

3:22-30

- The simultaneous ministry of Jesus (in the Judean countryside, 3:22) and John the Baptist (in Aenon near Salim, 3:23) is only recorded in John's gospel.
 - The exact location of Aenon isn't clear, but Salim was about 30 miles south of the Sea of Galilee along the Jordan River.
- The synoptics show JtB preaching openly and then fading into the background as Jesus is revealed.
 - Mt. 14:3, Mk 1:14, and Lk 3:19 all mention John the Baptist's arrest, but this conversation isn't present in either of those accounts.
- In the course of these events, a dispute apparently arises between a Jew and JtB's disciples concerning baptism.
 - There is a similar-type conversation in Matt. 9:14 when John's disciples address Jesus directly, inquiring about their practice of fasting versus the disciples' lack of fasting.
- A few things to note:
 - The conversation doesn't focus on the necessity of baptism.
 - The conversation doesn't focus on the method of baptism.
 - The conversation doesn't focus on the reason for baptism.
- While we don't have the specific conversation between these two parties recorded, we do get a sense of the reason for the conflict based on the report to John:
 - It's very possible that a Jew raised the question of where one should go for cleansing, since both Jesus and John were baptizing.
 - If this is the case, this resembles the question raised by the Samaritan woman in the next chapter concerning where one should worship (4:19-20).
 - It's also possible that this conversation was the result of competition between the followers of each teacher.
 - If both are baptizing, whose baptism is valid?
- John's followers felt that their teacher was being overshadowed by Jesus' growing popularity, so they were seeking an explanation.
 - It's curious to consider what they thought John might do as the result of this news.
 - Did they think John would invalidate Jesus' baptism?
 - That John would approach Jesus and rebuke Him for insubordination?
 - They recognized Him as "the One you testified about," but still seemed put out by Jesus' influence.
- John defies their expectations, though, by reaffirming the source of his calling and reminding them of his own place as the subordinate (3:28).
 - Remember, John had already established his position in relation to Jesus back in 1:27:
 - *"He is the One coming after me whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie."*
 - And in 1:30:
 - *"After me comes a man who has surpassed me, because He existed before me."*
- Just like the physical things of the old law, John reminds them that his function has merely been to prepare for the Messiah.
 - This is similar to the message of two of the accounts we have already seen: someone better has come.
 - The best wine came after the inferior wine (2:1-11).
 - The physical emblem for Israel's salvation was "lifted up" as a precursor to the physical/spiritual emblem of mankind's salvation being "lifted up" (3:14-15).
- As an illustration, John likens himself to a "best man" of a bridegroom.
 - This position certainly holds importance in the wedding festivities, but only because he serves the bridegroom.
 - The friend of the bridegroom is the *shoshben*.
 - He acts as a liason between the bride and the bridegroom.

- He arranges the wedding.
- He invited the guests.
- He presided at the wedding feast.
- He guarded the bridal chamber so that no one could defile it before the bridegroom came to his bride.
- Most likely, as seen in the parable of the Ten Virgins, he would be the voice calling out to the wedding guests and attendants that the groom had arrived (Mt. 25:6).
 - When he heard the bridegroom coming to consummate the marriage with his bride, he began the celebration with the guests.
- He is the bridegroom's chief attendant, receiving no payment other than the satisfaction of knowing that he has added to the happiness of his friend.
- His role as a mediator between the bridegroom and the bride was never meant to be permanent.
 - Once the union was consummated, he recognizes that he is no longer needed and his duty is fulfilled.
- Based on this description, what do you think is John's mindset as he declares: *"He must increase, but I must decrease?"*

3:31-36

- As with 3:16-21, it's sometimes difficult in John's writings to tell when characters are speaking versus when John is adding his own commentary.
 - The verses following John the Baptist's description of his role still fit the theme of the supremacy of Jesus, so they could be a continuation of his thoughts to his followers.
 - But they could also be additions of John the apostle, writing after the fact.
- In this summary paragraph, we see four basic truths that have relevance both to the stories that precede it and as a testimony of the authority of Jesus:
 - *"The One who comes from above is above all. The one who is from the earth is earthly and speaks in earthly terms. The One who comes from heaven is above all."*
 - Jesus came from heaven and spoke with a higher authority than that of anyone on earth at any point in its history.
 - *"He testifies to what He has seen and heard."*
 - Jesus spoke from observation, not theory. (A point that He emphasized to Nicodemus in 3:13.)
 - *"For God sent Him and He speaks God's words."*
 - Jesus spoke the words of God. He is the same Voice that spoke the world into existence, proclaimed the law from Sinai and commanded the prophets to speak.
 - *"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands."*
 - God's love for His Son caused Him to endow His Son with complete, universal authority to carry out His will.
- These truths underline the superiority of Jesus over John the Baptist (or anyone else, for that matter).
 - John the Baptist was a messenger of the Lord; Jesus is the physical revelation of the Father's glory.
 - His testimony is valid because it isn't hearsay or recitation; it is first hand knowledge.
- As Barclay puts it:
 - *"If we want information, we have to go to the person who possesses that information. If we want information about a family, we will get it first hand only from a member of that family. If we want information about a town we will get it first hand only from someone who comes from that town. So, then, if we want information about God, we will get it only from the Son of God; and if we want information about heaven and heaven's life, we will get it from Him who comes from heaven. When Jesus speaks about God and about heavenly things, says John, it is no carried story, no second-hand tale,*

no information from a secondary source; He tells us that which He himself has seen and heard. To put it very simply, because Jesus alone knows God, He alone can give us the facts about God, and these facts are the gospel."

- This testimony having been presented, there is a choice to be made by the hearers: accept it or refuse it.
 - As John states here, both will have a result:
 - *"The one who believes in the Son will have eternal life..."*
 - A point which has now been repeated three times in this chapter, underlining its significance to John's message.
 - *"...but the one who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him."*
 - This is the only time in John's writings (gospel and epistles) that "wrath" is mentioned.
 - The idea expressed by this word isn't of a sudden outburst of anger; it is the natural disposition of God against sin:

orgé ("settled anger") proceeds from an internal *disposition* which *steadfastly* opposes someone or something based on extended personal exposure, i.e. solidifying what the beholder considers *wrong* (unjust, evil).

[*"Orgē* comes from the verb *oragō* meaning, 'to teem, to swell'; and thus implies that it is not a sudden outburst, but rather (referring to God's) *fixed*, controlled, passionate feeling against sin . . . a *settled* indignation (so Hendriksen)" (D. E. Hiebert, at 1 Thes 1:10).]

HELPS Word Studies

- Just as light and darkness are exclusive of one another and can't coexist, the wrath of God acts as the repelling force between righteousness and unrighteousness.
- God isn't easily angered or vindictive, but He is committed to opposing and judging disobedience.
- Just as God is actively trying to save mankind, He is also actively opposed to evil.
- The conclusion of these two statements is the same one that Moses brought Israel to when he was preparing them to enter Canaan:
 - *"See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil... I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live."*
- John states that the gospel represents a crossroads for each person
 - His reaction to Jesus determines his destination: one path leading to eternal life, the other leading to an eternity excluded from God's presence.
 - Hearing and believing (and by extension, obeying) the Son is the only way we show that we wish to align ourselves with God and seek His righteousness.
 - To do otherwise is to reject eternal life.