

Good morning/afternoon to you all.

Now we'll pick up the story where we left off last time, at the top of page 10 of the Harmony of the Gospels continuing with the story of John the Baptizer. For this first section we'll read from Luke's account, since he has the most detail.

Luke 3:15-18

15 Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ [the Messiah] or not,

One of the questions I sent out last night was, What does Luke 3:15 tell us about the social climate of Judea at the time of Jesus Christ? What big social current does Luke tell us was sweeping the area at that time?

The people were expecting the Messiah, the Christ as it says here, to appear on the scene. They were expecting this because of various prophecies, one of them being the 70 Weeks prophecy of Daniel, which foretold the time of the coming of the Messiah. And we'll talk about that soon when we get to the timing of the beginning of Christ's ministry. There was this messianic expectation that we'll come across a number of times in the Gospels.

People wanted and expected a Messiah to appear soon to cast out the Romans and to establish an independent Jewish kingdom. And this gives us some idea of the power and influence of John's preaching, that many people wondered whether *he* was the prophesied Messiah to come. Obviously he had to be quite an influential figure for people to think that of him. And John responded that no, he was not the Messiah.

16 John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Another question I asked was what are the three baptisms mentioned here and what do they mean. And the three are baptism with water, baptism with the Holy Spirit and baptism with fire. To understand these better let's look at two Greek words used here. The first is the word translated "baptize." This is **the Greek word *baptizo***, which means to completely immerse or to completely submerge. It's used in other Greek writings of the time of **ships being sunk**. The writers would say that the ship was "baptized," meaning that it sank completely beneath the water. This is what baptize and baptism mean—to be completely sunk or submerged in water. It never means being sprinkled or dabbed with water.

The second word to understand is **the word translated "with."** This is the Greek word *en*, and it can mean "with," but also "in," "on," or "by." So it can mean the relationship of one thing to another in space—such as something *on* me, or *in* me, or *by* me, or *with* me. Or it can also mean *method or manner or how something is done*. So if I move this glass of water, it was moved *by* me as the manner or method as to how it was done.

I mention this to make the point that when this says "baptized *with* water" or "*with* the Holy Spirit" or "*with* fire" it can just as easily mean "baptized *in or by* water" or "*in or by* the Holy Spirit" or "*in or by* fire." And I think where this word is used here, it would probably be better translated "**baptized *in* water**" and "***in* the Holy Spirit**" and "***in* fire.**"

This may be something of a minor point, but I think it adds clarity to what John is saying because he is clearly baptizing *in* water, not just *with* water. So this is one of the baptisms mentioned here—being baptized *in* water, immersed or submerged in water, in this case in the Jordan River.

Then there is baptism with or in the Holy Spirit, which is different from what John was doing. Let's notice something interesting over in **Acts 19:1-5**.

1 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples

2 he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

3 And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism."

4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

So we see here that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance only. And what was John's mission? To prepare a people for the coming of the Lord. He would do that by preaching a message of repentance so that people would be receptive to Jesus Christ when He came as Messiah. John could not carry out a baptism of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit could not be given until after Jesus Christ died and rose again and went to His Father in heaven.

So John's baptism was in water and was a baptism of repentance, and it was later, after Christ's death and resurrection, that God gave the Holy Spirit *after* repentance and *after* water baptism and through the laying on of hands of a true minister of God. So those are the first two kinds of baptism mentioned here. They both involve repentance, they both involve being submerged in water, but after Jesus died and was resurrected the added element of the Holy Spirit was given that people might truly become converted through that Spirit and eventually in the resurrection become the actual sons and daughters of God.

So what about the third type of baptism mentioned here, the baptism of fire? Were any of you Pentecostals who used the term "baptism of fire" as they used it? You don't have to raise your hand if you don't want to. In my early years in the Church we had two men there from a Pentecostal background, and they could tell you what this meant. For them, the baptism of fire meant the Holy Spirit—though I wouldn't call this spirit exactly holy, but something else—would possess them and they would begin speaking in tongues and rolling on the floor and running full speed around the room without having any idea what they were doing. This was fairly common back in the 1960s and early 70s and may still be done today. This was supposedly proof that you had the Holy Spirit in you.

But is this what John was talking about? Let's **go back to Luke 3** and continue reading:

16 John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

17 "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

John here tells us what the baptism of fire is—it's to be burned up like chaff in unquenchable fire. In other words, it's talking about the lake of fire, or Gehenna. It's talking about the punishment of the wicked who will be burned to ashes because they have been *baptized*—immersed into—the flames of the lake of fire.

Now let's back up a bit and talk about the “winnowing fan” and wheat and chaff that's mentioned here and understand what this is talking about. If you were a farmer back then, when you harvested your wheat the job was far from done. **You had to separate** the edible from the inedible—the edible wheat kernels from the inedible husk that surrounded them. And this took several steps. First you had to break open the husks to release the wheat kernels. This was generally done with something called **a threshing sled** that would be pulled by a donkey or mule or ox. If you had small children, they would ride on it to give it extra weight to break apart the husks. This was done at what was called a threshing floor.

If you remember the story, King David bought a threshing floor as the spot to build the temple. **Here's an artist's illustration** of that, and you can see the threshing sled with a man and two children riding on it to give it more weight to break apart the husks. Notice that this is on a hilltop overlooking the city of Jerusalem. Why was a hilltop important? That had to do with the next step of the process.

Next you had to separate the wheat from the chaff, or husks. The way this worked was you hopefully had a windy day, and you would take **something like a shovel**, as shown here—and this is a modern day photo from Afghanistan, showing that these ancient techniques are still in use today 2,000 years later. Or alternatively, you could take a flat **basket called a winnowing fan**, and this is also a modern photo showing this ancient technique, and you would toss this mixture of wheat and chaff up into the air where the heavier wheat would fall back down to the ground and the lighter chaff would be blown away as you see in the photo.

So the wheat would then be swept up, as you see this man doing, and gathered into the barn. The chaff, if it wasn't all blown away, would be burned. It would make good fire-starter material. In a land where wood was a valuable commodity, you burned other things if you had them available. So that's the process John is talking about here—the wheat is threshed to open the husks, then it's tossed in the air with a winnowing fan to separate the wheat from the chaff, then the valuable wheat is gathered up to be taken to the barn, and the useless chaff is burned up in a fire.

I mentioned in last night's update that there are a number of examples of *remez* in this section we're covering today. In fact, there are several in this one verse. See if you found any of these.

Jeremiah 15:7

7 And I will winnow them with a winnowing fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children; I will destroy My people, since they do not return from their ways.

As we talked about in the sermon on *remez* several weeks ago, the people would have instantly got the point of this and thought of this verse in Jeremiah. This is making the same exact point John is making—that God will come and judge His people, and separate the wheat from the chaff, with the chaff being destroyed.

Another point from the sermon on *remez* is that the intent of a *remez* is to point the hearer or reader to more than just the phrase or the verse that contains the phrase. It's to point the reader or hearer to the entire context of the phrase being referred to. Keep in mind that our modern chapter and verse divisions weren't created until the 1200s to 1500s. The readers of the first century wouldn't have even thought in terms of verses and chapters, but in terms of whole sections or whole books. In that light, look at the verses before and after the actual verse of the *remez*. Let's look at the few verses before and the few verses after to get the real point John was making:

Jeremiah 15:5-9

5 “For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you? Or who will turn aside to ask how you are doing?”

Remember that a lot of the people coming down to the Jordan Valley to hear John would've been coming from or going to Jerusalem. So they would've thought of this in the context of the larger *remez*.

6 You have forsaken Me,” says the LORD, “You have gone backward. Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am weary of relenting!

This sounds just like John's call to repentance and to turn to God before it's too late, doesn't it? Just as Jeremiah was calling on his countrymen to repent, so was John. Then we come to the *remez* of the winnowing fan:

7 And I will winnow them with a winnowing fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children; I will destroy My people, since they do not return from their ways.

8 Their widows will be increased to Me more than the sand of the seas; I will bring against them, against the mother of the young men, a plunderer at noonday; I will cause anguish and terror to fall on them suddenly.

9 “She languishes who has borne seven; she has breathed her last; her sun has gone down while it was yet day; she has been ashamed and confounded. And the remnant of them I will deliver to the sword before their enemies,” says the LORD.

When John talks about someone coming with a winnowing fan to separate the wheat from the chaff, the righteous from the unrighteous, these verses would've come flooding into the minds of his audience because they knew their Scriptures.

Another interesting point is this— who is doing the talking here in Jeremiah 15? It's the LORD, or the God of the Old Testament, the one who would become Jesus Christ. Who does John say is going to come with his winnowing fan in His hand? The Messiah, Jesus the Christ. What's the unstated message? That the Messiah who is coming, Jesus Christ, is the God of the Hebrew Bible!

Let's look at several more examples of *remez* from John's example of winnowing and burning up the chaff:

Psalm 1:4

4 The ungodly are . . . like the chaff which the wind drives away.

Hosea 13:3

3 Therefore they shall be like the morning cloud and like the early dew that passes away, like chaff blown off from a threshing floor and like smoke from a chimney.

Isaiah 5:24

24 Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble, and *the flame consumes the chaff*, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom will ascend like dust; because they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

And what about John's reference to "unquenchable fire"? Is that a *remez*? Yes, it is.

Isaiah 66:23-24

23 And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD.

24 "And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, *and their fire is not quenched*. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

Jeremiah 7:20

20 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place—on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground. *And it will burn and not be quenched.*"

When we come across an example of *remez*, we need to always ask ourselves, *What's the point?* What's the message that it gave to the audience then? How would they have understood it?

Put yourself in their sandals. You're Jews. You know that the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, from whose these prophecies are taken, were sent to warn the kingdom of Judah to repent and turn to God so they wouldn't be destroyed by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. And what happened? Did they repent and turn to God? No, so they were destroyed, invaded by the Assyrians in Isaiah's time and then later by the Babylonians in Jeremiah's time. John is talking to the descendants of those Jews who didn't listen earlier and who were taken away as captives to Babylon. So what's the point of the *remez*? That if you don't repent and turn to God and listen, the same thing is going to happen to you as happened to your ancestors! And sure enough, that's exactly what happened about 40 years later when they were killed and enslaved by the Romans.

Notice how Luke concludes this section:

Luke 3:18

18 And with many other exhortations he preached to the people.

Are you beginning to see now why people were wondering whether John himself was the Messiah? He is preaching a powerful message of repentance just like the great prophets of old—like Isaiah, like Jeremiah, like Elijah, telling people to repent and turn to God before it's too late. We know from Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote about 60 years later, that John the Baptizer had a major impact on the people at that time.

Now let's switch over to Matthew to cover the next section, since now he gives more detail than Luke. And again we're going to see several examples of *remez* here—by Matthew, Mark, Luke, Jesus Christ, and God the Father via an angel. So continuing—

Matthew 3:13-15

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.

14 And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?”

15 But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him.

Is there a *remez* here in what Jesus said? Actually, there’s probably at least two. Notice that Jesus said He would “fulfill all righteousness.” “Fulfill” here means to fill to overflowing, to fill up completely. You could express this as saying that He would *personify* righteousness in every way. This is how John and others hearing this would’ve understood it. So what’s the *remez*, the look back, here? Let’s notice:

Jeremiah 23:5-6

5 “Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

6 In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

What’s the message? Jesus said He would exemplify and personify righteousness. What’s the message with this *remez*? *Jesus is the Messiah!*

Let’s look at another one:

Jeremiah 33:15-16

15 ‘In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

16 In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.’

This is worded almost identically to the other passage we just read. Again, what’s the message? *Jesus is the Messiah!*

Now let’s switch over to Luke briefly:

Luke 3:21-22

21 When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; In the Greek this is saying that a number of people were there being baptized at the time Jesus is baptized, so this what happens next didn’t happen with just John and Jesus there to witness it. There were many witnesses to what happened next.

and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.

Mark, being the writer who records a lot of action, says literally, “the heavens were *ripped open*...” The NIV puts it as “He saw heaven being torn open,” the word being used here is like a piece of cloth being ripped in two. This is another *remez* that all three writers use, although they use different words to describe the heavens being ripped open. So what’s the *remez* of the heavens being torn open look back to?

Isaiah 64:1

1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence—

2 As fire burns brushwood, as fire causes water to boil—to make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence!

Again, what’s the point? What does this *remez* say? It says that the heavens, where God lives, are being ripped open and God is now here on earth! How was God now here on earth? **God has now come to earth** in the form of the man Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah! When Matthew, Mark and Luke write to us that the heavens were torn open, this is what

they want us to think of—this passage that says God is now coming to earth to make His name known that all nations may tremble at His presence! It’s a very, very powerful *remez*. And again, if you don’t know the text from which this came, you can’t play. Matthew, Mark and Luke don’t explain it. *They expect us to know it.*

But we’re not done yet. There are several more examples of *remez* here. Let’s switch to **Matthew 3:16** and pick up some more.

16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw *the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.*

Luke 3:22 adds,

And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him...

Some have wondered whether this “like a dove” is referring to how the Holy Spirit descended or whether it’s referring to what it looked like. Luke seems to make it pretty clear that, as he puts it, “**the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him,**” meaning that it looked like a dove, and Matthew says that it descended and alighted like a dove on Jesus. So both are accurate descriptions of what happened.

But why? *Why* did God choose to manifest the Holy Spirit in this particular way at this particular time? There’s no other place in Scripture where the Holy Spirit is manifested as a physical creature. Why here? And why now, at this particular time, in front of an audience of people there being baptized at the same time? Have you ever wondered about that? Doesn’t it seem a little odd for God to do things this way?

Do you sense a *remez* coming on? (say yes, and we can move on...) Let’s look at a familiar passage in a new light.

Isaiah 11:1-2

1 There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.

2 *The Spirit of the LORD shall rest* [rest, settle down and remain—like a dove settling down to land on something] *upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*
What’s the message? God the Father is doing a physical *remez* with the Holy Spirit being shown in physical form as a dove landing and resting on Jesus. Think about it. God’s Holy Spirit, His power, is invisible to human beings and normally and no one would see this prophecy being fulfilled. But God the Father manifests that Spirit in physical form as a dove to come and *rest* on Jesus at His baptism to show the assembled crowd there that *Jesus is the Messiah!*

Do you think that’s a stretch, that it’s too far-fetched? Initially I did. But then I read two other prophetic passages about the Messiah.

Isaiah 42:1

1 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; *I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.*

God again says here that He will put His holy Spirit on Him—on the Messiah.

Still think it’s a stretch? I did too, until I saw this one:

Isaiah 61:1

1 *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;*

2 *To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn,*

3 *To console those who mourn in Zion . . . that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”*

So Isaiah says the Spirit of the Lord will be on the Messiah, God says he will put His Spirit on the Messiah, and a Messianic prophecy says God’s Spirit is upon Him—the same things said three different ways. And at Christ’s baptism Matthew, Mark and Luke describe God’s Spirit descending and alighting on Jesus in the form of a dove. *God the Father is doing a physical act of remez to show the people gathered there that He is fulfilling these messianic prophecies with Jesus of Nazareth.* God is sending a very clear message, one that obviously Matthew, Mark and Luke got.

But the Father isn’t done yet. He gives another *remez*. Or two. Or three.

Luke 3:22

22 *And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”*

I might point out that this is apparently an angel speaking for the Father, since we read in

John 5:37—

37 *And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.*

So if no one has heard the Father’s voice, this must be an angel speaking for Him here.

Often you don’t get the point of the *remez* in just the verse quoted, but in the context of at least several verses before and after it. And we see that here. In verse 22 are three *remezim*, but the point of each is made not just in one verse but in several verses or the entire chapter. So let’s look at these three *remezim*—keeping in mind that these are the words of God the Father through an angel.

So where does the “You are My Son” part come from?

Psalm 2:7-12

7 *“I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.*

8 *Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.*

9 *You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”*

So this is all wrapped up in what God the Father says about the Son. He says He will give Him the nations for an inheritance, and the entire earth, and He will reign over them.

What’s that talking about? It’s talking about Jesus Christ’s return to earth to reign in the Kingdom of God.

In this case, the preceding verses of this Psalm are also part of the *remez*. Notice what **verses 1-6** say:

1 *Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?*

2 *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,*

3 “Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.”
4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD shall hold them in derision.
5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure:

6 “Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.” And who is that King?

7 “I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.

That King is Jesus Christ. God is sending the message through this *remez* to Psalm 2 that Jesus is His Son who will be given the entire earth and all the nations as an inheritance.

What about the part about the “beloved Son” or “Son whom I love”? What is that a *remez* to?

Genesis 22:1-2

1 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”

2 Then He said, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

This is a subtle but remarkable *remez*. Consider who Abraham and Isaac were a type of. We’ve known for years that they are types of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Abraham was willing to give his only son to God as a sacrifice. And God the Father did give His only Son as a sacrifice, not to Himself, but for humankind. We see the parallels. To a Jew there hearing these words about a “beloved son” or a “son whom I love,” he or she would’ve thought back to Abraham and Isaac. This is the first place where the words “son” and “love” appear in the Hebrew Scriptures.

But there’s a third *remez* here as well, one about the one “in whom I am well pleased.” We find it in

Isaiah 42:1-4

1 “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

2 He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.

3 . . . He will bring forth justice for truth.

4 He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.”

Again, when you read the nearby verses, God the Father is saying that this Son in whom He delights is the one who will come to earth as Messiah and establish justice throughout the earth in His reign. So we have the Father testifying that Jesus of Nazareth is His beloved Son and that He will ultimately reign as Messiah over the entire earth.

I want to cover one final point before we close. How many of you are familiar with the word *Tanakh*? It’s a Hebrew word, not found in the Bible, but it’s the word they use for the Old Testament. You may know that the books of the Hebrew Scriptures are divided into three sections. We find this referred to in **Luke 24:44**, where Jesus appeared to the apostles in the room on the night after He was resurrected and ascended to heaven. Notice what it says:

44 Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written *in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.*”

These three sections are called here **“the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.”**

The Law of Moses is called the Torah, the Prophets is called Nevi'im, and the Psalms is called the Writings or Kethuvim. (Psalms is the first and longest book of the Writings, so sometimes this book was generically referred to as the Psalms, as we see here.) If you take the first letters from these sections, you get the word Tanakh.

Why do I mention this? Because in the quotes that we just read from Matthew, Mark and Luke, there was a Jewish tradition that *all three sections of the Hebrew Scriptures would testify about the Messiah*. And what do we see? We see that God the Father quotes from the Psalms (“You are My Son), from the Torah from the book of Genesis (“My beloved Son” or “My Son whom I love”), and from the Prophets from Isaiah (“in whom I am well pleased” or “in whom I delight”).

He quotes from all three sections of the Hebrew Bible to proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah. And interestingly, Jesus Himself may be doing the same thing in this passage in Luke 24:44 when He says essentially the same thing—that the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms all testified about Him as Messiah. It’s an interesting side note that God seems to be going above and beyond and even fulfilling Jewish traditions not found in the Bible to prove again that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah and coming King.

Any questions?