

## LESSON 4 JESUS' BAPTISM AND JOHN'S DECLARATION

John did most of his baptizing in the Jordan River. This river was considered dirty by Naaman, and he resisted the command to wash in the River Jordan to be healed of his leprosy. Eventually, he did; and his leprosy was cured.

This river had a place in the minds of the Jewish people because of the significant events that took place there. The waters of the Jordan River were parted on more than one occasion. Joshua led the Children of Israel across the Jordan into the promised land. Elijah parted the waters, and he and Elisha walked across on dry land where Elijah was taken to heaven. Elisha parted the waters on his return from seeing Elijah leave earth. Notice that the transfer of power, Moses to Joshua, Elijah to Elisha, and John the Baptizer to Jesus, all took place at the Jordan River.

We have no information about why John baptized in this particular place, except for John 3:23. Maybe it was because of its historic past, maybe because that is where God sent John, or maybe because of its location. We know there was abundant water there. Whatever the reason, Jesus traveled from Galilee to the Jordan River and asked John to baptize Him in the Jordan River.

Many years ago, I stood in the Jordan River. This story about John and Jesus came to my mind as I look at the beauty surrounding me. I also stood at another spot close to the Jordan where it is said that Peter made his great confession of faith in Jesus when Jesus asked, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man am?" This river served John's purpose and mission to preach, to baptize, and to fulfill the will of God through Jesus' baptism.

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance unto the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). If we look back at Matthew 3:6, we read that John baptized, and the people confessed their sins. They were making public the sins they committed and showed by their baptism that they were sorry for their mistakes and wanted forgiveness.

When Jesus asked John to baptize Him, John resisted saying that Jesus needed to baptize him. Jesus gave little explanation except that it was designed that this baptism would take place and that it was to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). John did not argue but simply did as Jesus asked. Jesus did not need to repent, but He had to fulfill the will of God.

When the baptism was completed, Scripture says that the heavens opened, the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and sat on Jesus. A voice from heaven spoke and said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:21-22). As far as we know, this was the first declaration that the man Jesus is the Son of God.

There were probably those standing around that had been baptized by John, and probably some who had not. All would have witnessed the baptism and heard the voice from heaven. They would have also seen a “bodily shape” (Luke 3:22). This was the Holy Spirit in a bodily shape, not in the form of a dove. The Spirit descended like a dove.

The next day, John saw Jesus approaching Him once again. John declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God, that He would take away the sins of the world, that Jesus was the one preferred. Then John related what happened the day before, including the appearance of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism today is the single most important event in a person’s life. Being baptized allows us to replicate the death, burial, and death of Jesus. We die to sin, are buried in water, and raised out of the water free from sin. It gives us remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and it adds us to the church (Acts 2:47) because we are saved. There is no other way we can be saved.

Like Naaman, many resist going into the water. Naaman didn’t want to get in water he considered unclean. The River Jordan held cleansing power for Naaman, and baptismal water holds cleansing of our soul today by allowing us to contact the benefits of Jesus’ shed blood (Romans 6:1-4). The water itself holds no power, but the power was in the obedience of Naaman dipping seven times in the River Jordan. The power for us is our obedience to the command of Acts 2:38 and other passages. There are many reasons people resist baptism today. Many resisted it when John preached it. They didn’t want to repent. People today are resistant to the commands of God. They, like those to whom John preached, do not want to obey. They want to devise their own way of salvation.

Baptism is the beginning of the Christian life. It represents our faith; it is a testimony of our repentance; and it is our confession that Jesus is the Son of God. It shows our willingness to bury our sins and become a new person—a Christian.

**FOR DISCUSSION: WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THE LESSON?**

1. How did John's baptism differ from our baptism?
2. What is the significance of the Holy Spirit's appearance and the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism?
3. Did John truly understand that Jesus was the Messiah?
4. What kind of relationship would John and Jesus have had as they were growing up?
5. How difficult is it for us to acknowledge that someone is more important than we are?