

BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ

Unit 5a Johannine Synoptic Example 1

Presented by the



LANCASTER BIBLE COLLEGE
CAPITAL SEMINARY & GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Hello. This is Unit 5 of the Life of Christ, BIB203. And in this week, we will be dealing with John and its contribution to the synoptic Gospels. And this will be part one. Unit 6 will be part two. In this particular segment, this particular unit, we're going to be looking at passages that are correlated in all four Gospels necessarily. So we're going to be looking at the synoptic record, but then we're going to bring in the perspective that a fourth Gospel affords us. And so to begin, we're going to be looking at John 1:19-42. If you would please open your Bibles as I speak. And we will also want to be looking at Mark 1:1-12, Matthew 3:1-4:11, Luke 3:1-22 and 4:1-14.

So let's start off with the Gospel of John 1:19. It says, "And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

Now, we're going to stop here. I'm going to summarize for you what just happened. This is John's testimony. Apparently, the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem. So in close proximity to John's ministry in the Jordan in Judea, they wanted to ask him who he was, and he confessed, "I am not the Christ." And so this piques their interest and they say, "Well, what then? Are you Elijah?" He says, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" "No." "Who are you? We need to take an answer back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" In other words, "Why this ministry? What is the significance of this? What is the meaning of this thing that you're doing, baptizing people?"

And that's an interesting perspective. Interesting because it's not shared. This particular perspective is not shared by the synoptic Gospels, but this perspective sheds light on the synoptic Gospels. And I want us to go and start looking at that. So we're going to be going back and forth between these passages. So what we want to do now is hold our place here at John and let's go to Mark 1:1-12. And so we're correlating both of these passages to see what we come up with. It is necessary, I think, to state that as we compare perspectives, we glean much that is not said in the text. We are able to draw inferences. We've been doing that for the last few units, drawing inferences from the interpolation of passages because they shed light on each other and they allow us to see something else. When two objects are in close proximity to one another, their shadows intersect and it creates another quality, a different quality to the shadow than would be had if those two objects were apart. That analogy sort of fits what we're trying to do here.

So Mark 1:1. "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" We just read that in John. So we can continue in verse 4 of Mark 1. "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'" "

So here in Mark, we see John being introduced. His message is put forth first by Isaiah the prophet, although it's basically Isaiah and Malachi basically amalgamated together, but Isaiah is the head text of the roll of Hebrew Bible from which this is drawn, from which this is remembered. John appears. He baptizes in the wilderness. The country of Judea and all Jerusalem are going out to him. We're told about what he wears. We're told about what he preaches. "Someone is coming after me who is mightier than I am. I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose the strap of his sandals. I have baptized you with water. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

How do we correlate the John passage plus this passage? Well, Mark tells us basically what John the Baptist preached, the nature and the quality of his ministry, the character of his ministry, I should say. In John, what we have is sort of an inside window that John the apostle, not John the Baptist, affords us in the fourth Gospel where we have the inside scoop on the interaction between the religious authorities and this prophet baptizing in the river Jordan. And what we see in John is that people actually were sent to him, to John the Baptist, that is, to ask him what the meaning of his ministry was and who he was. Was he Messiah? And of course, he was careful to say, "I'm not Messiah." "No, I am not Elijah," which is ironic because of the prophecy that had been given to his father years before that he would come in the spirit and the power of Elijah. A clear citation from Malachi 4. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord."

So what we see in the fourth Gospel is more of an interaction. There was more of an interaction between the religious authorities and John. What we see in John is that they sent representatives to find out what John was about. And we should probably see that as preceding what we read about in the Gospels regarding what John the Baptist said to the actual religious leaders and persons of note. For that, we have to go to the Gospel of Matthew 3:1. Please come there with me. And so what we see here in 3:1, and I'll summarize the content and read some of it, of course. "John the Baptist comes preaching in the wilderness of Judea." We know that. The content of his message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. This is the one who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah." And we see that quotation again. "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" We're told what John wears. We're told that "Jerusalem and all Judea (verse 5) and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."

Verse 7 is interesting and is important for our exercise here. "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'" And then you see familiar material. "I baptize you with water for repentance. Someone is coming after me. He is mightier than I. I am not worthy to unloose the thong of his sandals." We've seen this language, but we see some addition in Matthew. The winnowing fork. "He will clear his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn. He will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire."

So what we see from just that little section of text that we pulled from the Gospel of John and then so far have correlated with Mark and Matthew, it's not unreasonable to suppose that representatives are sent to John to find out what he is about. And then when they go back with what John says to them, he

says he's not Messiah. He says he's not Elijah. He says someone is coming after him who is mightier than he is. He baptizes with water, but the one coming will baptize with fire. They go back and they tell the religious leaders what this individual said, what John the Baptist said. And then these religious leaders, presumably, go out to the Jordan River to see for themselves. And it is at that juncture that John the Baptist calls them a brood of vipers and asks them who warned them to flee from the wrath to come. And that's just a small sampling of what the fourth Gospel does in relation to the synoptics. It should be said, however, that very often in the studies of the Gospels by New Testament scholars who specialize in that kind of thing, this kind of activity that we are engaged in here technically is not usually what is done. Sure, there is some level of correlation. I could think of one author right off the top of my head who does do that kind of a correlation, but those kinds of correlations that you might see along those lines tend to be incidental. They are not engaged in with a whole lot of rigor or a lot of intention because it's just not done. It's just not part of the accepted methodology.

And of course, we have the issue of the 2nd century work, the Diatessaron, a term which simply means "through four," which was written, compiled by a Syrian by the name of Tatian. The earliest harmony of the Gospels. I think I may have mentioned that in Unit 1, but it's the earliest harmony of the Gospels. And what did he do there? Literally, he sought to harmonize everything, creating a chronology that was seen, by and large, to be unworkable. So anytime we try to read the Gospels pertaining to the life of Christ chronologically, it has to be done with great care. I will be the first to tell you, if you've never heard it before, that we can only do it to a limited degree. We cannot create an exhaustive chronology of the life of Christ. It is simply too difficult. And that is why most scholars don't engage in it. But some degree of chronologization can take place. We can line up certain pericopes and we can extrapolate what may have happened. The conclusions that we draw must necessarily be tentative, but not so tentative that they do not have theological value.

Having said all of that, again, we just looked at a small slice of the Gospel of John. And now I wanted to fill in the picture with this particular exercise. And we're not quite done with it yet because we haven't finished John 1:19-42. We only read some of the passage. So to complete the synoptic circuit, we want to go to Luke 3:1. Please come there with me. And so we have Lucan material. It starts off telling us that it's the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. We're told who's ruling where and what in Palestine. Pontius Pilate is governor of Judea. Herod is tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis. Lysanias, no relation to the Herods, is tetrarch of Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas are high priests around that time. And this is when John receives his ministry orders from the Lord. The word of the Lord comes to him. He goes into the wilderness. He's already in the wilderness. He goes into the region around the Jordan and proclaims a baptism of repentance for the remission of sin. So you have all of this background material that Luke gives us, which also, of course, sheds light within the context of the Synoptics, but it sheds light also on the Gospel of John, the fourth Gospel.

So this is the beginning of it. We see the beginning of it in Luke. And so when John begins his ministry, well, what happens? Religious leadership in Jerusalem hears about it and they send representatives to query him on the nature and the character of his ministry and the rationale for it. And John records for us that interaction. They take that back, as I've said, to their masters, their bosses, as it were, to the religious leadership. And finally, the religious leaders show up at the baptism of John, and John castigates them. Well, here in Luke, what we have is verse 4, chapter 3. Isaiah the prophet is cited again. "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

So we see that again. But Luke adds more. “Every valley shall be filled. Every mountain and hill shall be made low. The crooked shall become straight. The rough places shall become level ways. All flesh shall see the salvation of God.” He tells the crowds that come out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers!” So from the synoptic perspective, in Matthew, John the Baptist calls the religious leaders a brood of vipers. In Luke, John the Baptist calls the crowd indiscriminately “brood of vipers.” So it’s broadened in the Gospel of Luke. So that tells us then that this is not something that John said (John the Baptist, that is) for the benefit of the Pharisees and the scribes that came out. He didn’t call them solely “brood of vipers.” He called the crowds a brood of vipers. So that adds texture. Interpolating all of these passages potentially adds texture to the story of the life of Christ.

So in Luke, they are called a brood of vipers. And we see the language again. “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. Don’t claim Abrahamic parentage. God can raise children from these stones for Abraham. The axe is laid to the root of the trees.” That’s Lucan. “Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” We look further in Luke. The crowds ask him about good ethical practice and he answers them, “If you have two tunics, share one. If you have food, share it too.” Tax collectors. “What shall we do?” “Collect no more than you are authorized.” Soldiers. They asked, “What do we do?” “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation. Be content with your wages.” The people were in expectation. They’re all questioning whether he’s the Christ, and he answers them, “No, I’m not” by telling them, “I baptize you with water, but someone else is coming after me.” The more direct conversation we see recorded in the fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John, where representatives get his answer, as we have said. And then we see familiar material. “The strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. The one coming after me is mightier than I. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor.” We saw that in Matthew.

So we have texture now. Those passages that we’ve looked at so far. In Luke, we’ve looked at verses 1 through 8:17. And we looked at Mark 1:1-12. And we looked at Matthew 3:1 and some material after that. We didn’t quite finish it all, probably about 14 or 15 verses. We didn’t go very far. And that’s just a small sampling of what might be gleaned from a correlation of John 1:19-42 and the rest of these passages. Now, we have not completed the process, as I’ve said. In the next unit, we will continue it. And we may or may not finish the passage in the Gospel of John, but at any rate, we’ll make a good beginning in the second section.