls with respect to Jesus (3:36).

APPLICATIONS

- 3:1. Come to Jesus at night when you are afraid to come to Jesus by day.
- 3:3,8. Consider, "Have I been born again?" Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith⁸¹.
- 3:16. Memorise John 3:16. It is the gospel message in a nutshell.
- 3:18. Be convinced that your family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and countrymen, who have heard the gospel but do not believe, stand condemned already.
- 3:19-21. Never do things in the dark, but always live your life in the light. Be transparent.
- 3:30. Continually step down from your pedestal and let Jesus Christ become greater.
- 3:36. Be convinced that people, who reject Jesus Christ, will not see eternal life.

QUESTIONS

- 3:3,5,7. What does it mean, 'to be born again'?
- 3:3,5. What is 'the Kingdom of God'?
- 3:9-13. What does Jesus mean when he speaks about knowing and testifying about the heavenly things?
- 3:14-15. What does Jesus mean when he says, "he must be lifted up"?
- 3:34. What does it mean that God has given the Spirit to Jesus without limit"?
- 3:35-36. Why does everyone stand or fall with respect to Jesus Christ?

⁸⁰ Romans 1:18

⁸¹ 2 Corinthians 13:5