



Type: Book Chapter

Luke Chapter 3

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Source: *The Testimony of Luke*

Published: Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2014

Page(s): 171–217

Abstract: A commentary on the events of Luke 3, accompanied by parallel columns of the King James translation of the chapter alongside a new rendition.



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Luke Chapter 3

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses a bright, desert light onto the energetic actions of John the Baptist's ministry and the quiet launching of the Savior's. Amidst these verses stand concerns with wilderness and water, with dry and wet. For instance, John baptizes in the parched wilderness, but in the only large source of water for immersion that can be found—the Jordan River. To be sure, abundant sources of water bubble up in Jericho near where John is baptizing. But Jericho is surrounded by wilderness, and none of its water sources allow baptism except, perhaps, the spring of Elisha (see 2 Kgs. 6:1–7) and the stream that flows out of Wadi Kelt, if it is dammed. Moreover, the general region of Jericho where the Baptist ministers is the scene of a number of important manifestations of divine power, including the Israelite crossing of the Jordan River (see Josh. 3:6–4:18), the fall of Jericho (see Josh. 6:1–20), and the miracle at Elisha's spring (see 2 Kgs. 6:1–7). Two of these have to do with water.

Perhaps significantly, those who come to hear John will walk through the dry wilderness to find him at the water, there to become wet in baptism. Jesus too goes into the dry wilderness to reach the Baptist, thereafter retreating into the desert from the cooling water of the river, later walking to Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee, a body of water, to begin to gather disciples (see 4:31; 5:1–11). In these incidents we hear echoes of the Exodus experience of the Hebrew slaves who travel from the well-watered Nile Valley through the desert to the Red Sea where they find deliverance through its waters.

This chapter also blends together the themes of creation, exodus, atonement, and judgment in a dramatic sweep of the most important dimensions of the gospel message. Creation, for instance, appears in the details of the fruit of the tree (see 3:8–9), the vipers (see 3:7), the coming of the Holy Ghost (= wind of God; see 3:16–22; Gen. 1:2), and the voice of God (see 3:22). The Exodus rises to view in references to the wilderness (see

3:4), the path through the desert for the Lord-King and his people (see 3:4–5), the water barrier or entry (see 3:16), and the commandments of John to his hearers, which complement those of Moses (see 3:11, 13–14). The Atonement stands forth in the powers both to forgive sins (see 3:3, 8) and to send God’s Spirit (see 3:16, 22). The theme of judgment comes forward in the mention of fire (see 3:16) and the threatened punishments against the unrighteous (see 3:9, 17). There are more.

By tying John’s ministry, and thus that of Jesus, to the situation in the Roman world (see 3:1; also 1:5; 2:1), and by tying Jesus to humankind, specifically to Adam, in the genealogy that he records (see 3:38)—thus the first and last verses of this chapter—Luke places John and Jesus fully and physically within the human sphere of activity. This is no small matter. In effect, Luke assures readers that John and Jesus are real people; they are not from the transient, soft world of myth or legend (see the Analysis on 3:1–6). Thus, what they say and do becomes important for those of us who share this earth with them: they offer teachings and examples for us that remain timeless.

Among the bright threads woven through these verses glimmers the tie to prophecy and its character. This thread binds John’s work to prophecies from Isaiah and Malachi. It is Isaiah’s words that receive prominent, direct notice in Luke’s introduction to the Baptist’s coming: “As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet” (3:4). John’s work is given its proper, elevated station by the quotation from Isaiah 40:3–5, which Luke lifts from the sweet, deeply comforting words of the Lord to his people and to Jerusalem, promising them deliverance from “warfare” and “iniquity”; “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned” (Isa. 40:1–2). By direct implication, Luke’s quotation, which draws upon the language immediately following this promise, affirms to readers that the promised day will surely dawn and that John is its physical forerunner.

Moreover, the character of the words in Isaiah 40:3–5 gathers up a certain sense about the Lord’s work. This sense appears in the command, “make his paths straight,” and continues almost to the end of the quotation: “the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth” (3:4–5). The cumulative impression has to do with exactness. Even the parts of the prophecy that speak of valleys being “filled” and mountains “brought low” push forward a sense of strict evenness and framed order, of careful planning and focused effort. We grasp that, in divine actions, here specifically at a new dawning of divine powers that

push themselves forward through the Baptist, nothing is random or without purpose. Instead, divine anticipation and precision stretch evenly in all directions, gracing all creation with sacred meaning. We see this feature of exactness in the words of the Risen Savior in the New World as he directs the newly chosen twelve disciples that his ordinances are to be performed precisely in his way: “this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done.” Moreover, “I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do” (3 Ne. 18:6, 24).

Perhaps oddly, the Lord seems to break this rule by sending his word to John in the wilderness rather than to constituted authorities at the Jerusalem temple, “Annas and Caiaphas . . . the high priests” (3:2). But two observations disclose proper order. First, it becomes evident that, although Annas and Caiaphas are set off from the earthly rulers by Luke’s placement of their names, they are still to be viewed as participants in the worldly order, as their juxtaposition to the Emperor Tiberius and others illustrates (see 3:1). Second, long before this moment, the Lord has prepared John, for he “was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old . . . to overthrow the kingdom of the Jews, and to make straight the way of the Lord” (D&C 84:28). Thus, John’s selection demonstrates that heaven is working within pre-established guidelines and, importantly, the purpose and fact of his ordination underscore the warping corruption within the current religious establishment.

The long quotation from Isaiah brings us to see that, in early Christian eyes, this Old Testament prophet possesses clear views of the era and the person of the coming Messiah (see 3:4-6). We shall see this dimension again in Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah’s language in the synagogue of Nazareth as applying to his own ministry (see 4:17-19). Other ancient scripture also makes this link. For instance, the prophet Nephi writes that he cherishes the words of Isaiah because Isaiah “verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him” (2 Ne. 11:2). Moreover, the Risen Jesus commands his New World audience to “search these things [the record of Isaiah] diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Ne. 23:1). One can augment these passages with the so-called Servant Songs of Isaiah wherein the prophet writes of the Servant-King whom the Lord will raise up and support in a time to come (see Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).¹ Plainly, we should see

1. Bernard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia übersetzt und erklärt* (1892), cited in Roland Kenneth Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), 767-68.

Isaiah's prophetic connection with the coming Messiah to be strong and bright enough that it shines forth across the scriptures, taking a variety of forms, but clearly ever pointing to the Messiah.

But Luke does not play notes that ring familiar only from Isaiah. He also sounds chords that harmonize with words of Malachi, bringing his story about John fully and melodiously within the divinely orchestrated strains from Old Testament prophets. As we shall see in the Notes below, Jesus will speak of John as the "messenger" pointed to in Malachi 3:1 (see the Note on 7:27). In addition, John's warning words about the axe lying at the root of the trees ties to Malachi's prophecy about the looming destruction of "root" and "branch" in the last days (Mal. 4:1). Moreover, John's promise that the coming one will bring a baptism of "fire" recalls Malachi's reference to the one who will carry fire into his decisive acts of judgment (3:16; Mal. 3:2; 4:1).

This observation leads us to conclude that John speaks passionately and strongly about the end of time. His vision is not simply of the here and now, that is, a generous imparting of one's coat "to him that hath none" and a stoic contentment "with your wages" (3:11, 14). John lifts such workaday actions into a distant sphere that wraps our acts with eternal consequences by asking, "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (3:7). Although this alarm, embedded in the Baptist's question, may well involve the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its environs (see 21:6, 20, 23-24), the broad scriptural connection is to the fate of the wicked in the final wind-up scene: "Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up" (Mal. 4:1). Speaking of such a day, Isaiah threatens, "The day of the Lord cometh . . . to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. . . . And I [the Lord] will punish . . . the wicked for their iniquity" (Isa. 13:9, 11). The Apostle Paul, coming a generation after the Baptist, knows God's "wrath" is to manifest itself in the end: "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness" not only in the mortal sphere but especially in "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" when "God [shall] judge the world" (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 3:6). As a final example, in his book of Revelation, John declares and then asks, "For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:17). Plainly, in the broad view of scripture, the Baptist aims our attention to that future moment when God takes final action against the wicked.

John’s appeal to the end-time gracefully balances a complementary emphasis on creation, thereby framing a divine symmetry of grand scope. For amidst his tough warnings about the future, particularly “the wrath to come,” he unexpectedly declares to his hearers that God “is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham,” much as he has created a man from the dust of the earth, thus bringing together God’s orchestrated past and future (3:7–8).

In a different vein, a person naturally wonders where John gains the first whisperings of the testimony that he bears concerning the “one mightier than I” (3:16). It seems most natural to suppose that he receives such from his mother, Elisabeth, who has experienced the spirit of prophecy, specifically about the coming Messiah, when Mary comes to visit her (see 1:41–45). In addition, John’s father receives both instruction from the angel and a prophetic insight similar to his wife’s that will form the basis for his own testimony about his son (see 1:15–16, 68–79). The testimonies of John’s parents will endure with them and, thus equipped, they will teach their son. On those occasions, which occur appropriately in their home, they become as their son will become, heralds of the coming Christ.

JOHN APPEARS (3:1–6)

(Compare Matt. 3:1–6; Mark 1:2–6; John 1:19–23)

King James Translation

¹ Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judæa, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituræa and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, ² Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

³ And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of

New Rendition

¹ Now in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar’s reign, while Pontius Pilate was prefect of Judea, and Herod [Antipas] was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of Iturea and the land of Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

³ And he came into all the land surrounding the Jordan, proclaiming baptism of repentance for the remission of

sins; 4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; 6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

sins, 4 as it has been written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one crying in the wilderness. ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight;’ 5 every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be leveled, and the crooked will be straightened and the uneven ways will be smoothed; 6 And all flesh will see the salvation of God.”

Notes

3:1 *fifteenth year . . . Tiberius:* Because Tiberius comes to power in AD 14, after the death of Augustus on August 19, the year seems to be AD 29. But variant ways of reckoning calendrical matters tell us that we cannot be more certain than the general period AD 27–29.²

Pontius Pilate: Usually called “governor of Judea,” as in the KJV, Pilate’s actual title is prefect (Greek *hēgemōn*, Latin *praefectus*),³ an office that is subject to the Roman legate in Syria. Sometimes the position is mistakenly called “procurator,” a title not in use until the reign of Claudius (AD 41–54), because of an anachronistic reference by the Roman historian Tacitus.⁴ The prefect’s responsibilities are threefold: (1) to keep the peace—he controls soldiers who function as police; (2) to judge, as illustrated in the case of Jesus; and (3) to care for the economic interests of Rome and Judea, including the collection of taxes. Pilate, next mentioned in 13:1, serves as prefect of Judea from AD 26 to 36.⁵

Judaea: This territory lies around Jerusalem, extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, and a few dozen miles north and south of the capital city.⁶

2. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:455; Morris, *Luke*, 103.

3. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 763; BAGD, 344.

4. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

5. Schürer, *History*, 1:383–87; Daniel R. Schwartz, “Pontius Pilate,” in *ABD*, 5:395–400; Helen K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 100 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–23.

6. Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1989), 167, 170, 175–78.

Herod: This person is Herod Antipas, second son of Herod the Great. He is “not born earlier than 20 B.C.” and is thus fifteen or sixteen years of age when his father, Herod the Great, dies in 4 BC and Antipas becomes tetrarch.⁷ It is Antipas who arrests John the Baptist after the latter criticizes him for convincing his half-brother’s wife, Herodias, to leave Philip and marry him (see 3:19–20; Mark 6:17–18).

tetrarch: The term means originally “ruler of a fourth part.” After the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, the Roman emperor divides Herod’s kingdom among several, including two sons and a daughter, Salome. Except for the governorship of Pilate over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea, which begins in AD 26, the territories that Luke mentions are all in the northern part of the region. From 4 BC to AD 39, Herod Antipas governs the area west of the Sea of Galilee, as well as a strip of land that lies on the east bank of the Jordan River and Dead Sea called Perea.⁸

Galilee: This territory lies west of the Sea of Galilee, and includes the important city of Sepphoris, whose remains stand three miles north of Nazareth; but Antipas’s tetrarchy does not reach the Mediterranean coast.

his brother Philip: The third son of Herod the Great and half brother of Antipas, Philip governs from 4 BC until AD 33 or 34 the territory between the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee and Mount Hermon that includes Caesarea Philippi which he founds at one of the sources of the Jordan River (see the Note on 3:19).⁹

Lysanias: Mentioned only here, this man governs a region northeast of Mount Hermon.

3:2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests: Annas is the father-in-law of Caiaphas (see John 18:13). Only one person at a time can serve as high priest. But Herod, his son Archelaus, and the Roman governors who succeed them appoint and depose high priests with some regularity. A deposed high priest, of course, continues to assert influence and may be called “high priest” as a matter of courtesy. Annas, who serves from AD 6 to 15, remains an influential figure after his deposition, seeing several of his sons and sons-in-law serve as high priest. Caiaphas holds the position from AD 18 to 36,¹⁰ no doubt with his father-in-law standing in the wings

7. Harold W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 17 (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), 11–12.

8. Aharoni and others, *Carta Bible Atlas*, maps 223, 231; map 14 in the LDS edition of the Bible.

9. Josephus, *B.J.* 2.9.1 (§§167–68).

10. Schürer, *History*, 2:230.

as a support. By this time, Roman officials begin to impose even more control over the office of high priest, beyond that exercised by Herod and his son Archelaus. In an attempt to check the influence of the priests, they hold the high priest's sacred clothing in a compartment to which only the governor has access. Because Annas serves as high priest for about nine years (AD 6–15) and Caiaphas for eighteen (AD 18–36), over a thirty-year period they stand as the most influential persons in their society, including the entire ten years of Pilate's governorship (AD 26–36).¹¹

the word of God came: Setting the names of the high priests next to the notice of the divine revelation to the Baptist seems purposeful, underscoring sharply that God's communiqué does not go to respected religious authorities in Jerusalem, within the halls of power, but far away, to the son of an obscure priest.

the word of God came . . . in the wilderness: A similar expression appears at the beginning of Jeremiah's book in the Septuagint: "The word of God which came to Jeremiah" (LXX Jer. 1:1). The term translated "word" (Greek *rhēma*) in the introductions to both Jeremiah and John has to do with a specific message rather than the entire gospel (see the Notes on 5:1; 22:61).¹² In addition, a strong chord sounds here for the living, vital voice of revelation in contrast to the written word. This almost musical sound finds echoes in Luke's introduction of Isaiah's book as "*the book of the words of Esaias the prophet*" (3:4; emphasis added) and in Jesus' unusual word picture "It is said" that he uses when introducing a written line from the Mosaic law found in Deuteronomy (4:12; Deut. 6:16; see the Notes on 3:4; 4:12; 16:30). In a different vein, besides Luke, only John's Gospel introduces the Baptist by pointing to revelation as the justification for his ministry, though the other accounts assume it (see John 1:33). According to Joseph Smith, during John's ministry, he "was the only legal administrator in the affairs of the kingdom there was then on the earth, and [held] the keys of power. . . . The son of Zacharias wrested the keys, the kingdom, the power, the glory from the Jews, by the holy anointing and decree of heaven."¹³ Because "the word" comes to the Baptist "in the wilderness," hinting that this type of region is his customary habitat, the desert in effect becomes a place of revelation, as well as of spiritual and physical renewal.

11. Josephus, *A.J.* 15.11.4 (§§403–405); 18.2.1–2, 6.3 (§§26, 35, 90–95); Schürer, *History*, 2:229–32; Johnson, *Luke*, 64.

12. Plummer, *Luke*, 85; BAGD, 742–43; *TDNT*, 4:75–76, 113.

13. *TPJS*, 276.

One can compare Jesus' experiences, often with others, in the wilderness in 4:1–13, 42; 5:16; 9:10–17 (also Acts 7:30, 38, 44).

John: A question arises about how God empowers John. Is it merely and primarily “the word of God” through which inspiration comes?¹⁴ Later, John will be called “my messenger” in accord with LXX Exodus 23:20 and LXX Malachi 3:1 (see 7:27), indicating a divine commission. According to D&C 84:28, he “was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old.” Although priests in the Jerusalem establishment are not ordained as such, the need for John’s ordination should not surprise us. In the case of Jesus, Luke 10:22, John 3:35, and Doctrine and Covenants 93:4 hold that Jesus receives his authorization directly from his Father (see the Analysis on 3:21–22 and the Note on 4:18). We compare the words that point to Jesus’ commission, “I am sent” (4:43).¹⁵ A further matter concerns the lack of a note about John’s clothing in this account (see Matt. 3:4; Mark 1:6). Why does Luke avoid this aspect? While he might be worried about the image that he conveys to his Roman readers, that is, an image of a man who looks free-spirited, even wild, it seems that John’s appearance is not an important issue for Luke but rather he lays emphasis on John’s place in the fulfillment of prophecy, which he turns to immediately (see 3:4–6).

wilderness: The general area is probably the Judean wilderness or desert that lies just east of Jerusalem, stretching eastward to the hill country on the other side of the Jordan River. This observation matches the statement in the next verse. John is already in the desert, God’s ground. Incidentally, the view that John associates himself with the Essene community that has withdrawn to the northwest shore of the Dead Sea holds little merit.¹⁶

3:3 all the country about Jordan: John evidently preaches in places on either side of the Jordan River, essentially from the Dead Sea on the south

14. *TDNT*, 8:836–41.

15. *TDNT*, 2:171, 348; 5:452–53, 895; Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 9; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957–66), 2:132–33; Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 246 (“receiving the fulness of the priesthood”); JST Luke 9:25 (“whom God hath ordained”); John 17:2, 7, 18; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 1:4; Heb. 1:2, 9 (quoting Ps. 45:7); 3:2; 5:10 (compare 7:21; 8:3); 1 Pet. 1:2, 20; Ether 3:14; D&C 93:17; *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* 1.45.5; compare also 1 Cor. 2:6–7.

16. S. Kent Brown, “The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Mormon Perspective,” *BYU Studies* 23, no. 1 (1983): 49–66, especially 62 and n. 45; Dana M. Pike, “Is the Plan of Salvation Attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls?” in *LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Dana M. Pike (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 91, n. 5.

to the Sea of Galilee on the north. The Gospel of John notes specifically that he preaches “beyond Jordan,” in Perea, the territory that hugs the east bank (John 1:28; 10:40), as well as near “Aenon near to Salim” on the west bank (John 3:23). Lehi notices that John will “baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan,” that is, operating from the east bank (1 Ne. 10:9). The river, of course, offers a source of water deep enough to perform immersion baptisms.¹⁷

preaching: In the New Testament, this Greek term (*kēryssō*) usually embraces the preaching of the Christian gospel (for example, Matt. 11:1; Mark 3:14; Rom. 10:14, 15). Here the term appears in its original sense of “acting as a herald.”¹⁸

baptism: Because this baptism is defined here as one “of repentance for the remission of sins,” it seems that Luke is clarifying that the ordinance performed by the Baptist is distinct from other known cleansing, ritual ablutions. Moreover, the term stems from the Greek verb *baptizō*, which means to plunge or to immerse.¹⁹

baptism of repentance for the remission of sins: This expression mirrors Mark 1:4 and may show a connection to Mark’s account. Substantively, the questions are whether and how the baptism of John connects to his world, because it appears that John takes over the form, but not the substance or content, of the Jewish ritual ablution in a *mikvah* bath. Because repentance is to precede a person’s baptism at John’s hands, this ordinance shares the same religious background as that of the Essenes of the Dead Sea who hold that their members “have not been cleansed [by entering a ritual bath] unless they turn away from their wickedness.”²⁰ In addition, immersion in a *mikvah* bath at Qumran, in a spirit of repentance, opens the way for a person to receive forgiveness of sins.²¹ This concept—repentance preceding baptism—matches what we find in the Book of Mormon (see Alma 7:15; Moro. 7:34; etc.).²² A further issue has to do with whether John’s baptism essentially adopts the water ritual that gentile proselytes go through when

17. Aharoni and others, *Carta Bible Atlas*, map 229.

18. Plummer, *Luke*, 86; *TDNT*, 3:697–703.

19. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 305–6; *TDNT*, 1:530.

20. *The Rule of the Community* 5:13–14, in Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 8.

21. *The Rule of the Community*, 3:3–12, in García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 4.

22. Noel B. Reynolds, “Understanding Christian Baptism through the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 4–37.

they embrace Judaism (a person performs the ritual for himself or herself). The evidence remains unsure. Some conclude that Jewish proselyte baptism arises only after the loss of the temple in AD 70.²³ Others hold that this ritual is in place by the time of John’s ministry.²⁴

repentance: The Greek term *metanoia* properly means “change of mind” or, as in modern English, “change of heart,” pointing to a person’s inner transformation from the past to a new future.²⁵

remission of sins: The Greek term *aphesis*, for which the standard translation is “remission,” literally means “a sending or casting away” and connotes a complete release, cancellation, or pardon.²⁶ Luke’s expression strongly indicates that the power of the Atonement is already in force through a person’s repentance and the baptism administered by John. Though some hold that John’s baptism is to be distinguished from the Christian baptism “with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (3:16),²⁷ the Apostle Paul shows that immersion baptism is fully a part of Christian ordinances (see Rom. 6:1–11). The promised remission, or forgiveness, of sins receives a deepening, enriching connection from the passage that Luke next quotes from Isaiah 40. For, although he does not quote the verses just before Isaiah 40:3–5, which he does cite, verse 2 holds that Jerusalem’s “iniquity is pardoned” and she has paid “double for all her sins” (Isa. 40:2). The context of Isaiah 40, therefore, points to an era of both physical and spiritual cleansing. In Isaiah’s words, this era comes to all; in John’s preaching, it comes to the individual, almost as a prelude to the fulfilling of Isaiah’s universal promise. In modern scripture, baptism presents a dual public symbol that marks the cleansing of an individual from sin, a “remission of sins” after repentance, and of preparing the individuals thus gathered through baptism for the end-time, for “the coming of the Lord” (D&C 84:27–28).²⁸

23. Theophilus Mills Taylor, “The Beginnings of Jewish Proselyte Baptism,” *New Testament Studies* 2 (1955–56): 193–98.

24. *TDNT*, 1:535–37; Morris, *Luke*, 104–5; W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of Conflict from the Maccabees to the Donatus* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 180 and n. 18; Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 29–37 (cited in Frend, 202, n. 18).

25. BAGD, 513–14; *TDNT*, 4:999–1003.

26. BAGD, 124; *TDNT*, 1:509–12.

27. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:459.

28. *TDNT*, 1:537; Reynolds, “Understanding Christian Baptism,” 4, 7–17, 31–33.

3:4 *written*: This term regularly introduces a quotation from an accepted scriptural source²⁹ and draws up an image of a person reading God’s word that comes initially by hearing (see 2:23; 4:8, 10, 17; 7:27; 10:26; 18:31; 19:46; 20:17; 21:22; 22:37; 24:46; the Notes on 4:4; 24:44). The existence of a written source creates some tension for those who seek to make scripture and regularized actions more important than the living voice of revelation: “By three things is the world sustained: by the [written] Law, by the [Temple-] service, and by deeds of loving kindness.”³⁰

***the book*:** This Greek word, *biblos*, regularly points to the individual works of scripture whereas a related term, *biblion*, refers to the scroll or surface on which the book is written (see 4:17, 20).³¹

***the book of the words*:** Properly, “book of sayings,” Luke places emphasis on both the living, oral character of prophecy and its spontaneity as it mirrors divine influence; it is these words or sayings that are then written into a book. The quality and importance of the living voice of prophecy are blessedly underscored in the vibrant “word of God [that] came unto John” (3:2) and in Jesus’ introduction of Deuteronomy 6:16, a written passage, by uttering, “It is said” (4:12 and Note thereon; also 7:7; the Note on 16:30). The Joseph Smith Translation brings back emphasis onto the written character of prophecy by rendering this passage “written in the book of the prophet Esaias; and these are the words, saying . . .” (JST 3:4).

***voice*:** This term appears elsewhere as a keyword announcing a new age, a new dispensation, a new divine action (see Alma 5:57; D&C 1:1; 65:1, 3; 133:21–24; Moses 6:27, 50–51). It seems to carry that meaning in this context (as also in Mark 1:3, perhaps Matt. 3:3). Beginning with “the voice,” Luke’s quotation in this and the next two verses comes from LXX Isaiah 40:3–5, with some variations. A comparison shows that the Septuagint of Isaiah 40 does not closely follow the Hebrew text. Luke’s quotation of these verses goes beyond the other Gospels’ quotation of a single verse (only Isa. 40:3 in Matt. 3:3 and Mark 1:3). Of course, the fact that Isaiah 40:5 ends in “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” underscores Luke’s interest in the universality of the gospel message. After all, he is a Gentile touched by its truths. But there is more. The argument that Luke is rather slavishly following Mark at this point, with possible influences from Matthew, begins to falter. Luke, or his source, shows a broader grasp of the

29. *TDNT*, 1:746–49, 758–59.

30. *Mishnah Pirke Aboth* 1:2, in Danby, *Mishnah*, 446.

31. BAGD, 140–41; Marshall, *Luke*, 136.

significance of Isaiah’s prophetic words for John’s ministry than do the others. In a stunning innovation, modern scripture applies these words from Isaiah to a person’s ultimate, eventual meeting with the Savior: “In the wilderness, because you cannot see him [the Savior]—my voice, because my voice is Spirit; . . . sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him [the Savior]; for he will unveil his face unto you” (D&C 88:66, 68).

in the wilderness: The quotation illustrates that the wilderness is God’s special territory where his living, vivid word can be heard (see the Note on 3:2).

Prepare . . . make: The sequence of imperatives comes from “the voice” and effectively directs all who hear to begin building the royal highway for the Messiah-king (see Isa. 49:11; 1 Ne. 10:8; Hel. 14:9). In modern passages that focus on the end-time, the imperatives frame the preparations for the Second Coming of the Lord (see Alma 9:28; D&C 33:10; 45:9; 65:1, 3; 84:28).

the way: This path or road which the herald announces has already received Zacharias’s prophetic attention wherein he focuses on his infant son preparing the Lord’s “ways” and guiding the feet of the Lord’s people “into the way of peace” (see 1:76, 79).

his paths: The expression in LXX Isaiah 40:3 is “paths of our God.” Whether Luke is quoting from memory is not clear, but by rendering the quotation simply “his paths,” he ties “the Lord” of this passage to Jesus in accord with the heavenly identification of Jesus as “Lord” elsewhere (Greek *kyrios*; see 1:17; 2:11; etc.).³² For believers, the commandment to “make his paths straight” remains ever in effect (see D&C 33:10; 65:1; 133:17; also 2 Ne. 4:33; Alma 7:19–20).

3:5 *Every valley:* All of the Gospels quote Isa. 40:3 in connection with John’s ministry (see Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; John 1:23), but only Luke quotes this next verse which has to do with the physical construction of the highway for the coming king. We can see that, through prophecy, Luke wants to make concrete the earthly reality of the Messiah by referring to the hard work of road building (see D&C 133:27; also 38:40). Just before the term “Every valley,” the Prophet Joseph adds a significant, wholly new section in the JST, a section which describes in broad language the prophesied ministry of the coming Messiah who will reach across cultural and ethnic boundaries not only, mercifully, “to be a light unto all who sit in darkness”

32. BAGD, 459–61; *TDNT*, 3:1086–95; Marshall, *Luke*, 136.

but also, threateningly, “to come down in judgment upon all” (JST 3:5–10; see 1:79; the Notes on 4:22; 22:32; the Analysis below). In modern scripture, the like expression “the valleys to be exalted” points to the end-time (D&C 109:74).

every mountain and hill shall be brought low: An example of a high hill brought low by human means is already visible southeast of Jerusalem in Jesus’ day after Herod’s workmen remove one hill in 23 BC to build up the height of a nearby hill that becomes the foundation for the fortress named Herodium.³³ Jesus will promise his followers that they will move mountains through their faith (see the Note on 23:30; Matt. 17:20; 21:21; Mark 11:22–23; also Isa. 54:10; 1 Cor. 13:2; Hel. 10:9; 12:17; 3 Ne. 22:10; Moro. 8:24).

filled . . . brought low . . . made straight . . . made smooth: Witnesses will behold the results of the herald’s labors—the completed sacred highway that allows the king to come. An additional element rises to view: exactness. The coming of the word of God to the Baptist brings its own special framework, its own precision, its own expectations. To be sure, spiritual life in John’s world receives its shape and ordering within the norms of the temple and synagogue. But the lines quoted here from Isaiah 40:4–5 imply that a new order has arrived with a fresh outlook for worship and relating oneself to the coming king. In an intriguing precedent that shows the multiple fulfillment of prophecy,³⁴ the Lord takes up and then recasts language from Isaiah 40:4 to apply to the last days when “the Son of Man cometh”; his people are to be “looking forth . . . for the valleys to be exalted, and for the mountains to be made low, and for the rough places to become smooth” (D&C 49:22–23; also 133:22; Alma 7:20).

the rough ways shall be made smooth: Explicit is the notion that the paths prepared for the king will be totally free of pebbles and branches and stumbling blocks, mirroring the command to “gather out the stones” from the path of the people of God (Isa. 62:10; see D&C 109:74).

3:6 all flesh shall see the salvation of God: Luke inexplicably omits the prior expression from LXX Isaiah 40:5, “the glory of the Lord shall appear,” which would serve his overall purposes, perhaps illustrating that he is quoting from memory. Importantly, however, Luke strikes a universal chord that sings of “all flesh” as recipients of God’s salvation, that is, all

33. D. Kelly Ogden and Jeffrey R. Chadwick, *Holy Land: A Geographical, Historical and Archaeological Guide to the Land of the Bible* (Jerusalem: HaMakor, 1990), 239; Ehud Netzer, “Herodium,” in *ABD*, 3:176–80.

34. David R. Seely, “Prophecy in Biblical Times,” in *EM*, 3:1162–63.

humans,³⁵ to which John is about to give voice (see Isa. 49:26; 1 Ne. 19:17; Mosiah 16:1; D&C 1:34; 63:6). In addition, it is only when matters are precisely arranged—as they should be in the divine hegemony—that salvation will appear, not before. The salvation of God does not come randomly but with divine care and planning (see D&C 133:3). Significantly, the Greek verb *horaō*, “to see,” has to do with direct perception, not a visionary experience (see the Notes on 24:31, 34; also D&C 97:16; 123:17). Moreover, the term “flesh” (Greek *sarx*) appears in Luke’s Gospel only twice. As such, it creates an *inclusio* that arcs across the narrative and underscores its unity (see the Note on 24:39).³⁶

Analysis

These verses bring at least seven significant matters to the fore. First, in accord with Luke’s manifest interest in tying his story to historical events in the wider world (see 1:5; 2:1–2), he links the beginning of John’s ministry, not that of the Savior, to “the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar” (3:1). Though Luke has a specific time frame in mind, we cannot determine its beginning point, whether it is Tiberius’ coregency with Augustus, which begins, according to Velleius Paterculus, in AD 11, or whether it is Tiberius’ accession to sole power soon after the death of Augustus on the 19th of August, AD 14. This dilemma permits us to date the beginning of John’s ministry only within the years AD 27–29.³⁷

A second matter links to Luke’s efforts to connect important events to dates. It has to do with doctrinal principles arising from concrete historical events. Luke has already begun to rehearse events that carry such principles. As an example, Latter-day Saints believe that Adam and Eve are real persons who lived in a real time and place. Their fall is also real, bringing serious spiritual consequences to them and their descendants. Thus, the need arises for their rescue, for an atonement. In response to this need, Jesus is born into this world as a real person who undergoes experiences that he shares with all of us. His Atonement occurs at a real time and in a real place. His Atonement is not mythical or ethereal. It releases genuine, tangible powers to us, powers that become effective both in the resurrection and during our repenting.

35. *TLNT*, 3:233–34.

36. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

37. Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars* 2.100.1; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 56.30.5; Marshall, *Luke*, 133; Morris, *Luke*, 103.

Third, by introducing John again, whose birth appears earlier, Luke now opens a more or less independent epoch that consists mainly of the Baptist's preaching and baptizing.³⁸ For many readers, John's activities seemingly lead in a more or less straight line to the final objective of Luke's Gospel, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. However, Luke carefully frames John's ministry not only as a prelude to that of Jesus, as we shall see in the content of his preaching and in Jesus' appeals to John's activities (see 7:24–28, 33; 16:16; 20:4), but particularly as an ending of the Old Testament era (see the Analysis on 3:21–22 below).

Fourth, the rejection of the religious establishment in Jerusalem is almost complete. Because the Divine contacts a preacher in the wilderness rather than the constituted authority at the temple, the Lord shows his displeasure with the centuries-long, serpentine events that have led to the coming to power of Annas, Caiaphas, and their associates. Long gone is the rightful line of priests who return from exile and who can document their descent through Zadok, the high priest of Solomon's day. In their place have come odd lots of ambitious priests who buy or manipulate their way into sacred office.³⁹

In this connection, and as a fifth element, the revelation to John forges a new future, a fresh set of expectations for worshipers, and it places revelation at the summit, new and thriving and clear. This facet becomes visible in Luke's longer quotation that adds the two verses from Isaiah 40:4–5, extending the words quoted by Mark and Matthew. These two latter writers end their quotations with the words, "make his paths straight" (Isa. 40:3). Luke draws in more from Isaiah's prophecy to show that God is putting a renewing, bright stamp on his work. And this enterprise begins with the Baptist. For with his coming, and "the word of God" that moves him, the work of God swings into action: "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low," making the celestial landscape into a dominion that is level and passable and inviting, offering to followers consistency and fundamental equality. Moreover, God's kingdom will bring inspired regularity and clarity, for "the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth," providing the mortal traveler a straight path unencumbered by the snags and pits of undermining corruption and stilted tradition. With confidence, they can step onto

38. Plummer, *Luke*, 85.

39. S. Kent Brown and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, *The Lost 500 Years: What Happened between the Old and New Testaments* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 111–19.

“the way of holiness” (Isa. 35:8). In a word, the revelation to John heralds a new day of divine clarity and precision, of guiding inspiration and well-informed devotion. In one stunning moment, the old, which has served ancient Israel for centuries, collapses as a guide.

Sixth, Luke’s narrative now starts to connect with those of Mark and Matthew. This connection raises a host of issues that receive attention in the Introduction III.G and III.H. As seen above, when introducing the Baptist, Luke expands the quotation from Isaiah 40 to include verses 3–5 (see 3:4–6) rather than merely verse 3 as Mark and Matthew repeat (see Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3). Plainly, Luke sees the longer quotation from Isaiah as anticipating John’s work, a quotation that mentions “all flesh” beholding “the salvation of God.” This language touches the universality of God’s actions, a theme that Luke’s report features (see the Notes on 1:49, 79, and the Analysis on 1:57–80). This point leads to the next.

Seventh, the work of Joseph Smith intensifies a fleeting yet very bright light on these verses, particularly by widening the prophetic connection to the Old Testament in 3:5 which in the Greek text binds Isaiah’s words with John’s ministry. Significantly, Joseph Smith’s expansion fits Luke’s interests of both quoting more from an Old Testament prophecy, as in 3:5–6, though Luke fits the prophetic focus onto John alone, and folding a universal aspect into his story. Joseph Smith’s additions in JST 3:5–10 pull up a series of summarizing, sweeping statements about the ministry of the Messiah, not of John, as it impacts “the heathen nations” and “the Gentiles” as well as “those who are lost . . . of the sheepfold of Israel” until “the keys of the kingdom shall be delivered up again unto the Father.” The addition reads, speaking of the one for whom the path is made straight:

For behold, and lo, he shall come, as it is written in the book of the prophets, to take away the sins of the world, and to bring salvation unto the heathen nations, to gather together those who are lost, who are of the sheepfold of Israel; Yea, even the dispersed and afflicted; and also to prepare the way, and make possible the preaching of the gospel unto the Gentiles; And to be a light unto all who sit in darkness, unto the uttermost parts of the earth; to bring to pass the resurrection from the dead, and to ascend up on high, to dwell on the right hand of the Father, Until the fulness of time, and the law and the testimony shall be sealed, and the keys of the kingdom shall be delivered up again unto the Father; To administer justice unto all; to come down in judgment upon all, and to convince all the ungodly of their ungodly deeds, which they have committed; and all this in the day that he shall come; For it is a day of power. (JST 3:5–10)

Through an inspired Joseph Smith, the prophesied ministry of the Messiah who “shall come, as it is written in the book of the prophets,” becomes breathtaking in its endless reach. In this view, the key moment that Isaiah 40:3–5 envisions finds fulfillment not only in John’s heralding ministry but also in “a day of power” wherein the Messiah himself comes.

In this connection, in an intriguing revelation received by Joseph Smith that concerns, in part, the end-time, the Lord utters a standard warning, “be not deceived” (see 21:8), and then urges his people to “continue in steadfastness, looking . . . for the valleys to be exalted, and for the mountains to be made low, and for the rough places to become smooth—and all this when the angel shall sound his trumpet” (D&C 49:23). Moreover, in a prayer from Joseph Smith, we read that the divine work of the latter days, which shall end with the “supper of the Lamb” and the coming of “the Bridegroom,” begins with the imperatives “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (D&C 65:1, 3). With a flick of a celestial switch, the prophecy from Isaiah 40:4 is applied not only to the ministries of the Baptist and of the Messiah but also to conditions at the end of days, clearly demonstrating that prophecy can point to more than one event or circumstance yet to occur.⁴⁰

This discussion would not be complete without a word about the origins of baptism as an ordinance. It begins with Adam and Eve. Once they are banished from the Garden of Eden, their story is one of undeviating obedience to the Lord. In the course of their lives of worship, after offering “the firstlings of their flocks” in response to the Lord’s command to do so (Moses 5:5), they reach a point at which the Lord can reveal more. At a time soon thereafter, “an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam” (Moses 5:6), and Adam receives a sweeping revelation on repentance and baptism (see Moses 6:51–68). In the midst of this experience, Adam “was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord, and was carried down into the water, and was laid under the water, and was brought forth out of the water. And thus he was baptized.” Immediately, “the Spirit of God descended upon him, and thus he was born of the Spirit” (Moses 6:64–65). From this moment of moments, baptism by water and baptism by the Spirit are inextricably entwined.⁴¹

40. Seely, “Prophecy in Biblical Times,” 3:1162–63.

41. Draper, Brown, and Rhodes, *Pearl of Great Price*, 99–106.

JOHN'S MINISTRY (3:7–20)

(Compare Matt. 3:7–12; 14:3–4; Mark 1:7–8; 6:17–18;
John 1:24–28; 3:19–20)

King James Translation

7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. 12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. 14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; 16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than

New Rendition

7 And he said to the people who had come out to be baptized by him, “Offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit worthy of repentance, and do not start saying to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 9 And even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

10 And they asked him, “Then what should we do?” 11 And in reply, he said to them, “He who has two shirts, share with someone who does not have one, and he who has food do likewise.” 12 And tax collectors came to be baptized also, and they said to him, “Teacher, what should we do?” 13 And he said to them, “Collect no more than you have been directed to.” 14 And soldiers also asked him, saying, “What should even we do?” And he said to them, “Extort nothing, do not accuse any falsely, and be content with your pay.”

15 And because the people were in expectation of the Messiah, and since everyone pondered in their hearts concerning John, whether he was the Christ, 16 John answered everyone, saying, “I baptize you in water; but one is coming who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to

I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: 17 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.

18 And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people. 19 But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, 20 Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.

loosen. He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire, 17 whose winnowing shovel is in his hand to clean off the threshing floor and to gather the grain into the barn. And he will burn the chaff with inextinguishable fire.”

18 He declared the gospel to the people by many and varied exhortations. 19 But Herod the tetrarch, having been reprov'd by him concerning Herodias, his brother's wife, and concerning all the atrocities which Herod had committed, 20 he added this too on top of everything: he shut up John in prison.

Notes

3:7 *the multitude that came forth*: The context, particularly John's point about Abraham as father (see 3:8), points to a Jewish crowd rather than Gentile. In fact, Josephus notes that John speaks specifically to Jewish crowds.⁴² The long trek from distant towns down to the floor of the Jordan valley means that these people are more than curious; they are coming “to be baptized.” The Joseph Smith Translation adds that the Baptist responds to the multitude by “crying against them with a loud voice,” raising his voice in warning, as the following words illustrate (JST 3:12).

***O generation of vipers*:** This expression introduces the recorded words of John. Besides the traditional view that John 1:1–18 derives from the Baptist,⁴³ we possess quotes from a lost record, said to be in written form, in Doctrine and Covenants 93:6–17. The words that Luke reports from John form a direct verbal parallel between Luke 3:7–9 and Matthew 3:7–10, save for the terms “fruits” and “begin” in verse 8, which differ from Matthew's version. The exact similarities invite the question whether Luke borrows his lines from Matthew. It seems not, particularly because of the high possibility that Luke's expression “begin not” is closer to the original Semitic term than Matthew's “think not” (see the Note on 3:8).⁴⁴ The

42. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.5.2 (§117).

43. McConkie, *DNTC*, 1:71.

44. Marshall, *Luke*, 140.

enduring tie of this expression to the final judgment appears in Doctrine and Covenants 121:23.

vipers: The reference to snakes opens a wide array of probable allusions. First, the reference points to the serpent in the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 3:1; Moses 4:5–6). Other allusions to creation in the passage underscore this likelihood, such as the fruit of the tree (see 3:8–9; Gen. 3:2–3; Moses 4:8–9), the coming of the Holy Ghost (= the wind of God or his Spirit; see 3:16, 22; Gen. 1:2; Moses 2:2), and the voice of God (see 3:22; Gen. 1:3, 6, etc.; Moses 2:1, 3, etc.). Second, the reference may point to snakes that can be tamed only by the presence of the Messiah (see Isa. 11:6–9). A third motif ties to the brass serpent raised by Moses in the desert (see Num. 21:6–9), forming a link to the Exodus and to divine deliverance (see 2 Ne. 25:20; Alma 33:19–22; Hel. 8:14–15).

who hath warned you to flee: John’s question invites inquiry about whom he has in mind as the motivator for those who come to him. Are there other preachers? Is it divine inspiration or fear? The question may simply be rhetorical.⁴⁵

the wrath to come: The expression can point both to the looming destruction of Jerusalem and the countryside (see 19:43–44; 21:6, 20, 23–24) as well as what awaits the wicked in the final wind-up scene (see Mal. 3:2; 4:1; Isa. 13:9, 11; Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; Rev. 6:17; etc.). In either sense, the Baptist shows himself to be standing squarely among those who see God taking decisive action against the wicked at a specified moment in the future, most likely at the end-time, the so-called *eschaton* (see D&C 121:23). At this point in Matthew’s report, the Joseph Smith Translation adds words spoken by John about the Savior who is just beginning his ministry and about the relationship between the ministries of the two men. The occasion when John’s audience may have encountered Jesus remains unclear: “Why is it that ye receive not the preaching of him whom God hath sent? If ye receive not this in your hearts, ye receive not me; and if ye receive not me, ye receive not him of whom I am sent to bear record; and for your sins ye have no cloak” (JST Matt. 3:34; see also John 15:22).

3:8 fruits: Matthew’s version of John’s words records the singular “fruit,” a minor deviation. In the context, John is talking about proper behavior. But the image touches real fruits, including the fruit in the Garden of Eden that brings knowledge of good and evil (see Gen. 3:6; Moses 4:8–9). Additionally, the reference to fruits ties to blessings from the Lord, both present

45. Marshall, *Luke*, 139.

and future, both of the field and of the flock, both of the body and of God's Spirit. As an example of one's body, field, and flock, see Deuteronomy 28:4 ("Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle"); as an example of the Spirit, see Galatians 5:22–23 ("the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering," etc.).

worthy of repentance: The sense is that one's actions, or "fruits," match or are equal to one's repentance, and rise up as a demonstration of repenting. On the term repentance, see the Note on 3:3.

begin not: The mood of the Greek verb *archomai* is subjunctive and functions as an imperative, thus forming a categorical prohibition.⁴⁶ With the complementary infinitive "to speak" (Greek *legein*), this verb points to action begun and continued.⁴⁷ This expression "begin not" differs from Matthew's "think not" (Matt. 3:9). Marshall cites studies that argue for Luke's expression standing closer to an Aramaic original than that of Matthew, and therefore indicating that Luke may have another source and does not depend solely on Matthew for the account of John's preaching.⁴⁸

We have Abraham to our father: More properly, "We have Abraham as our father," a meaning supported by the Joseph Smith Translation which renders this statement "Abraham is our father" and then adds the following to show that this claim, imputed by John, carries an exclusive genealogical connection: "we have kept the commandments of God, and none can inherit the promises but the children of Abraham" (JST 3:13). This last statement also smacks of exclusiveness. In addition, it anticipates the later question "are there few that be saved?" and pushes the issue forward whether only Israelites will be saved (13:23; see the Note thereon). What is more, John's words bring forward the notion of family, Abraham's family, underlining it in bold colors. In fact, this verse and the next raise the family prominently to view with John's insistence that God can "raise up children unto Abraham" and that "the root of the trees," that is ancestors, and the "good fruit," that is descendants, are at risk of being permanently parted (3:8–9). In modern parlance, "the seed of Abraham" are faithful believers (see D&C 84:34; 103:17; 132:29–37).

Abraham: Reference to the common ancestor of Jews (see Isa. 51:1–2) may go beyond the obvious genealogical connection and embrace the idea that Abraham's righteousness is so meritorious that it overflows onto later

46. BAGD, 113; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §337.

47. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §2128.

48. Marshall, *Luke*, 140.

generations, conferring merit or righteousness on them in God’s sight, as a few sayings from rabbis of the early second century suggest (see the Note on 16:24). This notion that the action of one benefits others lies at the base of the Savior’s Atonement (see the Analysis below).⁴⁹ Another aspect rises to view. Abraham is not only the common ancestor to the Israelite people but is the recipient of God’s enduring covenant and of his rescuing power when he “plagued Pharaoh and his house,” thus allowing Abraham and his family to depart from Egypt (Gen. 12:17). One senses such a set of connections lying behind John’s reference to Abraham.

I say unto you: Such words, which pointedly underscore John’s authority as a preacher of God, often come on Jesus’ lips (see 4:24; 5:24; 7:9, 14, 26, 28, 47; etc.; the Note on 6:27).

God is able of these stones to raise up children: The Baptist’s statement points in two directions. First, it reminds us about God’s creation of Adam from natural elements, from “the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7; Moses 3:7). Second, the phrase “from these stones” (Greek *ek tōn lithōn*) anticipates the later temptation of Jesus wherein the devil challenges him to “command this stone that it be made bread,” the word “stone” there being the same noun (Greek *lithos*), but in the singular (see the Note on 4:3).

stones: The metaphorical meanings attached to rocks and stones are weighty and colorful, including both the notion that Abraham is a rock from which his descendants are hewn or born (see Isa. 51:1–2), and the idea that Christ is a “stone” which becomes “the head of the corner” or the key-stone (see 20:17–18; Acts 4:11).⁵⁰ The living element attributed to “stones” also appears where Jesus declares that, if people will not recognize him as their king, “the stones [will] immediately cry out,” implying that nature knows her king (see the Note on 19:40).

3:9 axe is laid: The axe is placed at the base of the tree. So far, no action occurs, but the promise or threat of such action looms. This tone appears in other passages that appeal to this image. For instance, the Lord repeats this warning against possible wickedness among the early Saints who move to Missouri, pointedly claiming these words as his own (see D&C 97:7).⁵¹ Alma the Younger recites this dire language as a warning to his own people

49. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 268–73.

50. *TDNT*, 4:268–80.

51. Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000–2005), 3:220–21.

(see Alma 5:52, 56). Significantly, Alma makes two points that are relevant here. First, he issues the warning in connection with the imminent coming of “the Son of God . . . in his glory, in his might” (Alma 5:50), thereby forging the same link as the Baptist between judgment and the arrival of the Savior (see Luke 3:16–17). Second, Alma says that his words about the axe (or ax) come from “the Spirit” (Alma 5:52). What is not clear is whether Alma learns this expression from the Spirit or whether, already knowing it, he is impressed by the Spirit to repeat it in this context. For the concept appears independently in Alma and Luke, raising the question whether the two instances arise independently though connected by inspiration or whether they go back to a common source. The most likely of common sources, if there is indeed a common source for both passages, lies in Isaiah’s words about the Lord cutting off the branches of the mighty Assyrian empire: “the Lord of hosts, shall lop the bough [of Assyria] with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron” (Isa. 10:33–34).⁵²

the root of the trees: The allusion appears to point back to Malachi’s prophecy about “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” that will leave “all that do wickedly . . . neither root nor branch,” severing such people from ancestors and descendants, thus leaving them without enduring family ties. Further, the Baptist’s mention of “fire” recalls Malachi’s words, “the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven” (Mal. 4:1, 5), heightening the possibility that Malachi’s words lie in the background.

trees . . . good fruit: The language here alludes to the creation scene wherein God declares all the trees to be “good” (Gen. 1:12; Moses 2:12). As we have seen, the fruits noted in John’s words point to proper behavior following repentance (see the Note on 3:8; also D&C 52:17–18). The fruit may also point to a righteous posterity, as the contextual concern with children of Abraham demonstrates (see 3:8).

fire: The image of fire, along with that of cutting, is one of severe, divine judgment (see Ps. 18:8; Amos 1:4, 7, 10, 14; 2:2, 5; Mal. 3:2; Jacob 6:7; Alma 5:56; Hel. 14:18; Morm. 8:21). Importantly, the references to fire as judgment in Amos chapters 1 and 2 are also linked to the destruction of the Amorites, which the prophet describes as the loss of “fruit” and “roots” (Amos 2:9).

52. Marshall, *Luke*, 141; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1.469.

3:10 Beginning with this verse and running through verse 14, Luke brings forward a summary of the Baptist’s teachings that respond to his hearers’ concerns and are found nowhere else. It seems obvious that he is either drawing on a written source or relying on someone’s vivid memory.

What shall we do: Perhaps not surprisingly, the question is identical to that posed to Peter and his fellow Apostles after the Pentecost crowd hears Peter’s stirring testimony of the Savior (see Acts 2:37). It recurs in the mouths of those who come to hear the Baptist preach (see 3:12, 14).

3:11 *He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none:* This principle of sharing goods is echoed in Jesus’ teachings, though in a different form (see 6:30–35; 18:18–24; Matt. 5:40–42; also D&C 70:14; 84:105, 112), and is carried on in the earliest church (see Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–35). John’s declaration may be directed against the Essenes, who hold an entirely different view. In fact, they share only within their numbers.⁵³

3:12 *publicans:* These people are private tax collectors who contract with the Roman or Herodian governments to collect taxes, which include tariffs and tolls as well as land and poll taxes. At the imperial level, corporations of Roman businessmen bid for the contracts. At lower levels, local collaborators collect the taxes for the Roman corporations or for Herodian vassal administrations. At every level, the desire to make a profit encourages collecting more than is actually due to the government. Because of the way that John answers the question in 3:13, it appears that these publicans are lower-level functionaries who work at commercial centers where merchants pay tolls on their goods, as in Capernaum and Jericho. It is at the tax office just east of Capernaum that Jesus calls one of his Twelve Apostles, Levi, who is probably an employee of Herod Antipas’s administration (see the Notes on 5:27, 29–30; 19:2; also Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:14).⁵⁴

Master: This title, a term of respect for a person who can expound the will of God (Greek *didaskalos*),⁵⁵ contrasts mildly with calling the Baptist “Rabbi” in John 3:26. The word “master” repeats the term applied to those who surround the youthful Jesus in the temple (see 2:46) and is a regular form of address to Jesus by those outside the circle of his disciples (see 7:40; 8:49; 9:38; 10:25; etc.; and see the Note on 12:13).⁵⁶

53. David Flusser, “Jesus’ Opinion about the Essenes,” *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), 162–68.

54. John R. Donahue, “Tax Collector,” in *ABD*, 6:337–38.

55. BAGD, 190–91.

56. *TDNT*, 2:152–57.

3:13 *that which is appointed you:* The substantive Greek participle *diatetagenon* stems from the Greek verb *diatassomai*, which carries the sense of what is ordered or commanded and appears frequently in Luke’s writings (see 8:55; 17:9, 10; Acts 7:44; 18:2; 20:13; 23:31; 24:23).⁵⁷ Tax collectors, of course, are known for trying to collect more than is required and, in Jewish eyes, are ritually unclean.⁵⁸ Even so, neither John nor Jesus condemns the profession as somehow beneath the dignity of his followers. This expression “that which is appointed you” elicits a significant addition of two verses to the Joseph Smith Translation of Luke that are addressed to Theophilus (see 1:3; Acts 1:1):

For it is well known unto you, Theophilus, that after the manner of the Jews, and according to the custom of their law in receiving money into the treasury, that out of the abundance which was received, was appointed unto the poor, every man his portion; And after this manner did the publicans also, wherefore John said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. (JST 3:19–20)

Three points are important. First, Joseph Smith inserts an address to Theophilus, the sponsor of Luke’s writing, at this point in the narrative (see 1:3; Acts 1:1), plainly indicating that, in this instance, the Prophet is expanding text rather than elucidating meaning. Second, Joseph Smith brings up the custom of contributing money to the temple treasury for the poor, specifically to “the Chamber of Secrets” that is to support “the poor of good family” (see 21:1).⁵⁹ Third, he connects the situation of the poor to publicans, not in the expected sense that tax collectors take advantage of the poor but, apparently, that they should not take advantage of those with means by manufacturing the excuse that they intend to help the poor.

3:14 *the soldiers:* Presumably, these soldiers are Samaritans or, more probably, auxiliaries raised from the Greek cities of Sebaste in Samaria and Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast. From the time of Julius Caesar, Jewish men have been regularly exempted from recruitment into Roman military service.⁶⁰ Their main duties may be to assist tax collectors or simply to function as a police force.⁶¹

57. BAGD, 188; Plummer, *Luke*, 92; *TDNT*, 8:34–35.

58. *TDNT*, 8:99–103; Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 304, 310–12.

59. *Mishnah Shekalim* 5:6; Johnson, *Luke*, 315.

60. Josephus, *A.J.* 14.10.6 (§204); 17:8.3 (§198); Schürer, *History*, 1:362–65.

61. Plummer, *Luke*, 92; Marshall, *Luke*, 143–44.

demanded: The usual sense of the Greek verb is generally softer, “asked” (*eperōtaō*), though the KJV translators may be trying to convey the meaning that soldiers, because of their authority within society, are accustomed to demanding.⁶² The imperfect tense of the verb may point to continuous action, “kept asking,” as if the soldiers are trying to intimidate John rather than being sincere. Conversely, the imperfect could be inchoative or incipient in its sense, meaning “the soldiers began to ask.”⁶³

Do violence: At base, the Greek verb *diaseiō* means “to shake violently”; by extension, it bears the sense “to intimidate,” an action prohibited since the days of Julius Caesar.⁶⁴

accuse any falsely: Though the Greek term here, *sykophanteō*, underlies the English word *sycophant*, “flatterer,” it never carries this meaning in antiquity, but rather refers to blackmail or false accusation. The Greek verb also links to the noun for “fig” and has to do with the action of shaking the fruit from a fig tree, thus exposing the produce hidden under the leaves of the tree. By extension, it means to make people yield up their fruit, or wealth, by shaking them or by false accusations.⁶⁵

your wages: All agree that soldiers receive little in remuneration for their sometimes dangerous work. The term here translated “wages” originally bears the sense of one’s “allowance” or “rations” for services, such as foods (Greek *opsōnion*). It eventually comes to refer to payment for services rendered.⁶⁶

3:15 *the people were in expectation:* As becomes clear, people are expecting “the Christ,” though their expectations are not the same from person to person or group to group. Known anticipations range from a conquering Messiah of David’s descendants to one of priestly demeanor of Aaron’s family, to two Messiahs, and even to none.⁶⁷ Of course, none of these expectations match who Jesus is and what he will become.

all men mused: The wide impact of John’s ministry rolls out of these words, indicating that, though he ministers only in the neighborhood of the Jordan River (see 3:3), strong rumor of his activities reaches people throughout the country. According to the fourth Gospel, lively and persistent rumors

62. BAGD, 284–85.

63. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §1900.

64. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 411; Josephus, *A.J.* 14.10.6 (§204); Plummer, *Luke*, 92–93.

65. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1670–71; Plummer, *Luke*, 93; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:470–71.

66. *TDNT*, 5:591–92; BAGD, 606–7; Plummer, *Luke*, 93.

67. Brown and Holzapfel, *Lost 500 Years*, 145–51.

about John motivate officials to inquire about his true identity and activities (see John 1:19–25).

whether he were the Christ: The speculative character of all the talk concerning the Baptist emerges in this expression, pointing to this question arising among people who have neither heard him preach nor know him (see the Note on 24:26).

3:16 *John answered:* Here John’s response about himself points first to his ministering acts and then to the one who “cometh,” the same order as in John 1:26–27. According to John’s Gospel, the Baptist answers the queries of authorities by saying that he is not the Christ nor Elijah nor “that prophet” (John 1:20–21).

I indeed baptize you with water: Here Luke turns to words of John that he shares with Matthew and Mark, though Matthew adds “unto repentance,” a phrase missing in the records of Mark and Luke (see Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8). Perhaps Luke means to place emphasis on the difference between the water baptism that the Baptist offers and the Messiah’s baptism “with the Holy Ghost and with fire” that not only comes to one who repents but also purges the person’s sins (see 2 Ne. 31:13–14; 3 Ne. 9:20; 12:2). The phrase “with water” or “in water” represents a dative of instrument.⁶⁸

one mightier: As do Mark and Matthew, Luke acknowledges that John introduces Jesus to his hearers, though Jesus himself does not appear in the story until 3:21. The expression does not seem to preserve a Christian answer to persons who venerate the Baptist as the Messiah.⁶⁹

cometh: The verb (Greek *erchomai*), though common, seems to allude to that of LXX Malachi 3:1 (“behold, he comes”), which points to the “coming one” who brings both judgment and purifying powers (see 13:35; Acts 13:25; Ps. 118:26; Zech. 9:9; Mal. 3:2–3; Mosiah 3:9; D&C 133:2, 10, 17, 19, 66; JST Matt. 3:38–40; the Notes on 19:38; 20:16; 21:8, 27; the Analysis on 3:7–20; 19:28–40; 22:39–46).⁷⁰ Because the verb appears strategically here, at the beginning of Luke’s narrative, and near its end (see 19:38; 20:16), it forms a possible *inclusio* that unifies the Gospel account (see the Note on 24:32).⁷¹

the latchet: The Greek word (*himas*) means “thong” or “strap.” The act of unbinding such a strap is left to slaves.⁷² The word draws subtle attention

68. Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §195.

69. Marshall, *Luke*, 145.

70. BAGD, 310–11; *TDNT*, 2:666–69.

71. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

72. BAGD, 376; Marshall, *Luke*, 146; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:473.

to the connection of Jesus' sandals and the highway to be built for the coming king (see 3:4–5).

baptize you with the Holy Ghost: In another allusion to the creation, that of the spirit of God moving “upon the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2), John ties the actions of Jesus to those of Jehovah in the beginning (see the Notes on 3:7, 8, 9). In his words to Nicodemus, Jesus speaks of being “born of . . . the Spirit,” an event equivalent to being baptized “with the Holy Ghost” (John 3:5).

with fire: The allusion is both to judgment or punishment (see the Note on 3:9) and to purifying, aspects that stand together in Malachi's prophecy about the one who comes “to his temple” (see Mal. 3:1–3). These two functions are also joined in modern scripture (see 1 Ne. 22:17; 2 Ne. 30:10). Moreover, fire is the agent that purges sins: “then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Ne. 31:17; see also 2 Ne. 31:13). Further, the clear tie between fire and offering sacrifices on a burning altar is not to be missed. Finally, the fire stands as an agent of testimony, along with the Holy Ghost. In this sense, the promise of fire is fulfilled in the burning hearts of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, thus forming an *inclusio* that arcs across Luke's narrative and brings a unity to all (see the Note on 24:32).⁷³

3:17 *he will thoroughly purge his floor:* Threshing floors in ancient Israel consist of walled areas where the soil is cleared off to expose the smooth limestone crust of the earth. The expression means to “clean thoroughly” and carries the senses (1) that the Messiah will clean the soil from the floor where the grains of wheat will fall to the earth after being threshed and separated from the chaff, and (2) that, because the threshing floor is completely clean, he will be able to retrieve every grain.

the wheat . . . the chaff: A subtle affirmation stands within these terms that the good and the bad grow up together, often inseparable until the judgment (see Matt. 13:24–43).

the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable: John returns to the image of fire as judgment (see the Notes on 3:9 and 3:16).

3:18 *many other things:* Luke indicates plainly that he offers only a sample of John's preaching efforts and is aware of his words on other occasions, an example of which, spoken to Herod Antipas, follows immediately (see Mark 6:18).

73. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

3:19 being reprov'd by him for Herodias: Herod Antipas, whom Luke introduces in verse 3:1, interferes in the marriage of his half brother and then marries his wife (Mark 6:17).⁷⁴ Against this act, the Baptist says: “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife” (Mark 6:18). Such criticism gives Herod grounds for imprisoning John. Josephus, writing decades later, offers an additional motive: Herod’s fear of John’s popularity led to the imprisonment.⁷⁵

Herodias: We know a fair amount about this woman. She is born to Aristobulus, a son of Herod the Great, and to Berenice, Herod’s niece. While a child, she is betrothed to Herod’s son, also named Herod. Her only known child is a daughter named Salome. Herodias accepts a proposal of marriage from Herod Antipas, a cousin, while still married. She seems to be ambitious and pushes her second husband, Antipas, still a tetrarch, whom she marries when she is almost forty years of age, into seeking royal privileges from the new emperor Gaius (AD 37–41). When the request fails because of alleged treachery, she goes into exile in Gaul, or France, with Antipas. Her jealous and ambitious character is consistent with Mark’s description of her plot to have the Baptist executed (see Mark 6:19–28).⁷⁶

his brother Philip: The name Philip is missing from some of the earliest manuscripts of this passage, and may have been borrowed by a later copyist from Mark 6:17, and could therefore form an incorrect addition here. The passage should likely read simply “his brother.” This person, simply named Herod by Josephus, cannot be the same individual noted in 3:1, that is, “Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis.” Both Herod, as Josephus names him, and Philip are sons of Herod the Great. Herod the son (Herodias’ first husband and father of Salome) lives as a private citizen in Jerusalem without playing a major role in government, a situation that does not fit with the ambitions of his wife Herodias. Hence, she opens herself to Herod Antipas’s amorous advances. Philip the tetrarch becomes the son-in-law of Herodias when he marries her daughter Salome, his niece, but dies childless (see the Note on 3:1).⁷⁷

74. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.5.4 (§136).

75. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.5.2 (§118).

76. Josephus, *A.J.* 17.1.2 (§14); 18.5.1 (§110), 4 (§136); 18.7.1–2 (§§240–55); Josephus, *B.J.* 2.9.6 (§§181–83); Schürer, *History*, 1:344, 351–52; Ben Witherington III, “Herodias,” in *ABD*, 3:174–76.

77. Josephus, *A.J.* 17.1.2 (§14); 18.5.4 (§137); Josephus, *B.J.* 1.30.7 (§600); Schürer, *History*, 1:344, n. 19; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:477; Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, 131–36; Witherington, “Herodias,” 3:174–76; Paul L. Redditt, “Philip,” in *ABD*, 5:310–11.

3:20 *he shut up John in prison:* From Josephus, we learn that John “was brought in chains to Machaerus,” a small fortress built by Herod the Great that perches atop a hill overlooking the east shore of the Dead Sea. There, far from Jerusalem but rather near the place of John’s activities so that his followers can visit him, the Baptist “was put to death.”⁷⁸

Analysis

The appearance and then disappearance of John from Luke’s narrative marks an important moment in the march of events toward the Savior’s ministry. Beginning with Hans Conzelmann, some commentators see this moment in Luke’s presentation as bringing the era of the old prophets to an end and introducing the new age of the Messiah, marking a distinct break between the epochs of John and Jesus.⁷⁹ But the matter is more complex because both Jesus and his closest followers regularly draw connections back to the ministry of the Baptist, tying the two men together. And, despite arguments to the contrary, Luke highlights these connections. For example, when disciples of John come to Jesus with questions and then leave, Jesus turns to his audience and declares that the Baptist “is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee,” plainly weaving John’s activities into his own and linking the two ministries to the same prophecy (7:27, quoting Mal. 3:1; see also Acts 1:5). Peter, when recounting his interaction with the gentile Cornelius and the spontaneous coming of the Holy Ghost into that man’s home, cites the linkage between the baptisms of John and Jesus as the key element that brings him to baptize Cornelius (see Acts 11:15–17; also Paul’s words in Acts 13:24–25).

In this same vein, all New Testament sources consistently fold John and Jesus together. In the case before us, Luke does so by linking their births through angelic announcements and by pointing to a biological relation through their mothers. But this is not all. Luke, Matthew, and John preserve an ancient memory that connects the two men through the Baptist’s preaching. According to 3:16, the Baptist first declares, “I indeed baptize you with water.” Second, he mentions that “one mightier than I cometh.” Third, in a humble affirmation of his utter unworthiness, he intones that “the latchet of [his] shoes I am not worthy to unloose.” Not surprisingly, this

78. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.5.2 [§119]; see Luke 7:18–24; 9:7–9

79. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York: Harper, 1960), 20; *TDNT*, 6:836, 841.

same order of three—baptism, one who comes, and unworthiness to untie sandals—appears in Matthew’s Gospel, which of course shares basic features with Luke’s (see Matt. 3:11). But more compelling are the following words of the Baptist as quoted in John’s account, which shares little with Luke and Matthew: “I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you . . . who [is] coming after me . . . whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose” (John 1:26–27). Notably, the three elements stand in the same order as in Luke and Matthew. Such a connection plainly hints at a strong memory among Jesus’ disciples—it is they who preserve the memory,⁸⁰ not John’s disciples—that the Baptist’s preaching sets the activities of the two men side by side, intertwining them. That this memory persists long and strong beyond Jesus’ ministry is witnessed by Paul’s preaching recorded in the book of Acts, also written by Luke. After noting that John actively baptizes “before [Jesus’] coming,” he quotes the Baptist’s words: “there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose” (Acts 13:24–25). Here, embedded in the memory of second-generation followers, in this case Paul, we find the same order of the three elements from John’s preaching—baptism, one who comes, and unworthiness to untie sandals.

Turning back briefly to Luke’s Gospel, prominent passages exist wherein Jesus, on his part, openly links himself to John (see 7:24–28; 20:1–8). Even in popular lore, people draw connections between the two, as in Herod Antipas’s musings about John and Jesus because “it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead,” leading Herod to observe that “John have I beheaded: but who is this [Jesus], of whom I hear such things?” (9:7, 9). Incidentally, from Herod’s remark, it is plain that he is confident that John cannot return from the dead.⁸¹ In a word, he does not believe in the resurrection.

Other statements in Luke’s book of Acts make the same connection. According to Acts 1:5, the Risen Savior promises the eleven Apostles that they will “be baptized with the Holy Ghost” in a manner much as John “baptized with water.” Later, Peter recalls these very words when defending his action of baptizing the gentile Cornelius (see Acts 11:16). Moreover, when choosing a successor to Judas Iscariot, Peter, the spokesman of the eleven, asks that the new Apostle be one who has followed Jesus

80. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 93–132, 146–49, 313–14.

81. Cecilia M. Peek, “The Death of John the Baptist,” in Holzapfel and Wayment, *Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ: From the Transfiguration through the Triumphal Entry*, 230–35.

“beginning from the baptism of John,” illustrating that John’s ministry is a clear marker for that of Jesus (Acts 1:22). In the home of Cornelius, this same Peter speaks about Jesus’ ministry opening “after the baptism which John preached,” spotlighting the preparatory bridge connecting the ministries of the Baptist and the Savior (see Acts 10:37).

One other piece of this portrait needs color. Luke begins to paint Jesus in chapter 4 by touching his brush to no fewer than four hues that have already brightened his picture of the Baptist. First, he writes of “Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost,” a plain mirroring of John’s words that the coming one “shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost” (4:1; 3:16). The one who baptizes with the Holy Ghost also carries it. Second, Luke begins to weave his post-baptism story of Jesus by pointing out that he “returned from Jordan,” thus picking up the thread from his introduction of the Baptist: “he came into all the country about Jordan” (3:3). John comes to Jordan to undertake his ministry, Jesus retreats from Jordan, pointedly the place of John’s ministry, after receiving baptism. But rather than separating their ministries, the sequence underscores that John’s activities form the launch pad for Jesus’. Third, Jesus not only withdraws from Jordan but “was led . . . into the wilderness” where God’s word first comes to John as prophesied by Isaiah (3:2, 4). As we have already seen, the wilderness is a place of revelation (see the Note on 3:2; also see 4:42; 5:16; 9:12; Acts 7:30, 38, 44).

The fourth coloration may be the most bright and enticing. Luke writes that John “came into all the country about Jordan,” repeating the past tense of the Greek verb *erchomai*, “came” (3:3). Then he quotes the Baptist speaking about “one mightier than I [who] cometh,” again repeating the verb *erchomai*, “come” (3:16). The “coming one,” as he is called, arrives as the long-awaited messenger of God, as the expected king of old prophecy, as the bearer of both God’s blessings and judgment (see Ps. 118:26; Zech. 9:9; Mal. 3:1; the Note on 19:38).⁸² Hence, John comes and Jesus comes, both bringing divine powers; thus, the chords between the Baptist and the Savior, in Luke’s hands, are thick and richly painted.

We cannot step away from these ties between the two without noting the link drawn in modern scripture. From a revelation received by Joseph Smith in early May 1833, we learn that during John’s mortal ministry he produces a record, now lost, that describes Jesus in words akin to the prologue in the fourth Gospel (see D&C 93:6–17; John 1:1–18). In sweeping language, John discloses the content of a vision wherein he “beheld [Jesus’] glory, as

82. *TDNT*, 2:666–69.

the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, . . . which came and dwelt in the flesh.” Moreover, the Baptist “saw that [Jesus] received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace.” Further, looking to the future, John bears record that Jesus eventually “received all power, both in heaven and on earth” (D&C 93:11–12, 17).

In a different vein, when the Baptist draws the name of Abraham into his preaching at 3:8, he presents a kaleidoscope of vivid and enduring elements that touch his people’s lives and expectations. They point both to the past and to the present. Concerning the past, John and his fellow Jews see Abraham as both an ancestor and as the one person who establishes the nature of their relationship with God. That relationship is wrapped in a covenant that promises land and seed (see Gen. 12:1–2; 22:17–18; Abr. 2:6, 9; repeated to Isaac and Jacob in Gen. 26:3–4; 28:13–14). In extra-biblical scripture, the covenant between Abraham and the Lord also assures the rights of priesthood to Abraham’s descendants which allow authorized individuals to perform acts that bind themselves, and those for whom they officiate, to God in sacred, everlasting ways. For instance, through Abraham and his children, the covenant offers “the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation” to “all the families of the earth” (Abr. 2:11). Further, John’s appeal to Abraham is an appeal to family ties that the Jewish part of his audience share one with another. This emphasis on family continues the stress on the home and family that the story of Zacharias and Elisabeth firmly underscores. All of these ancient dimensions tie to the name Abraham.

Turning to the theological landscape of John’s day, the concept of Abraham’s merit is evidently growing into a forceful and comforting reality. According to this view, Abraham and others, through their obedience to God, come to possess merits in excess of what they need for a proper standing before the Divine. As a result, these extra merits become available and, in certain instances, effective in the lives of those who come after them by helping to make them acceptable in God’s eyes. Strikingly, as W. D. Davies points out, one recognizes elements of Paul’s doctrine about Jesus’ Atonement in such a concept. Particularly, “as by the offence of one [Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [Jesus] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom. 5:18–19). We cannot deny that this sort of concept has taken root in the larger Jewish society in the era of John and Jesus. Ancient sources such as *2 Baruch* (24.1; 44.14),

the *Testament of Levi* (13.5), and the *Testament of Naphtali* (8.5) verify this concept's growing presence. Hence, it is very possible that this stream of theological reflection comes to influence Paul, as Davies holds.⁸³ But we must also understand that the concept of the Atonement is older than the human race and that, at its base, it rests on the willing “sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” who offers redemption for “all mankind, even as many as will,” and who is appointed for this purpose “from the foundation of the world” (Moses 5:7, 9; 7:47). The concept of the merit of Abraham, while exhibiting similarities to the doctrine of the Atonement, does not displace it nor does it offer an explanation of its origin.

We should not step away from John without reviewing the sketch by Josephus (b. AD 37/38), the only roughly contemporary author who writes about him. In his most comprehensive work about his people and their history, Josephus briefly takes up John as a subject, calling him “the Baptist.”⁸⁴ Josephus' treatment of John carries the feel of authenticity because it does not exhibit any overtly Christian interests that might go back to a Christian interpolator. Rather, Josephus introduces John by saying that “some of the Jews” see Herod's execution of John as the reason for “divine vengeance” in a severe defeat of his army, thus elevating John to a high status before God. He describes John's teachings thus: “he . . . exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice towards their fellows and piety towards God, and so doing to join in baptism.” We notice immediately the lack of John's stern warning about the end of time that the Gospel writers record. We also miss the Baptist's central message about the Messiah, though Josephus notes that Herod Antipas comes to fear John as a possible insurrectionist, which draws up messianic connections, for “the crowds about him . . . were aroused to the highest degree by his sermons.” Moreover, Josephus mistakenly holds that John's well-known baptism is not “to gain pardon for whatever sins [people] committed, but as a consecration of the body.” Such views lead us to conclude that Josephus does not possess fully accurate information about the Baptist.⁸⁵

83. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 268–73.

84. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.5.2 (§§116–19).

85. C. K. Barrett, *New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 197–98.

JESUS' BAPTISM (3:21–22)

(Compare Matt. 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; John 1:29–34)

King James Translation

21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, 22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

New Rendition

21 And it came to pass that while all the people were being baptized, and after Jesus had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Ghost descended bodily on him in the form of a dove, and a voice came from heaven, “You are my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Notes

3:21 *all the people were baptized*: This expression appears in a subordinate clause, moving the emphasis onto the main clause, “the heaven was opened” (see the Note below). Of course, by adding this detail, Luke connects the baptisms of John’s hearers to the baptism of Jesus, pointing to a common tie to believers and the Savior through an ordinance. In effect, Jesus does not stand to the side of the rest of humankind but, by his choice, remains subject to the same kinds of salvation requirements that touch the rest of us. Moreover, in receiving baptism, Jesus “publicly identified himself with the sinners he came to save”⁸⁶ (see the Note on 7:29).

***Jesus also being baptized*:** Commentators have puzzled about Jesus submitting himself to baptism because Luke portrays Jesus as sinless, and John’s baptism is “of repentance for the remission of sins” (3:3). The ancient prophet Nephi answers the question by declaring that “notwithstanding he [Jesus] being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him . . . he having set the example” (2 Ne. 31:7, 9). Interestingly, the text records Jesus’ baptism in the passive and does not mention John directly. This may be part of Luke’s effort to shift attention from the Baptist and focus it more squarely on Jesus. The Joseph Smith Translation, however, makes visible the tie between Jesus and John that Luke’s text does not by adding six words: “Jesus also *came unto John: and being baptized of him*” (JST 3:28; emphasis added).

86. Morris, *Luke*, 109.

Jesus . . . praying: Luke alone preserves the detail that Jesus prays at his baptism, an illustration of the link between personal worship and ordinances.

the heaven was opened: This is the main clause of this verse and hence the emphasis rests on the renewing of revelation, which both comes about because of Jesus' prayer and comes specifically to him as he steps onto the stage and John steps off. Behind this statement lies the concept of gates or doors that lead into and out of heaven. For this sense, see a form of this verb, *anoigō*, at LXX Isa. 64:1; Matt. 3:16; John 1:51; Acts 7:56; 10:11; Rev. 3:7; 4:1; 19:11.⁸⁷ At Mark 1:10, a different and much stronger Greek word appears for heaven's opening, *schizomai*, "to rend," which carries a much more apocalyptic tone.⁸⁸ One sense has to do with the heavens thereafter being open above Jesus (see John 1:51).⁸⁹ Both Luke and Matthew alter this word in their accounts, almost matching one another, possibly pointing to a version of the story that is common to the two of them, though other details differ between them.

3:22 the Holy Ghost descended: All the Gospels record that the Holy Ghost descends onto Jesus, plainly implying that the Holy Ghost bears characteristics that fit within our terrestrial time and place (see Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; John 1:32). This view is consistent with the statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit," understanding spirit as "matter, but it is more fine or pure" (D&C 130:22; 131:7). The arrival of the Spirit signals the fulfillment of one aspect of Isaiah's prophecy about the Suffering Servant: "I have put my spirit upon him" (Isa. 42:1), making it possible to see this event as the anointing of Jesus with the Spirit (see the Analysis below). In the wider context of Luke's writings, including the book of Acts, the baptism of the Holy Ghost accords with Luke's important emphasis on the Spirit. In fact, the Spirit's descent upon the Apostles at Pentecost as "cloven tongues like as of fire" is, in a literal sense, a parallel to the Holy Ghost coming upon Jesus at his baptism (Acts 2:3; 10:44). In addition, with the public moving of God's Spirit onto Jesus, he receives both the authorizing agent and the guiding influence for his ministry (see the Notes on 4:1, 14). The fourth Gospel notes that the Spirit remained or "abode upon him" (John 3:32; also D&C 93:15), leading to the early Christian notion that the

87. BAGD, 70; TDNT, 5:529–30; 7:962.

88. BAGD, 805; TDNT, 7:960–62.

89. TDNT, 5:530.

Spirit comes to rest during Jesus' ministry.⁹⁰ Although the descent of the Holy Ghost is widely understood as the empowering moment for Jesus,⁹¹ other evidence points to the Father as the one who commissions the Son, most likely on another occasion (see the Note on 4:18).

in bodily shape like a dove: Only Luke notes the “bodily shape,” imputing physical characteristics to the Holy Ghost, though he does not appear as a bird. Evidently, only Jesus and John can see the Holy Ghost (see John 1:32–34).⁹² The Prophet Joseph Smith teaches that “the *sign* of the dove” was “instituted before the creation of the world” and that “the devil cannot come in the sign of a dove.”⁹³ No known ancient source compares God's Spirit to a dove except two, both from the same author, Nephi. In each, the scene prophetically envisions this moment of Jesus' baptism (see 1 Ne. 11:27; 2 Ne. 31:8).

Thou art: The expression points in two possible directions. (1) The Father is addressing the Son directly and thus the words are intended for him alone, not bystanders. This form of the Father's words agrees with that in Mark 1:11, whereas that in Matthew seems intended for all present (“This is my beloved son”—Matt. 3:17; also D&C 93:15, which comes from “John's record”—D&C 93:6). The idea that the meeting here between John and Jesus would effectively announce the Savior lies in the Baptist's words, “that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water” (John 1:31). (2) The clause “thou art” is a theological counterpoint to the first person singular “I am” and connects distantly to Jesus' role as the God of the Old Testament (see 4:34, 41; Ex. 3:14; Hel. 10:6; 3 Ne. 11:10; the Notes on 9:35 and 22:70).

beloved son: This title always comes on the lips of the Father when he introduces his son on special occasions. We compare the accounts of the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7), the announcement of the Risen Savior in the New World (3 Ne. 11:7), and the introduction of the Son of God to the Prophet Joseph Smith (JS–H 1:17). In Luke's story of events on the Mount of Transfiguration, he quotes the Father as introducing his “chosen son” (see the Note on 9:35). When the term “beloved” is applied

90. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 87; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.17.1; the *Gospel of the Hebrews* quoted in Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 4; *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* 3.20.2.

91. Plummer, *Luke*, 121; *TDNT*, 6:400–401; 8:367–68; Marshall, *Luke*, 154; Green, *Luke*, 186–87.

92. *TPJS*, 275–76.

93. *TPJS*, 276.

to a son or daughter, it means “only.”⁹⁴ Interestingly, manuscripts from the Western textual family include the interesting addition, “This day have I begotten thee,” likely an addition resting on Psalm 2:7. A few manuscripts also harmonize Luke’s account with Matthew 3:17, changing the words to the third person, “This is my beloved son.”⁹⁵

Analysis

In these verses, the focus moves entirely onto the Savior, shifting decisively away from the Baptist. In fact, in the preserved texts, Luke does not even mention that John performs Jesus’ baptism, though he implies it. Joseph Smith sees the difficulty and, as we have noted, makes an adjustment (see the Note on 3:21). Instead, Luke’s chronology leads him first to highlight John’s imprisonment and then to bring forward Jesus’ baptism, thus making it difficult to speak of John baptizing Jesus after being imprisoned.

But baptism is not the chief focus here. Rather, Luke subtly removes the emphasis from baptism to two other important facts: revelation and the Son of the Father. He achieves the first by the way he writes verse 21, placing his notices of John’s baptisms in subordinate clauses and underscoring the opening of heaven in the main clause. Because “the word of God” comes to John “in the wilderness,” we know that John carries the gift of revelation (3:2). Now that the Baptist is in prison, the gift unfolds to Jesus through the opening of heaven to him. The second emphasis is given vitality in the heavenly voice that sounds over Jesus as son of the Father in 3:22. This voice mirrors and extends the “voice of one crying in the wilderness,” a prophetic expression that points to John, as we have seen (3:4). In this context, therefore, the voice forms another connector between John and Jesus (but see 9:35–36 where the voice bears no link to the Baptist but only to Jesus).

Luke casts light on another important tie, the one between “all the people” and Jesus (3:21). Just as “the multitude . . . came forth to be baptized” (3:7), so Jesus comes to receive baptism at John’s hands. In Luke’s retelling, Jesus and the crowd stand on the same continuum. Like the crowd, he has to come to where John is ministering. As they, he needs to submit himself to baptism. As in their case, this baptism will come to him only through John. This continuum gains more prominence through the ensuing genealogy

94. Marshall, *Luke*, 156.

95. Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 112–13; Marshall, *Luke*, 154–55.

wherein Jesus is said to be a descendant of Adam (see 3:38). Luke seeks to make plain that Jesus stands fully within the human family, operates in their space of activity, and is not a person of myth or legend.

A number of commentators have wondered whether the descent of the Holy Ghost onto Jesus constitutes a messianic anointing.⁹⁶ Two passages recorded by Luke move into the picture. The first consists of words that Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61:1 when addressing members of the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted” (4:18). These words brim with a sense of divine commissioning already accomplished. The verbs *to anoint* and *to send* bear this meaning in other scriptural contexts.⁹⁷ The second passage occurs in Peter’s remarks in the home of the gentile Cornelius when he points to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry: “That word . . . began in Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power” (Acts 10:37–38). Peter’s words seem to say that the coming of the Holy Ghost, following Jesus’ baptism at John’s hands, constitutes an anointing of sorts, thereby endowing Jesus with divine power.⁹⁸

Such a commissioning of Jesus at his baptism may indeed have occurred. But Luke adds the further piece—that Jesus receives his commissioning directly from his Father. In quoting Jesus’ response to the successful mission of the seventy disciples, he writes that “Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said . . . All things are delivered to me of my Father” (10:21–22). Of course, one could suggest, what is “delivered” comes via the Holy Ghost. But Jesus’ naming of his “Father” points to a direct empowering by the Father, much as John records in quoting Jesus: “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand,” an act reminiscent of filling the hands of priests during their consecration (John 3:35; see Ex. 28:41; 29:9, 35; Lev. 8:33; Num. 3:3; Judg. 17:5; 1 Kgs. 13:33; Ezek. 43:26). Further, “the Father . . . gave me [Jesus] of his fulness” (D&C 93:4), language that points to the Father’s direct involvement in authorizing his Son. Hence, one may reasonably see steps in the commissioning of the Savior, one of which is the

96. Marshall, *Luke*, 154; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:482; Johnson, *Luke*, 69.

97. For example, [*anoint*] LXX Ex. 28:37; 29:7; Lev. 8:12; 16:32; Judg. 9:15; 1 Sam. 9:16; 15:1; 16:3, 12–13; 1 Kgs. 1:34, 39, 45; 19:15–16; [*send*] LXX Gen. 24:7, 40; 45:5; Ex. 3:10, 12–13, 15; Num. 31:4, 6; 1 Sam. 16:19; etc.

98. Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 226; Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 464–65.

coming of the Holy Ghost promptly after Jesus’ baptism and one of which is a personal consecration by the Father whose timing remains unknown—“I am sent” (4:43; see the Note on 4:18).⁹⁹

GENEALOGY OF JESUS (3:23–38)

(Compare Matt. 1:1–17)

King James Translation

23 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli, 24 Which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph, 25 Which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Amos, which was the son of Naum, which was the son of Esli, which was the son of Nagge, 26 Which was the son of Maath, which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Semei, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Juda, 27 Which was the son of Joanna, which was the son of Rhesa, which was the son of Zorobabel, which was the son of Salathiel, which was the son of Neri, 28 Which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Addi, which was the son of Cosam, which was the son of Elmoadam, which was the son of Er, 29 Which was the son of Jose, which was the son of Eliezer, which was the son of Jorim,

New Rendition

23 And Jesus himself was about thirty years, being the son, as was believed, of Joseph, the son of Eli, 24 the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, 25 the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, 26 the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Judah, 27 the son of Johannan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealthiel, the son of Neri, 28 the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmoadam, the son of Er, 29 the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, 30 the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, 31 the son of Melea, the son of Menan, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, 32 the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz,

99. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 9; Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 2:132–33; Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 246 (“receiving the fulness of the priesthood”); JST Luke 9:25 (“whom God hath ordained”); John 17:2, 7, 18; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Heb. 1:2, 9 (quoting Ps. 45:7); 3:2; 5:10 (compare 7:21; 8:3); 1 Pet. 1:2, 20; Ether 3:14; D&C 93:17; *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* 1.45.5; compare 1 Cor. 2:6–7.

which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, 30 Which was the son of Simeon, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Jonan, which was the son of Eliakim, 31 Which was the son of Melea, which was the son of Menan, which was the son of Mattatha, which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David, 32 Which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson, 33 Which was the son of Aminadab, which was the son of Aram, which was the son of Esrom, which was the son of Phares, which was the son of Juda, 34 Which was the son of Jacob, which was the son of Isaac, which was the son of Abraham, which was the son of Thara, which was the son of Nachor, 35 Which was the son of Saruch, which was the son of Ragau, which was the son of Phalec, which was the son of Heber, which was the son of Sala, 36 Which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Arphaxad, which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe, which was the son of Lamech, 37 Which was the son of Mathusala, which was the son of Enoch, which was the son of Jared, which was the son of Maleleel, which was the son of Cainan, 38 Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.

the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, 33 the son of Aminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Peres, the son of Judah, 34 the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, 35 the son of Seruch, the son of Ragau, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, 36 the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, 37 the son of Methusalah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahaleel, the son of Cainan, 38 the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Notes

3:23 *Jesus himself began*: The sense of beginning marks the start of Jesus' ministry, as the same verb in Acts 1:22 and 10:37 demonstrates (Greek *archomai*).¹⁰⁰

100. BAGD, 113.

about thirty years of age: Luke’s note alone establishes the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. According to Numbers 4:3, when a descendant of Aaron reaches thirty years of age, all things being settled, he is then permitted to officiate at the temple (see also Num. 4:47). A connection to David may also lie in this expression because, according to 2 Samuel 5:4, “David was thirty years old when he began to reign.” In this connection, Judah ben Tema, a rabbinic teacher of the second century AD, taught that “at thirty” a person is fit “for authority.”¹⁰¹ In a different vein, the Joseph Smith Translation adds a brief phrase immediately after “thirty years of age” that radiates some light onto Jesus’ life just prior to his ministry, “having lived with his father,” implying that Joseph lives long enough to see the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry (JST 3:30).

as was supposed: Luke’s purpose in writing this expression grows out of his knowledge that Jesus is not the literal son of Joseph (see 1:35). The Joseph Smith Translation expands this parenthetical statement so that it reads “as was supposed *of the world*” (JST 3:30; emphasis added), plainly pointing to a general perception among the acquaintances of Jesus’ family that he is the biological son of Joseph. This notion hints that, from the time of the initial discovery of Mary’s pregnancy, and the reason for it, her family and Joseph’s family are circumspect and do not talk about the divine circumstances that bring about her pregnancy: “she was found with child of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 1:18).

the son of Joseph: This expression, common in Jesus’ day, of course points to the family of which Jesus is a part (see 4:22). It links back to the central role that the family, under its father—the *bet-’ab* (Hebrew for “house[hold] of the father”)—plays in its members’ religious, social, and economic lives (see 15:17–19). In Jesus’ case, all members of the household, including any servants, stand within the circle of Joseph’s family, because, if he is still alive, he bears responsibility for their religious and economic well-being (see the Note on 4:34).¹⁰² In light of Mark 6:3, where Jesus is called “the son of Mary,” Joseph has evidently—and recently—passed from this life and Mary now holds the family together (see the Note above).

which was the son of Heli: In an unusual adjustment, the Joseph Smith Translation renders this expression “who was from the loins of Heli” (JST 3:30). This change impacts how we view Luke’s genealogy. Various theories have postulated that Jacob, the father of Joseph according to Matthew’s

101. *Mishnah Pirke Aboth* 5:21.

102. Christopher J. H. Wright, “Family,” in *ABD*, 2:762–64.

genealogy (see Matt. 1:16), is Joseph's biological father whereas Heli is his legal father (see the Analysis below). In making his adjustment, Joseph Smith clarifies that Heli, not Jacob, is the biological father of Joseph, which accords better with other theories that hold the Matthean genealogy to represent a legal line of royal succession.¹⁰³

3:24 *Which was the son of Matthat:* In like manner, the Joseph Smith Translation changes this line to "Who was from the loins of Matthat" (JST 3:31). This alteration makes more vivid the son-father connection of Heli to Matthat.

which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph: In contrast to the firming treatment of the names Heli and Matthat above, the Joseph Smith Translation of these lines seems to loosen the sense of relationship by rendering them as: "who was a descendant of Melchi, and of Janna, and of Joseph" (JST 3:31). However, in light of repeating, similar expressions throughout the genealogy list in the Joseph Smith Translation, it appears that the type of adjustment in these lines is chiefly cosmetic and is to be understood as an equivalency to the English expressions of the King James Translation, "which was the son of."

3:27 *which was the son of Neri:* After shortening the expression "which was the son of" to merely the words "and of" in the preceding verses, the Joseph Smith Translation of this line goes back to the equivalent in the King James Version, "who was the son of Neri," underlining the biological tie between Neri and his son Salathiel or Shealtiel (JST 3:34). Such an affirming emphasis undercuts conjectures about why Neri appears as the father of Salathiel.¹⁰⁴ According to 1 Chronicles 3:17, King Jeconiah is the father of Salathiel, but Jeremiah suggests that Jeconiah is childless, though Jeremiah may be speaking metaphorically (see Jer. 22:24–30).

Rhesa: Scholars have suggested that the name of this person, who is not known as a son of Zerubbabel from any other source, is really the Aramaic title for "prince" and originally referred to "prince Zerubbabel."¹⁰⁵ But there is no reason to see the word Rhesa as anything but a name. The Joseph Smith Translation renders the name as Resa, removing the second letter "h," which comes from the Greek spelling rather than the Aramaic.

3:28 *Which was the son of Melchi:* The Prophet Joseph Smith reverts to a prior expression when he renders this line as "Who was a descendant

103. For discussion, see Marshall, *Luke*, 157–61; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:488–98.

104. Marshall, *Luke*, 163–64.

105. Marshall, *Luke*, 163.

of Melchi” (JST 3:35; see the Note on 3:24). It is interesting that the name Melchi appears in both passages, 3:24 and here.

3:36 *which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe*: Joseph Smith spells the two names as they appear in Old Testament sources, Shem and Noah, though he does not adjust other well-known names such as Juda and Mathusala (see 3:33, 37; JST 3:40, 44).

3:38 *Adam, which was the son of God*: The Joseph Smith Translation changes this expression in significant ways: “Adam, *who was formed* of God, *and the first man upon the earth*” (JST 3:45; emphasis added). This alteration lays emphasis not only on Adam as a person who depends on God’s creative actions for his earthly existence but also on Adam’s status as the first of the human race, both important doctrinal points. Correspondingly, the emphasis in Luke’s text on Adam’s implied biological connection to God, and thus Jesus’ connection, is diminished in Joseph Smith’s rendition.

Analysis

The appearance of a genealogical table in Luke has naturally led to comparisons with the genealogy in Matthew 1:1–16. The first, clear impression, of course, is that the two records differ notably. Whereas Matthew’s is a descending genealogy, tracing Jesus’ ancestry down from Abraham and through David, Luke’s is ascending, tracing Jesus’ ancestry up all the way to Adam. Matthew records the names of forty-two male ancestors between Abraham and Jesus, Luke sets down fifty-five between the two. Matthew follows Jesus’ descent from David through the kingly line, beginning with Solomon, but Luke traces the Savior’s progenitors through Nathan, another son of David. Matthew’s table rests on the number fourteen, multiplied three times; Luke’s list rests on the number seven, multiplied eleven times. Matthew’s genealogy aims to demonstrate that Jesus is the king of Israel, descended from David through the line of kings. In fact, Matthew enhances this objective by the repetition of the number fourteen, which represents David, whose name, when reduced to numerical equivalencies in Hebrew, adds up to fourteen (D + V + D [*daleth* + *waw* + *daleth*] equals 4 + 6 + 4). In contrast, Luke’s genealogy seeks not only to tie Jesus to Adam, and thus to all humankind, but also to further establish his place as God’s son, a concept already revealed in Luke 1–2.¹⁰⁶

106. Marshall, *Luke*, 161; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:490, 498; Morris, *Luke*, 111.

The most compelling question has to do with the father of Joseph, Mary's husband. In Matthew's list, Jacob is Jesus' grandfather (see Matt. 1:15–16); in Luke's list, it is Heli (see 3:23). A number of theories have arisen about this difference, three of which are worth reviewing. According to one, Matthew preserves the legal lineage of Jesus through Joseph whereas Luke conserves the biological descent of Jesus through his mother Mary. This view understands the expression "Joseph, which was the son of Heli" (3:23) to mean "Joseph, which was the son of Heli by marriage to Mary," though no hint exists in Luke's words that would expressly lead to this conclusion because the Greek word for "son" (*huios*) is never attested as meaning "son-in-law." Although attractive because this theory emphasizes how Jesus is literally a descendant of David (known to be true from such sources as Romans 1:3, as noted earlier), the first securely attributed reference to this theory is not until Annius of Viterbo in AD 1490.¹⁰⁷

The second theory goes back to a third-century church leader, Julius Africanus (c. AD 170–245), who in a surviving letter to a certain Aristides holds that a levirate marriage explains the appearance of Jacob in Matthew's list and Heli in Luke's. In Africanus' view, Heli dies childless and thereafter his half brother, Jacob, marries his widow and becomes the biological father of Joseph, making Heli the legal father.¹⁰⁸ A third hypothesis holds that Matthew repeats the legal descent from David, that is, those who would have been kings if the monarchy had continued, and Luke preserves the biological line from which Jesus actually descends. According to this viewpoint, Jacob, the legal heir of David, dies childless and the right of royal succession passes to his brother Heli, the actual father of Joseph.¹⁰⁹

The Joseph Smith Translation may or may not help with these theories. In his inspired review of the New Testament Gospels, Joseph Smith allows Matthew's language to stand: "Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary" (Matt. 1:16; JST Matt. 1:4). But, as we have seen, he adjusts Luke's expression from "Joseph, which was the son of Heli" to "Joseph, who was from the loins of Heli," tying Joseph biologically to Heli (3:23; JST 3:30). Of the three theories, the Joseph Smith Translation would match only the third, and chiefly because it holds that Heli is the biological father of Joseph. Other elements are open to question because it is not fully clear

107. Marshall, *Luke*, 158.

108. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.7.2–15.

109. Morris, *Luke*, 110–11.

how deeply Joseph Smith thought about the matter concerning Jesus' legal and biological ancestry.

In any study of Luke's genealogy, one of the challenges facing a student arises from names unattested from any known source. We also have to be aware that the spelling of names may have become corrupted through the centuries. For instance, the name Esli is unattested as a Jewish name (see 3:25). The name translated Joseph in 3:26 is *Iōsēkh* in its Greek spelling, an otherwise unidentified name. A name that appears in some Greek texts but does not appear in the King James Translation, and may represent a textual corruption, is *Admin* in 3:33, standing between Aminadab and Aram (the Greek of this last name is spelled *Arni*).¹¹⁰ Whether Luke enjoys access to sources for his list that remain unknown to modern scholars persists as an open question.

110. Marshall, *Luke*, 162–65.