

Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3 – CFM Ep 187

Matthew 3

1. John the Baptist Prepares the Way (Matthew 3.1-12).
 - a. **John the Baptist: The Man. What was he like?** Elder Bruce R. McConkie submitted this possible view on this prophet: We know John was in the desert, for a period of trial and testing and training-perhaps not much different from Jesus' forty days of fasting and testing in the wilderness, as he began his ministry-but we do not know much else about his early life. The New Testament is not a biography of Jesus, let alone of John. ***The idea that our Lord's forerunner was a Nazarite for life, had never cut his hair or married, and that he lived always in the deserts is speculation that cannot be true.*** We can think of no good reason why the Lord would send one of his servants off into the deserts for thirty years to prepare him for the ministry. ***Men are prepared to serve their fellowmen by associating with them and by learning of their foibles and idiosyncrasies and how they will react to spoken counsel and proffered help.*** It is true John did not drink wine or strong drink; that he went into the desert for a testing period before his ministry; that while there he ate locusts and wild honey; and that he came forth among the people wearing what was in their minds the prophetic garb, raiment woven from camel's hair, held in place by a leather girdle. ***We suppose this mode of dress was simply to alert the people to his prophetic status, for the period of his ministry was to be short, and he needed to attract as much attention as possible. That he was married, had children, and lived as normal a life as his ministerial assignments permitted, we cannot doubt.***¹
 - b. “The kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3.2).
 - c. The voice of one crying in the wilderness – John quotes Isaiah 40.3.²

¹ Bruce R. McConkie, [*The Mortal Messiah, Volume 1: From Bethlehem to Calvary*](#), “John Prepares the Way,” Deseret Book, 1979.

² Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. (Verse 1 is a second person plural masculine imperative **נְחַמוּ נְחַמוּ עַמִּי יְאִמְרוּ אֵלֵיכֶם** – essentially, we have God in the Divine Council giving commands to multiple individuals to “speak comfort” to his people) Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? ***All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:*** The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: ***surely the people is grass.*** Isaiah 40.1-7

- d. John's clothing: camel's hair, leathern girdle. His food: locusts and honey (Matthew 3.4).³ This identification seems to be Matthew and Mark's way of identifying John with Elijah (see [2 Kings 1.8](#)).⁴
- e. "O generation of vipers!" (Matthew 3.7).
 - i. Who were the Pharisees and Saducees? Why were they coming to John? And why is Matthew writing about these people?⁵

³ The Arabs, in preparing them for eating, throw them alive into boiling water, with which a good deal of salt has been mixed, taking them out after a few minutes, and drying them in the sun. The head, feet, and wings, are then torn off, the bodies cleansed from the salt, and perfectly dried. They are sometimes eaten boiled in butter, or spread on unleavened bread mixed with butter. ***In Palestine, they are eaten only by the Arabs on the extreme frontiers; elsewhere they are looked on with disgust and loathing, and only the very poorest use them.*** Tristram, however, speaks of them as 'very palatable.' 'I found them very good,' says he, 'when eaten after the Arab fashion, stewed with butter. ***They tasted somewhat like shrimps, but with less flavour.***'...Concerning the mention of wild honey as food used by John, the author last quoted says in a continuation of the same paragraph: 'The wild bees in Palestine are far more numerous than those kept in hives, and the greater part of the honey sold in the southern districts is obtained from wild swarms. Few countries, indeed, are better adapted for bees. The dry climate, and the stunted but varied flora, consisting largely of aromatic thymes, mints, and other similar plants, with crocuses in the spring, are very favourable to them, while the dry recesses of the limestone rocks everywhere afford them shelter and protection for their combs. In the wilderness of Judea, bees are far more numerous than in any other part of Palestine, and it is, to this day, part of the homely diet of the Bedouins, who squeeze it from the combs and store it in skins.'" James E. Talmage, [Jesus the Christ](#), chapter 10: In the Wilderness of Judea.

⁴ Ulrich Luz writes, "The coming of the Baptist is predicted in the Old Testament (Isa 40:3)—so Matthew says with an introductory formula that is reminiscent of the introductory formula of the fulfillment quotations. In addition it aligns the Baptist with Jesus, to whom all the fulfillment quotations apply. ***Like the Qumran community, the followers of Jesus apply the prophetic words to their own present situation.*** The context especially emphasizes the catchword "wilderness." In the same way as the "wilderness of Judea" in v. 1, it is to be understood as a reference to the Baptist's mission to Israel. Matthew has taken over the description of the Baptist's food and clothing from Mark with almost no changes. Since he explicitly identifies John with Elijah (11:14; 17:12), he would have understood the leather girdle primarily as an allusion to Elijah's clothing (2 Kgs 1:8). Of course, the verse also emphasizes John as an ascetic... Since Tertullian (*Monog.* 8) it is explicitly said that the Baptist is not married. The connections between these interpretations and the ascetic and monastic movements are obvious. Ulrich Luz, [Matthew 1-7: A Commentary](#), Fortress Press, 2007, p. 135-136.

⁵ Elder McConkie gave a definition in brief: "Two of the most influential apostate sects among the Jews. The Pharisees were a zealous, devoted sect who accepted both the law of Moses and the traditions of the elders. They were pious and puritanical in conduct, glorying in frequent fasts and public prayers. Intensely patriotic and nationalistic, they believed in spirits, angels, revelation, immortality, eternal judgment, the resurrection from the dead, and rewards and punishments in the life to come.

"The Sadducees, on the other hand, categorically rejected and believed in none of these things. They were a sect composed of skeptical, worldly, wealthy people a selfish group finding their most powerful adherents among the chief priests. Though the Sadducees professed belief in the law, they rejected the traditions of the elders, and made no pretensions of piety or devout worship. The Pharisees were far more powerful and influential in Jewish political and religious life than were the Sadducees." Bruce R. McConkie, [Doctrinal New Testament Commentary](#), Deseret Book, 1:119.

Ulrich Luz sees the Pharisees as an important aspect in Matthew's writings, as they set up the important conflict. He draws a subtle distinction between Matthew and Mark in this way. He explains:

Thus the Gospel of Matthew tells the story of a conflict. The two (unequal) parties of the conflict are Jesus, the Son of God, and the Jewish leaders: Pharisees, scribes, chief priests. At the end of this conflict there is a schism. In

- f. “Therefore, bring forth fruits meet for repentance!” Greek: ποιήσατε οὖν καρπούς ἄξιους τῆς μετανοίας (Matthew 3.8).⁶
 - g. God is able to raise up these stones – as children of Abraham (Matthew 3.9).
 - h. The axe is laid at the root of the trees (Matthew 3.10).
 - i. John’s message of fire (πῦρ) is repeated (Matthew 3.10-12).⁷
 - j. John baptizes with water, Jesus with fire – verse 11.
 - k. The winnowing fan and the purging of the floor – verse 12.
2. The Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3.13-17).
- a. 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).
 - i. **The sign of the dove:** "The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the sign of a dove. The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but in the sign of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove; but the sign of a dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed, as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence."⁸

connection with this conflict and, as it were, “embedded” in it the story of Jesus’ relationship to his disciples is told. This is not a story of conflict but a story of teaching and learning, of misunderstanding and of understanding, of failure and new beginning. These two tensions are already present in the Gospel of Mark, but it seems to me that their weight is uneven in the two Gospels. *The Gospel of Mark is primarily a story of Jesus with his disciples, who misunderstand him and fail when faced with his suffering.* Jesus’ conflict with Israel and his way to the Gentiles are also present, but their influence is only secondary. *Now in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus’ conflict with Israel’s leaders becomes the main conflict that leaves its imprint on the story* of Jesus, while Jesus’ struggle with his disciples is, if anything, minimized. Instead of disciples who lack understanding and who fail there are learners and people of little faith. Luz, p. 11.

⁶ The use of ποιέω in this context, with ποιήσατε is a second person plural imperative: Do! Here John is telling his hearers to do something. The Gospel is one of action.

⁷ Greek: ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἀξίνη πρὸς τὴν ῥίζαν τῶν δένδρων κεῖται· πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιῶν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται “Even now the axe is set at the root of the trees! Therefore every tree not making good fruit is cut down and thrown into fire!” (Matthew 3.10, my translation). My take here is that John is not playing around. He is not saying that all is well in and around Jerusalem. This, to me, is a fiery sermon and John sounds like a fiery prophet.

⁸ Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 276. Robert Marrott gave this commentary:

All four Gospel writers indicate that at the baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus like a dove (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, John 1:31-33, reads: "And John bare record, saying: When he was baptized of me, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him; for he who sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me: Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (see also JST Matt. 3:45-46).

The Holy Ghost is a spirit person in the form of man (D&C 130:22) and does not transform himself into a dove or any other form. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained: "The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the sign of a dove. The Holy Ghost is a

personage [a man], and is in the form of a personage [a man]. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but in sign [symbol or representation] of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove; but the sign of a dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed, as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence" (TPJS, p. 276). The dove was a supernatural sign given to John to witness the identity of the messiah. Some non-LDS scholars have entertained differing opinions as to whether or not a real dove was present. Joseph Smith's explanation leads toward a conclusion that the dove was not literally present. Other references to the sign of the dove are 1 Nephi 11:27; 2 Nephi 31:8 and Doctrine and Covenants 93:15. The Book of Abraham states that to Abraham also was revealed "the sign of the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove" (Facsimile 2, Fig. 7). [Encyclopedia of Mormonism](#), Dove, Sign of.

The early Christians saw the dove as a symbol for the Divine Mother. See: Margaret Barker, [The Mother of the Lord: Volume 1: The Lady in the Temple](#), T&T Clark, 2012. One scholar who has analyzed the language of our scripture to see how the Holy Ghost is portrayed, found that there is space for an interpretation that fits with how the early Christians viewed the divine mother and the Holy Ghost. She wrote: "First and astoundingly, none of the references to the Holy Ghost in [restoration scripture] (not including the Bible) identify the third person of the Godhead as male. **Most of these references are either anonymous or neutral.** Doctrine and Covenants 130.22 states that the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit without mentioning any gender: "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us." In verse 23, the Holy Ghost is referred to as "it": "A man may receive the Holy Ghost, and it may descend upon him and not tarry with him." **A careful study of all these scriptures reveals that out of 156 occurrences, three are neutral, using the pronoun "it"** (D&C 130.23, Alma 34.38, and Moroni 2.2). **In the remaining 153 instances, the pronouns are indefinite:** "who," "which," and "that," used with phrases such as "by the power of," "the gift of," "moved by," "given by," "baptism of," and "full of." **While not conclusive, the absence of the male pronoun in these verses opens a canonical place in LDS theology for Heavenly Mother as Holy Ghost.** Thus, she can be imaged as an actual personage who dispenses the power of God to her children in their mortal journey toward a fullness of glory. In contrast to these texts, current discourse insists on identifying the Holy Ghost and Holy Spirit with male pronouns as occurs on the official Church web site: "The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead. He is a personage of spirit, without a body of flesh and bones. He is often referred to as the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, or the Comforter." (See: ["Holy Ghost," Gospel Topics.](#)) The Church presents a male Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, while LDS scriptures leave open the identification of the Holy Ghost, thus creating a possible place in the Godhead for Heavenly Mother.

Second, although the current dominant LDS perception of the Godhead envisions the Holy Ghost as male, there are other, older traditions, some based in scripture, that depict the Spirit as female, which can create at least a linguistic space for the female in the Godhead. Nevertheless, the Christian tradition in the West has mostly identified the Holy Spirit as male since antiquity, though there have been ongoing debates both because the grammatical gender of the word "Spirit" is varied in biblical languages (where all nouns show gender that is not necessarily connected with sexed persons) and also because the noun "Spirit" does not have the strong masculine connotation associated with "Father" and "Son." In Hebrew, the word for spirit is the feminine *ruach*, which has influenced some; but Jewish scholar Raphael Patai relies on the Talmudic and Midrashic term *shekhina* to show how this created a feminine personification of God's Spirit for the Hebrews. (Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 3rd edition, Wayne State University Press, 1990, p. 96–111.) The Greek word for Spirit, *pneuma*, is neuter, and the Latin word, *spiritus*, is masculine. The Latin biblical translator and theologian Jerome (c. 342–420 CE) argued that the three different biblical language genders for "spirit" meant that God transcends all categories of sexuality. (Jerome, *Comm. in Isalam* 11 (PL 24.19b); quoted in Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing), 86.) Still, Jerome, like other early Christian fathers, preferred the pronoun "he" for the "Spirit," which corresponds with his Latin Vulgate Bible translation and the patristic development of trinitarian theologies where the one God is manifest as three male personages. This has always been the trend from the early Christian fathers to contemporary Christian theologians: they claim God and the Holy Spirit are beyond gender and therefore can be described as feminine; still, they tend

The Son of Man⁹ will be the one who will come to judge by fire. In the Gospel of Matthew, preaching begins with the judgment of the Son of Man, and it will end with the judgment of the Son of Man (25.31-46). “Fire” is a central catchword of the first (Matt. 3.10-12), and last proclamation in the Gospel of Matthew (25.41). The coming annihilating judgment is a key to Matthew’s theology.

Mark 1

1. John the Baptist Prepares the Way (Mark 1.1-8).
 - a. John is dressed like Elijah (Mark 1.6), eating locusts and wild honey – this is rich in symbolism. Julie Smith lays out several ideas associated with this image of John appearing in this way at the start of Mark’s account.
 - i. John has, metaphorically, escaped Adam’s curse by not having to work by the sweat of his brow in order to eat; he eat what is freely available.
 - ii. John has rejected human community and only eats what he can get for himself. This would emphasize the wicked state of the community.
 - iii. Because this food would have been easily accessible in the wilderness, John would have been able to focus on his ministry. The simple food may indicate that John was an ascetic.
 - iv. The diet of locusts and honey would have made observance of purity laws simple for John since these foods “would not have been handled by anyone else, and wild honey would not be subject to tithing.”¹⁰

to use the male pronoun for the Holy Spirit. In *his Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Protestant theologian Clark H. Pinnock gives strong reasons why the Spirit can be called “she,” but still he decides to use the masculine pronoun in his book because “using the feminine pronoun exclusively could create more problems than it solves.” (Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Gove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 17.) The “problems” seem to be that the feminine pronoun would contradict patriarchal perspectives and structures.” Margaret Toscano, [In Defense of Heavenly Mother: Her Critical Importance for Mormon Culture and Theology](#), *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Volume 55, Issue 1, p. 36-68.

After finishing Baring and Cashford’s monumental work [The Myth of the Goddess](#) (Penguin, 1994), I see many connections between these two scholars: Margaret Barker and Margaret Toscano. Toscano is open to seeing the revelations of the restoration making space for Heavenly Mother, and Barker sees in early Christian thought the notion that there was a divine female goddess represented in their tradition prior to Jerome. Baring and Cashford lay out multiple examples of the goddess figure in several cultures of the ancient world that depict the divine mother figure associated with a dove. See pages 42-43, 60-61, 107, 124, 189, 193, 302, 358-359 for just a sampling of this imagery explained. They write (p. 359), “Perhaps the image common to all the cultures is the dove, which is sacred to Aphrodite as it was to Inanna-Ishtar, and recalls the dove resting on the top of the crown of the goddess in Crete. Remembering Aphrodite’s rulership of Heaven and Earth, and her mediation between them, it is significant that the dove is preeminently the image of relationship in the Christian tradition as the missing feminine aspect of the godhead: the Holy Spirit who relates humanity to the deity, descending at the baptism of Christ and at Pentecost.” See: *The Myth of the Goddess*, Penguin, 1993, p. 359.

⁹ Matthew uses the phrase “Son of Man” to describe Jesus more than any other author in the Bible. This phrase appears 81 times in the Koine Greek of the four Gospels, and after Matthew, Luke uses it 25 times, followed by 14 in Mark and 12 in John. See: Matthew 8.20; 9.6; 10.23; 11.19; 12.8, 32, 40; 13.37-41; 16.13, 27-28; 17.9, 12, 22; 18.11; 19.28; 20.18, 28; 24.27, 30, 37-39, 44; 25.13, 31; 26.2, 24, 45, 64.

¹⁰ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Fortress, 2007, p. 145. She writes, “2 Chr 31:5 implies that honey from domesticated bees was subject to the tithe; see J. F. Ross, “Honey,” IDB 2:639. If wild honey was not subject

- v. The Hebrew Bible links honey to God's care of Israel (see Ex. 3.8; Deut. 32.13; Ps. 81.16). Perhaps John's diet, like his clothing, is one of the ways that he preaches. The clothing sends a message about John's identity, while the diet sends a message about God's provision for the covenant people.
- vi. The typical wilderness foods strengthen the association between John and the Hebrew Bible prophetic messages about the wilderness that opens Mark's gospel.
- vii. While John dresses like Elijah, he does not eat like Elijah. Elijah was fed by ravens (1 Kings 17.6). Maybe John's diet teaches that while John fulfills the role of Elijah, he is not literally Elijah.¹¹

2. The Baptism of Jesus (Mark 1.9-11).

- a. Mark 1.10 Greek: καὶ εὐθέως ἀναβαίνων ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος εἶδεν **σχιζομένους** τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ὡσεὶ περιστερὰν καταβαῖνον ἐπ' αὐτόν· "And immediately *as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens being ripped open* and the spirit as a dove descending upon him."¹² (My translation)
- b. The Dove, Its Symbolic Significance.¹³
 - i. Members of the audience familiar with Greek mythology would understand Mark 1.10 to mean that the earthly Jesus, from the time of his baptism, was a divine being walking the earth. We see this idea manifest in several places in the ancient world, and it is likely the Greek speaking world of the first century would understand this.¹⁴ Dixon says it succinctly: "I suggest that certain elements in

to tithing, then one did not have to worry about whether the honey that one was eating came from a batch that had been properly tithed. According to Lev 11:22, the grasshopper (ἀκρίς in the LXX) is a clean animal."

¹¹ Julie Smith, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 77.

¹² This Greek word is used 10 times in the New Testament. Twice in Matthew (Matt. 27.51 twice – both the veil and the rocks were "rent"), twice in Mark, twice in Luke (Luke 5.36, Luke 23.45), and twice in John (John 19.24, 21.11), and twice in Acts (Acts 14.4, 23.7). See Mark 15.38: Καὶ τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ **ἐσχίσθη** εἰς δύο ἀπὸ ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω "And the veil of the temple was **torn/rent/ripped** into two from top to the bottom" (my translation). Julie Smith writes, "There are about a dozen other verbal and thematic similarities" between the story of Jesus' baptism and his death, "suggesting Mark wants the audience to interpret Jesus' death in light of his baptism." Julie Smith, *The Gospel According to Mark: Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary*, BYU Studies, Provo, Utah, 2018, p. 94.

¹³ It is likely that those who handed on and received stories about Jesus had differing degrees of familiarity with Jewish and Greek cultural traditions, and so by understanding this, I would suggest that the images and symbols in those stories would have been variously understood, depending on the background of each audience member who heard these stories. A Jewish hearer would certainly have a different, though similar point of view regarding Jesus' baptism than someone raised on Greek stories like Homer's *Iliad*.

¹⁴ On multiple occasions in the *Iliad*, Homer uses bird similes to describe the descents of gods from the heavenly realm to earth. In book 15, an Achaean soldier smites Hector, leaving him badly injured. Zeus responds to this event by sending his son, Apollo, to aid the Trojan leader. When Apollo makes his descent from Olympus, Homer writes that the god "went down from the hills of Ida [βῆ δὲ κατ' Ἰδαίων ὄρεων], like [ἐοικώς] a swift, dove-slaying falcon, that is the fleetest of winged creatures" (15.237-38). Three books later, Homer uses a simile to depict Achilles' mother, Thetis, as she descends to earth. In this scene, Achilles is mourning the death of his cousin, Patroclus, who, while donning Achilles' armor, was killed by Hector. Because this event leaves Achilles without his battle garb, Thetis descends from the heavenly realm in order to bring new armor to the mighty warrior. After she leaves the shop of the god Hephaestus, the famed craftsman of armor for the gods, Homer writes, "like [ὥς] a falcon she leapt down [ἄλτο] from snow-capped Olympus, bearing the flashing armor from Hephaestus" (18.616-17). While Thetis's presence ultimately encourages Achilles to enter the war against the Trojans, for the time

the baptism, along with other scenes in Marks Gospel, would have invited such individuals to associate the dove simile in Mark 1.10 with the common mythological topos of gods in human form.”¹⁵

- ii. Genesis 1.2 discusses the Spirit of God that “hovers” over the waters of creation: וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֵף עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם “And the spirit (rûah) of Elohim **hovered** over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1.2b, my translation). In Jewish tradition, the “hovering” would be identified with a dove.¹⁶
 - iii. The dove was seen in the Noah story as a message that the crisis was over (Gen. 8.11). Perhaps Jesus’ life and his very body could have been viewed as a vehicle for salvation.
 - iv. The dove could be seen as a symbol of innocence or purity. In a sense, coupled with his baptism, Jesus here is the embodiment of all that is pure and holy, a foreshadowing of what he intends to do with Israel.
 - v. The dove was sometimes seen as a symbol for Israel.¹⁷
 - vi. The dove was used in the Hebrew Bible for sacrifices (Lev. 1.14), so perhaps Mark was showing how Christ would be sacrificed in a coming day.
 - vii. “Sign of the dove.” See Joseph Smith’s commentary above.
 - viii. The dove was a symbol for the divine mother. Perhaps to some of Mark’s audience, this could have been understood as a manifestation of both his mother and his father’s presence here in the symbolic waters of life (another symbol of the divine feminine).¹⁸
- c. Mark 1.11 Greek: καὶ φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα. “And a voice came **out of the heavens**, You are my **beloved** son, in whom I am well pleased.” (My translation)¹⁹
3. The Temptation of Jesus (Mark 1.12-13).
 - a. “Into the wilderness” (Mark 1.12). Farrar proposes a location somewhere south of Jericho.²⁰

being, the Achaean continues to mourn the loss of his cousin. Because of his refusal to eat during his time of mourning, Zeus sends Athena down to provide Achilles with nectar and ambrosia. Upon his command, Athena, “like [ἔϊκυῖα] a bird of prey, long-winged and shrill-voiced, leapt down [κατεπαλτο] from heaven through the air” (19.349-50). Her presence remains unnoticed by all. She secretly puts nectar into Achilles’ breast and returns to Zeus’s house undetected. Edward P. Dixon, “Descending Spirit and Descending Gods: An Interpretation of the Spirit’s ‘Descent as a Dove’ in Mark 1:10,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Winter 2009, Vol. 128, No. 4, p. 767.

¹⁵ Dixon, p. 767.

¹⁶ Smith, p. 92. See also: Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo’ed IV, Hagigah 15a.

¹⁷ Smith, p. 93.

¹⁸ Baring and Cashford, *Myth of the Goddess*. While these authors do not get into the baptism of Jesus, the dove symbol was seen throughout the world of Jesus as a symbol for the divine mother, and their book demonstrates this in spades.

¹⁹ Smith gives a couple options for “beloved” here. ἀγαπητός can be a title: “The Beloved One,” or it could be “only,” in the sense that Jesus is being contrasted with the masses who come to John for baptism. See: Smith, p. 95.

²⁰ “A tradition, said to be no older than the time of the Crusades, fixes the scene of the temptation at a mountain to the south of Jericho, which from this circumstance has received the name of Quarantania. Naked and arid like a mountain of malediction, rising precipitously from a scorched and desert plain, and looking over the sluggish, bituminous waters of the Sodomitic sea -- thus offering a sharp contrast to the smiling softness of the Mountain of

- b. Mark 1.13 Greek: καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα **πειραζόμενος** ὑπὸ τοῦ Σατανᾶ καὶ ἦν μετὰ τῶν **θηρίων** καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι διηκόνουν αὐτῷ. “And he was there in the wilderness forty days **being tested** by Satan and he was with the **wild beasts**, and the angels attended to him.” (My translation).
- i. “Being tested” could refer to: 1) Jesus is proving his worth here. 2) Satan is allowed to “have at” Jesus, meaning that he is not unlike mortal men in this regard. 3) Jesus is acting out this role in the heroes journey, facing the adversary, coming to show others his ability to conquer forces of darkness.
 - ii. “Wild beasts” (θηρίων) – this could be translated as “animals,” or it could be referring (most likely) to wild beasts. This could be referring to: 1) Demons. The association of wild animals with demons was made by the oracle in Isaiah 13.20-22.²¹ 2) The presence or absence of wild animals can be read in the Hebrew Bible as either the withdrawal or active participation of God’s divine protection. On one hand, perhaps Mark is demonstrating that Jesus is subject to the full effects of the fall, and yet on the other, Jesus, like Daniel, is protected from wild beasts. 3) The beasts are a representation of the desolation of the wilderness (see Deut. 8.15; Isa. 13.21-22; 34.11), so perhaps Mark included this detail to accentuate Jesus’ loneliness in this region. 4) In Daniel’s visionary experiences (Daniel 7) and in John’s Apocalypse, animals are representative of the powers and kingdoms of this world. Perhaps Mark is emphasizing Jesus’ power over the kingdoms of this world. 5) Isaiah 43.19-21 tells us that
4. Jesus Begins his Ministry (Mark 1.14).
 5. He calls his first disciples (Mark 1.16-20).
 - a. “They forsook their nets, and followed him” (Mark 1.18).²²
 6. He heals a man with an unclean spirit (Mark 1.21-28).
 - a. And **they were astonished** at his doctrine: for he taught them **as one that had authority**, and not as the scribes (Mark 1.22). Greek: καὶ **ἐξεπλήσσαντο** ἐπὶ τῇ διδασκίᾳ αὐτοῦ· ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοὺς **ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων** καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς.

Beatitudes and the limpid crystal of the Lake of Gennesareth -- imagination has seen in it a fit place to be the haunt of evil influences[1] -- a place where, in the language of the prophets, the owls dwell and the satyrs dance.” Frederick Farrar, [The Life of Christ](#), electronic manuscript Cumorah Foundation, p. 93.

²¹ The brief account of Jesus’ testing in the wilderness in Mark 1:12-13 pits Jesus, the Spirit of God, and the angels, on the one hand, against Satan, wild animals, and (it is implied) demons, on the other. The text does not reveal exactly how and why Jesus was tested. His ability to withstand Satan and the wild beasts attests to his trust in God and to the favor bestowed by God on him. Adela Yarbro Collins, [Mark: A Commentary](#), Fortress Press, 2007, p. 153.

²² Dallin H. Oaks said, “Follow is the word the Savior used when he called his helpers to the ministry. As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two fishermen, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, at work in their vocation. ‘And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men’ (Matt. 4:19). ‘And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him’ (Mark 1:18). Here the Savior established a pattern for those he calls to do his work. Acting through his servants, for he has said that ‘by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same’ (D&C 1:38), he calls us to take time from our daily activities to follow him and serve our fellowmen. Even the greatest among us should be the servant of all (see Mark 10:43-44). Those who always remember him will straightway assume and faithfully fulfill the responsibilities to which they are called by his servants.” Elder Dallin H. Oaks, [“Always Remember Him,”](#) *Ensign*, May 1988, 30.

- i. “Authority” (ἐξουσία) can also mean “Power.” The idea conveyed here is that Jesus has his own authority, his own power. This is in contrast to the scribes of his day.
 - ii. **Scribes:** Scribes were associated with three main tasks: interpreting the Law of Moses, teaching the Law of Moses, and acting as judges. The common perception was that scribes had no real authority of their own but rather enjoyed an expertise related to sacred texts; they would have been considered religious authorities of a fairly low level. Most scribes were associated with the Pharisees, although it was possible for a scribe to be part of any or no Jewish sect. Because scribes were seen as teacher of the tradition, they are frequently contrasted with Jesus, who teaches not from tradition but from his own authority/power, which sometimes contradicts the tradition.²³
- b. “Come out of him!” (Mark 1.25).
- i. Talmage: “On these as on other occasions, we find evil spirits voicing through the mouths of their victims their knowledge that Jesus was the Christ; and in all such instances the Lord silenced them with a word; for He wanted no such testimony as theirs to attest the fact of His Godship. Those spirits were of the devil’s following, members of the rebellious and defeated hosts that had been cast down through the power of the very Being whose authority and power they now acknowledged in their demoniac frenzy. Together with Satan himself, their vanquished chief, *they remained unembodied*, for to all of them the privileges of the second or mortal estate had been denied; their remembrance of the scenes that had culminated in their expulsion from heaven was quickened by the presence of the Christ, though He stood in a body of flesh.”²⁴
- 7. Jesus heals many (Mark 1.29-34).
 - 8. He preaches in Galilee (Mark 1.35-39).
 - 9. Jesus cleanses a leper (Mark 1.40-45).

Luke 3

- 1. John the Baptist Prepares the Way (Luke 3.1-21).
 - a. The Historical Setting. Luke’s logical approach.²⁵ Notice the pattern of listing seven political and spiritual authority figures.
 - i. The Emperor Tiberius (Luke 3.1).²⁶
 - ii. Pontius Pilate – governor of Judea (Luke 3.1).²⁷

²³ Julie Smith, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 121.

²⁴ James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 93-94, emphasis added.

²⁵ Luke gives the setting of John’s ministry. In fact, seven rulers are mentioned, working from the most comprehensive ruler down to the regional spiritual leaders. This type of synchronic approach to dating fits ancient style (Thucydides 2.2; Polybius 1.3), as well as being a part of Old Testament dating, where the prophet’s call is placed alongside the rulers who governed during his ministry (Jer. 1:1–3; Isa. 1:1; Amos 1:1; Schürmann 1969: 151 n. 31; Nolland 1989: 138; C. F. Evans 1990: 231). Darrell Bock, *Luke 1.1-9.50*, Baker Academic, 1994, p. 734 electronic version.

²⁶ Tiberius ruled 14-37 CE.

²⁷ Pilate, Roman governor of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea 26-36 CE. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 104. It should be noted here that **Herod**

- iii. Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee (Luke 1.1).²⁸
- iv. Philip the Tetrarch of Iturea (Luke 1.1).²⁹
- v. Lysanias the Tetrarch of [Abilene](#) (Luke 1.1).³⁰

Archelaus should have been the tetrarch of this territory in the time of Jesus, but he was stripped of his title by Rome in 6 CE. He was removed from power because of his unpopularity with the Jewish people. Named in his father's will as ruler of the largest part of the Judean kingdom—Judea proper, Idumaea, and Samaria—Archelaus went to Rome (4 BC) to defend his title against the claims of his brothers Philip and Antipas before the emperor Augustus. Augustus confirmed him in possession of the largest portion but did not recognize him as king, giving him instead the lesser title of ethnarch to emphasize his dependence on Rome. **Archelaus was half Idumaeon and half Samaritan and, like his father, was considered an alien oppressor by his Jewish subjects.** Their repeated complaints against him caused Augustus to order him to Rome again in AD 6. After a trial in which he was unsuccessfully defended by the future emperor Tiberius, he was deprived of his throne and exiled to Gaul. In the account of the Gospel According to Matthew (2:22), it was fear of Archelaus' tyranny that led Jesus' family to settle outside his domain at Nazareth in Galilee. [Britannica, Herod Archelaus](#). Accessed 12.10.22.

²⁸ This is Herod Antipas (called Herod the Tetrarch here in Luke 3) was a 1st-century ruler (from 4 BCE to CE 39) of Galilee and Perea, who bore the title of tetrarch ("ruler of a quarter") and is referred to as both "Herod the Tetrarch" and "King Herod" in the New Testament, although he never held the title of king (he did campaign for this title, but Rome never officially granted it. This title was used by others to flatter him, however) See: France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 510. Herod the Tetrarch **was a son of Herod the Great and a grandson of Antipater the Idumaeon**, thus he was a third-generation ruler of a family with deep ties to Rome. He is known today for accounts in the New Testament gospels of his role in the execution of the prophet John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1–12). Following the death of his father Herod the Great in 4 BC, Herod Antipas was recognized as tetrarch by Caesar Augustus. Antipas officially ruled Galilee and Perea as a client state of the Roman Empire. He was responsible for building projects at Sepphoris and Betharamphtha, and for the construction of his capital Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Named in honor of his patron, the emperor Tiberius, the city later became a center of rabbinic learning after the Jewish-Roman wars (66–135 AD). Writing of this leader's father and his relationship to him, Darrell Bock stated, "Herod the Great rebuilt much of the city of Jerusalem and started the restoration of the great temple. Education and economic vitality came to the region, intermixed with bouts of internal unrest. But with his death in 4 B.C., **his kingdom was split among his three sons: Archelaus**, the eldest, received Judea and Samaria until his banishment in A.D. 6 (he died in A.D. 18). **Herod Antipas** inherited Galilee and Perea, **and their benevolent half-brother Philip** received the northern Transjordan area. Technically, they were all tetrarchs or, in effect, regional rulers. With Archelaus's banishment, the governing of the region became the domain of a succession of Roman prefects, but wise policy required that the prefect cooperate with his Herodian neighbors and be sensitive to his predominantly Jewish subjects. John's ministry stepped into this complex political situation (Schürer 1973–87: 1.336–98; Reicke 1968: 84–137). The major ancient source for this period is Josephus, who discusses each of the key figures: Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, and Philip. Philo also discusses Pilate (Embassy to Gaius 38 §299). In addition, an inscription referring directly to Pilate as prefect is evidence that he was popularly regarded as holding this position. Bock, p. 736-737 electronic version, emphasis add

²⁹ Philip the Tetrarch (26 BCE. - 34 CE), was son of Herod the Great and his fifth wife, Cleopatra of Jerusalem. Philip the Tetrarch ruled over the northeast part of his father's kingdom between 4 BCE and 34 CE. He was a half-brother of Herod Antipas (the second husband of Herodias) and Herod Archelaus. See: Day: [Herod the Great and the Herodian Family Tree](#).

³⁰ Abilene was a district in Coele-Syria, an area encompassing [land north of Israel](#) including Pnias and Damascus and the Lebanon Mountains. Bock notes, "Luke's mention of Lysanias of Abilene has often been regarded as Historical error. Wellhausen (1904: 4) believes that Luke blundered by citing the Lysanias mentioned by Josephus in Antiquities 14.13.3 §330 and 15.4.1 §92. This ruler is too early to be mentioned here since he died in 36 B.C. But the accusation of error ignores evidence of other inscriptions that attest to a later Lysanias who lived in the time of Tiberius... The inscriptions seem to be confirmed by vague Josephian references to a Lysanias in a time period before Herod Agrippa I, Herod Antipas's nephew and successor who ruled from A.D. 40 to 44 (*Antiquities* 19.5.1 §275; 20.7.1 §138). As to the dates of Lysanias, the references are so few and obscure that they cannot be determined. Bock, p. 737-738, electronic version.

- vi. Annas and Caiaphas the high priests (Luke 1.2).³¹
- b. John teaches and baptizes (Luke 3.3-18).
 - i. Make his paths straight (Luke 3.4).
 - 1. John invited his audience to repent. Repentance can be on very different levels. C.S. Lewis said, "At the lowest, what you call "Pagan penitence," there is simply the attempt to placate a supposedly angry power—"I'm sorry. I won't do it again. Let me off this time." At the highest level, the attempt is, rather, to restore an infinitely valued and vulnerable personal relationship which has been shattered by an action of one's own. If forgiveness, in the crude sense of remission of penalty, comes in, this is valued chiefly as a symptom or seal or even by-product of the reconciliation."³²
 - ii. Generation of vipers... wrath to come (Luke 3.7).
 - iii. Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance (Luke 3.8).
 - iv. The axe is laid at the root of the trees (Luke 3.9).
 - v. The people ask, "What shall we do?" (Luke 3.10).
 - vi. Impart to those in need (Luke 3.11).³³
 - vii. Publicans, don't take too much in taxes (Luke 3.12-13).³⁴ John is now speaking to two of the most hated groups of Jewish society: the toll collectors and the

³¹ The final figures mentioned in Luke's synchronic dating are Annas and Caiaphas, who are not political figures but the key Jewish religious authorities. The reference has an interesting peculiarity, as Luke refers to the period of the ἀρχιερέως (archiereōs, high priest) Annas and Caiaphas. That is, Luke uses a singular term to refer to two men. **But there were not two high priests in this period.** Annas had been high priest from 6 to 15 CE. After a few short tenures by other high priests, Caiaphas, Annas's son-in-law, came to power and remained there until 36 CE. **Thus, Caiaphas was the formal high priest during this time.** What is Luke suggesting by his use of the singular ἀρχιερέως? He is communicating that actual power was really shared and that the religious authority of the region was really a two-man affair, with Annas exercising great power behind the scenes (Ellis 1974: 88; Marshall 1978: 134). The picture of John 18:13–27 confirms this description and shows the accuracy of Luke's reference (on Caiaphas, see Acts 4:6; John 11:49; Bovon 1989: 168–69). It may well be also that Annas, though not officially in office, retained the title for life, much as American presidents or governors do. Thus, one could speak of the time of the high priests Annas and Caiaphas without speaking of their official time of holding office. Josephus also exhibits plural references with regard to the high priests (on Annas, see *Antiquities* 20.9.1 §§197–200; on the "college" of high priests, see *Antiquities* 20.10.4–5 §§244–51). Thus, Luke accurately gives insight into the real power structure of religious Judaism in Jerusalem. Bock, p. 737-739.

³² C. S. Lewis, *Letters To Malcolm; Chiefly On Prayer*, 95.

³³ Elder Russell M. Nelson has observed that 'when the Lord sent prophets to call Israel back from apostasy, in almost every instance, one of the first charges made was that the poor had been neglected.' Thus, part of John the Baptist's message of repentance was, 'He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.' (Luke 3:11.) **The prophets of the Book of Mormon taught that the care of the poor was the only way we could obtain essential blessings.** The prophet/king Benjamin declared that we must impart of our substance to the poor, 'such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief' for the sake of 'retaining a remission of [our] sins from day to day, that [we] may walk guiltless before God.' (Mosiah 4:26.)" Dallin H. Oaks, *The Lord's Way*, Deseret Book, 1991, p. 103.

³⁴ To understand a little about the reply that John gives to the toll collectors, one must examine the background of the office. (E. Sanders 1992: 146–69 notes that the tax system in Palestine was not more oppressive than in other regions. He estimates that taxes consumed somewhere between 20 percent and 30 percent of one's income.) Taxes in the Roman Empire were a complex affair. There were different ranks of collectors, and there were different taxes to collect. The system of collection was known as tax (or toll) farming. **City rulers leased the right to**

soldiers. Both John and Jesus saw and engaged with the least among those of his world.

viii. Soldiers, do no violence, be content in your wages (Luke 3.14).³⁵

Collect taxes to an individual or group, who had bid for this right and had paid for it in advance. Thus, the collector would not only have to collect the tax that Rome had stipulated, but **he also would have to add a surcharge to meet his expenses, an additional charge over which he had total control.** (In *Antiquities* 12.4.2–9 §§160–220, Josephus has a vivid story of such a crafty collector, Joseph, who extorted much money during the rule of Ptolemy V.) In most of the empire this job of collection went to wealthy Romans who were designated “publicans.” They in turn would hire others to do the actual collection, the “tax collectors” proper (τελώνης, telōnēs). And at times these tax collectors would hire subordinates, becoming “head tax collectors.” Because of the political situation, in 44 B.C. Julius Caesar reduced taxes in Palestine, so that publicans ceased to operate there (Donahue 1971: 44; *Josephus Antiquities* 14.10.5–6 §§200–209). Collecting direct taxes for Rome became the responsibility of the prefect, who hired a δημοσιῶνης (dēmosiōnēs, state or public tax official; literally, farmer of the revenue)—a term that does not appear in the New Testament—to collect taxes. **Direct taxes included the poll tax (a general citizen’s tax) and the land tax (a tax on one’s harvest)** (Michel, TDNT 8:97–98). In addition to these direct taxes, **there also was a set of indirect taxes on all items purchased or leased in a region, including a type of sales tax**, which involved the hiring of τελῶναι, the term Luke uses here. (In *Antiquities* 17.8.4 §205, Josephus says that these taxes were “ruthlessly exacted”; in 18.4.3 §90 he notes the temporary lifting of the taxes under Caesar.) Dues were collected at major cities such as Jerusalem, Jericho, and Caesarea. (The rate ranged from 2 percent to 10 percent in the empire itself. Josephus describes some tax decrees (*Antiquities* 14.10.5–6 §§200–209), explains the bidding for tax collection (*Antiquities* 12.4.3 §169), and mentions some exemptions (*Antiquities* 12.3.3 §143). See also 1 Macc. 10:26–31; 11:28, 34–36; 13:34 for exemptions and relief in an earlier period.) As one can see, this system of multiple collectors, each of whom could add his own surcharge, could create great abuse. In fact, a Palmyrene inscription from a slightly later period records an attempt to control abuses (Dittenberger 1903–5: #629). Judaism reacted with extreme distaste to those who took up this vocation. **One of the reasons was that people whose business required them to travel might be taxed at each locale throughout a region, and they regarded these surcharges as robbery** (Michel, TDNT 8:101–2). Of all the taxes, the indirect taxes were the least liked. Lucian, a second-century non-Christian writer, in describing people who “only stir up great confusion,” referred to “adulterers, pimps, tax collectors, yes-men, and informers.” (*Descent into Hades* 11. Other notations from ancient writers include Tacitus, *Annals* 2.42; and Pliny, *Natural History* 12.32 §§63–65. Emperors sometimes warned against abuses: **Tiberius said, “The sheep are to be shorn, not fleeced”**; Dio Cassius 57.10.5; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 32; Danker 1988: 88.) **Even non-Jews disliked them. Jews excommunicated toll collectors because they were regarded as robbers** (Donahue 1971: 49–53). Only a few of these men were commended for how they carried out their tasks. A group of such tax collectors were sensitive to John’s message and asked him what they should do. In addressing John, the toll collectors used the word διδάσκαλε (*didaskale*, teacher), a term that was often used of a rabbi to denote deep respect (Ellis 1974: 90). In fact, in Luke nondisciples often address Jesus with this title (9:38; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 18:18). John apparently touched a nerve. The description is apt, since in 3:1–18 we see John offering prophecy, preaching apocalyptic, and giving exhortation and wisdom (Bovon 1989: 174). The tax collectors were basically asking, “What needs to change?”

John’s reply is straightforward: the toll collectors are not to give up their profession. Rather, they are to conduct themselves honorably and fairly. John is not a political revolutionary, for he does not attack the right to collect taxes. What John argues is that taxes should be collected without extortion, surcharges, kickbacks, payoffs, or bribes. The tax collectors are to do their job and not take advantage of their authority. They must exact only what has been appointed (διατεταγμένον, *diatetagmenon*) to them to collect. In short, they are to be honest stewards. Πράσσετε (*prassetete*) is a commercial term that means “to transact business” (BAGD 698 §1b; BAA 1399–1400; Luke 19:23). The fruit of repentance in a toll collector would be fair business practices, in contrast to corrupt toll collectors. The call is one of fairness to one’s neighbor. It parallels the call made to the crowd. The penitent one lives differently, manifesting an appropriate response in his or her vocation. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1.1-9.50*, Baker Academic, 1994, emphasis added.

³⁵ The third group, the soldiers, ask how they should respond. It is generally agreed that these soldiers were Jewish

- ix. I am not the Christ (Luke 3.15-17).
 - 1. “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable!” (Luke 3.17).³⁶
- c. John rebukes Herod (Luke 3.19-20).
 - i. Herod the tetrarch has taken the wife of his brother Philip as wife. Philip is the half-brother of Antipas, or Herod the Tetrarch, the man who imprisons John and is the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea in the time of Jesus. He rules from 4 BCE to 39 CE. Philip never rules any lands when his father Herod the Great dies in 4 BCE.³⁷

rather than Roman (Fitzmyer 1981: 471; Bovon 1989: 174 n. 39; Marshall 1978: 143; Schneider 1977a: 86–87; Plummer 1896: 92). They could have come from **one of three groups**: Antipas’s army in Perea, which included foreign troops as well (on the international nature of this army, see Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.8.3 §§198–99); the Judean “police”; or soldiers who assisted and protected the toll collectors. The last possibility may be indicated by καὶ ἡμεῖς (*kai hēmeis*) at the end of the question: What shall “we also” do? (i.e., we alongside the toll collectors). It may also be supported by John’s reply focusing exclusively on money. These two factors indicate a possible connection between the groups of 3:12–14, though one cannot be certain (so Leaney 1958: 107; Geldenhuys 1951: 139; Hendriksen 1978: 208). The possibility for abuse of authority by law enforcement personnel was very real (Heidland, TDNT 5:592). The soldiers, sensing a need to change as a result of John’s warning in 3:7–9, ask what they should do. Their wages: The exhortation is to be content with one’s wage. Ὀψώνιον (*opsōnion*) is almost exclusively a military term for the provisions given to a soldier. **The military wage of the day was a basic provision of food and minimal subsistence** —a level of support that might tempt one to take advantage of position and to supplement income through excessive use of civil authority. If one was content, then one would be less tempted by this possibility. John’s counsel is similar to that of Josephus in discussing soldiers (*Life* 47 §244; Fitzmyer 1981: 471). Bock, p. 809-812, electronic version, emphasis added.

³⁶ A sickle was generally a crescent-shaped, sharpened metal tool held in one hand while the other hand clutched some stalks of grain. With one sweep of the arm, the reaper cut the grain and, after gathering many stalks, bound them together into a bundle. Bundles (or sheaves) were spread out to dry on a flat threshing floor usually made of stone, and then stalks (straw), husks, and heads of grain were shredded by animals treading over them, sometimes pulling a threshing sledge (upturned on one end, with jagged pieces of metal or stone fixed with pitch into the bottom-see). Following the threshing was the winnowing, which separated the grain from the husks. With a winnowing fork (sometimes called a ‘fan’), the threshed mixture was tossed into the air, and the afternoon and evening breeze coming off the Mediterranean during the harvest time would carry the lighter husks (the chaff) to settle in their own pile while the heavier grain fell into a pile immediately below the winnower. Any stones or impurities could be further sifted out with a sieve (see Luke 22:31), and then the grain was ready to be used or transported to storage. The separation of the grain from the impurities is a scenario similar to that envisioned by John the Baptist, where he described the coming Messiah as one ‘whose fan [winnowing fork] is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’ (Matt. 3:12; see Luke 3:17.)” See: D. Kelly Ogden, [Where Jesus Walked: The Land and Culture of New Testament Times](#), Deseret Book, 1991, p. 79.

³⁷ **Why does Philip not rule? Philip was Herod II. He was the fourth son (of Herod and Mariamne II, the daughter of Simon Boethus the High Priest), namesake & briefly heir apparent of Herod the Great.** After Herod I executed his Hasmonean sons, Alexander & Aristobulus IV (7 BCE), he betrothed the latter’s orphaned daughter (Herodias) -- who was still a minor -- to her half-uncle, Herod junior, known as “Philip” in Matthew and Mark and known in history as Herod II. This arranged marriage was more than temporary child custody. For Herodias was descended directly from the dynasty of priest-kings that had ruled Jerusalem for more than a century before Herod, as she was a Hasmonean. Since this liaison bolstered the young Herod’s right of succession to the throne of Judea, the king’s oldest son (Antipater III) objected to the arrangement. So, Herod confirmed the latter as his heir & relegated the young Herod to next in line.

2. The Genealogy of Christ (Luke 3.23-38).

Comments on the genealogy of Christ

Elder Talmage said:

“Two genealogical records purporting to give the lineage of Jesus are found in the New Testament, one in the first chapter of Matthew, the other in the third chapter of Luke. **These records present several apparent discrepancies**, but such have been satisfactorily reconciled by the research of specialists in Jewish genealogy... it should be borne in mind that the consensus of **judgment** on the part of investigators is that **Matthew's account is that of the royal lineage**, establishing the order of sequence among the legal successors to the throne of David, **while the account given by Luke is a personal pedigree**, demonstrating descent from David without adherence to the line of legal succession to the throne through primogeniture or nearness of kin. Luke's record is regarded by many, however, as the pedigree of Mary, while Matthew's is accepted as that of Joseph.”³⁸

Elder Maxwell stated:

“We can wait, as we must, to learn later whether ... Matthew's or Luke's account of Jesus' Davidic descent is correct. (See Matt. 1; Luke 3.) Meanwhile, the Father has, on several occasions, given us Jesus' crucial genealogy: 'This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’”³⁹

Elder McConkie:

"Matthew begins his gospel by saying, 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David.' Thereupon he names an apparent genealogical line from Abraham to 'Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.' (Matt. 1:1-17.) Luke starts with Joseph and travels genealogically back to Adam without conforming to Matthew's account. (Luke 3:23-28.) Scholars are unable to unravel or bring into harmony the accounts here involved, and we have not been told by revelation the specifics of our Lord's ancestry. There is no way from a historical standpoint to search out the generation of Christ. One of the Biblical accounts may be the genealogy of Mary, the other of Joseph; one may assay to set forth kingly descent,

When Antipater was executed for planning to poison his father (4 BCE), the younger Herod became his father's oldest surviving son. But, since the elder Herod had discovered that the younger's mother (Mariamne II) had known of the plot against him & done nothing to prevent it, he dropped her son from his will just days before he died. *Although Herod II survived his father's deathbed purges, he was left a private citizen while his remaining half-brothers divided his father's realm. This eventually cost him his marriage. Although he did marry Herodias and had a child by her, she left him for his younger half-brother, Antipas.* After that the younger Herod slipped into anonymity. See: [Herod II Boethus, Virtual Religion](#). Accessed 12.15.22. Other references: Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.14-19, 53, 78; 18.109-110, 136-137. *War* 1.557, 562, 573, 588, 599-600. See also: Mark 6:17-18 and Matt 14:3-4.

³⁸ James E. Talmage, [Jesus the Christ](#), p. 53.

³⁹ Neal A. Maxwell, [“Out of Obscurity,”](#) *Ensign*, November 1984, p. 11.

the other give the lineal ancestry. We do not know. The only point upon which there is surety is the fact that Mary was his mother and God was his Father."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ*, Deseret Book, 1978, p. 471.