



Matthew Lesson 4

April 21, 2020

Scriptures from TLV
“The Megillah of Matthew”
3:1-17

Our study tonight is chapter 3. We continue to examine Matthew’s words with Jewish eyes to try and catch everything which clearly shows this work as having an underlying Hebraic basis. And, it is a book recognized by many seeking Jews as Jewish.

Verses 1-3: *1 In those days, John the Immerser came proclaiming in the wilderness of Judea, 2 “Turn away from your sins, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!” 3 For he is the one Isaiah the prophet spoke about, saying, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of Adonai, and make His paths straight”* (Matthew 3:1-3). John is a name which came about in the 12th century as a diminutive of the Hebrew *Yochanan* and its Latin derivation *Johanan*. There is no question that his name was and is *Yochanan*, but to make it easier, we’ll just call him John.

John’s words, “Turn away from your sins for the Kingdom of Heaven is near” speak of *t’shuvah*, repentance. There is much corruption going on within the Temple leaders and some Pharisees. They are not following *Torah* and are making their own rules. He is calling the people to turn back to ADONAI. In the TLV verses just quoted, the words kingdom and heaven are not capitalized. I have capitalized them here to show that the word “heaven” is an epithet for YHVH, ADONAI. Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew means exactly the same as Kingdom of God in the other Gospels, the Kingdom of YHVH, יהוה, the Father, the G-d of the Scriptures.

In saying this, John echoed the words of *Yeshayahu*, Isaiah, who some 700 years earlier had said: *3 A voice cries out in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of Adonai, Make straight in the desert a highway for our God”* (Isaiah 40:3 TLV). John’s statement here is yet another incidence of *remez*, hinting back at an earlier Scripture. But, to understand what the Pharisees and Sadducees who heard John say this might have understood, we also have to understand that John’s words were not only referring to these exact words of Isaiah. This key phrase would have also brought to their minds the surrounding verses and Isaiah’s overall theme and context. By hinting back to these words of Isaiah, John is proclaiming ADONAI’s message of judgment, but also redemption for those who repent. The overall context would also include the message about ADONAI’s Servant who is introduced in chapter 42. We know Him to be *Yeshua*. Those hearing these words would have instantly thought about the Servant message. And, this would also have been reflected in their questions to John. They asked him: *19 ... , “Who are you?” 20 He openly admitted and did not deny; he admitted, “I am not the Messiah.” 21 “What then? Are you Elijah?” they asked him. “I am not,” said John. “Are you the Prophet?” “No,” he answered. 22 So they said to him, “Who are you? Give us an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” 23 He said, “I am ‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of Adonai,” as the prophet Isaiah said”* (John 1:19b-23 TLV). John said that he was not the Messiah, not Elijah or The Prophet. The Messiah is, of course, *Yeshua*, ADONAI’s Servant spoken of by Isaiah. And, Elijah was also expected as a current fulfillment of the role which he had

centuries before. “The Prophet” whom they referred to here is the Prophet like Moses whom ADONAI identified in Deuteronomy 18. Yeshua is that Prophet.

4 Now John wore clothing from camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4 TLV). The Scriptures only tell us a few things about John. From what we know, we can understand that he was a forager and he depended upon what he could find in the wilderness for his food. He ate locusts, insects, which were and are kosher according to *Torah*. Camel’s hair came from an animal that was not kosher for food, but was not excluded as a beast of burden or their hair as raw material for clothing.

From the Book of Luke, we know more about John. Since Yeshua’s mother *Miryam* and John’s mother *Elisheva*, Elizabeth, were related (Luke 1:36), the two men were also related, possibly cousins. From another source of John’s words and regarding Yeshua, he said: *31 “I didn’t know Him, but I came immersing with water so that He might be revealed to Israel” (John 1:31 TLV).* This says to me that John didn’t know Yeshua as Messiah. He would have known Him as his relative. But, he also knew that his ministry of immersion into *t’shuvah*, into repentance, was a preparation for the revelation of Yeshua as Messiah to Israel. That knowledge, Yeshua as Messiah, was revealed to John by the *Ruach*, by the Holy Spirit, when Yeshua came into the group of people gathered at the Jordan. This is clearly shown in John chapter 1: *29 The next day, John sees Yeshua coming to him and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the One about whom I told you, ‘He who comes after me is above me, because He was before me.’ 31 I didn’t know Him, but I came immersing with water so that He might be revealed to Israel.” 32 Then John testified, “I have seen the Ruach coming down like a dove out of heaven, and it remained on Him. 33 I did not know Him; but the One who sent me to immerse in water said to me, ‘The One on whom you see the Ruach coming down and remaining, this is the One who immerses in the Ruach ha-Kodesh.’ 34 And I have seen and testified that this is Ben-Elohim” (John 1:29-34 TLV).* John did not know Yeshua as Messiah, but was clearly identified to him as Messiah at that moment. ADONAI’s Spirit said to John, “your cousin Yeshua is my Son, the Messiah.”

About all that we know about John before his time at the Jordan River, was that he was the son of *Z’karyah*, Zechariah, an elderly priest. Some have speculated that John was the rightful High Priest of Israel at this time and that he rejected his priestly role to go into his wilderness ministry. This could have meant that his father Zechariah was the rightful High Priest when the Angel Gabriel spoke to him in Luke chapter 1 about John being born. It is known that at the time that this visit from Gabriel would have occurred, 4-5 BCE, Herod was replacing the High Priests with one of his own choosing. The Roman Legate Valerius Gratus had also chosen Caiaphas, a priest not in the true order of succession as High Priest in the year 18). Caiaphas, High Priest at the time of John’s ministry, is reported to have purchased his high priesthood. It is only speculation that Zechariah and John were rightful High Priests, but it is interesting to consider it for the underlying spiritual implications; that the true High Priest of Israel anointed Yeshua for His ministry, the Messiah of Israel. But, it is only speculation and we shouldn’t take it any further.

The immersion which John was proclaiming was an immersion of repentance. *Tevilah*, meaning immersion in Hebrew and baptism from the Greek, was not a new thing, not something which John invented. It was a very important process commanded by ADONAI and dating back to the time of giving the *Torah* in the wilderness. There were a number of spiritual reasons for immersion. Some of them were, for the coronation of kings, for entering

into rabbinic office, for preparation for marriage, for ritual purity before entering the Temple and for *t'shuvah*, for repentance, as practiced by John.

Because of what John did, he was known as *Yochanan haMatabil*, John the Immerser or John the Baptist.

But, John also filled the role of Elijah for that generation. Yeshua confirmed this when He said: 13 *“For all the prophets and the Torah prophesied until the time of John. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come”* (Matthew 11:13-14 TLV). John was not Elijah reincarnated, a false belief by some, but came in the spirit and purpose of Elijah's ministry. The Prophet Micah said: 23 *“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of Adonai. 24 He will turn the hearts of fathers to the children, and the hearts of children to their fathers—else I will come and strike the land with utter destruction”* (Micah 3:23-24 TLV). This also indicates that there is yet another Elijah who is to come who will make our hearts right with each other and prepare us for the second coming of Yeshua before the great and terrible day of ADONAI. One interpretation of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and vice versa is that the hearts of the Jews will be turned to the hearts of the Christians and the hearts of the Christians to the Jews. May it be, and soon L-rd!

5 *Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan. 6 Confessing their sins, they were being immersed by him in the Jordan River. 7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his immersion, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Therefore produce fruit worthy of repentance; 9 and do not think that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father!’ For I tell you that from these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 10 Already the axe is laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”* (Matthew 3:5-10 TLV)! Those coming from Jerusalem and around Judea had quite a trek to get to where John was immersing. From Jerusalem alone, it was about 16 miles. But, that was not the worst of it. They would have travelled from about 2,500 feet above sea level through sea level and down to about 1,500 feet below sea level. But, then, they also had an exhausting climb to return to Jerusalem. They would have been very motivated to make this journey. But, some were just curious and John recognized the insincerity of some of the Pharisees and Sadducees and called them out. They were smug in their position of righteousness because they were descendants of Abraham. Children of Abraham, whom John said could be raised up from stones, were children of faith, ones who sincerely trusted in ADONAI and not in their positions as priests and Pharisees as these men did. John challenged them to repent and produce good fruit or, he seemed to be saying, their resurrection after death would be to eternal fire.

11 *“As for me, I immerse you in water for repentance. But the One coming after me is mightier than I am; I am not worthy to carry His sandals. He will immerse you in the Ruach ha-Kodesh and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He shall clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn; but the chaff He shall burn up with inextinguishable fire”* (Matthew 3:11-12 TLV). We find two points in these two verses. First, John's immersion was only for repentance; for *t'shuvah*. This was in keeping with his message we read in verse 2: 2 *“Turn away from your sins, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!”*. But, turning from sins is only *t'shuvah*, repentance. It is the decision to not sin anymore; the visual example is to turn your body 180 degrees away from sin and walk in a new direction. This is a conscious decision, but it is not confession. We also must confess our sins in order for Yeshua to forgive

them as was demonstrated in verse 6: *6 Confessing their sins, they were being immersed by him in the Jordan River.* John's ministry of repentance spread throughout Israel and even more than thirty years later Jews were still making *t'shuvah* and being immersed for repentance. In Acts 19, *Sha'ul* encountered some disciples of Yeshua in Ephesus who had only been immersed into the immersion of John. Of course, he took care of that and immersed them into Yeshua. And, the *Ruach HaKodesh* fell on them. As John said, Yeshua will immerse us in the Holy Spirit, but also with fire. Those disciples in Ephesus had trusted in Yeshua, but had not been immersed into Him. This demonstrates for us the great importance of immersion. Yeshua explained this to His disciples Just before he ascended to His Father when He commanded them: *4.... to wait for what the Father promised—which, He said, “you heard from Me. 5 For John immersed with water, but you will be immersed in the Ruach ha-Kodesh not many days from now”* (Acts 1:4b-5 TLV). And, then He told them why it was important: *8 But you will receive power when the Ruach ha-Kodesh has come upon you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and through all Judah, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8 TLV). And, about ten days later on the Day of *Shavuot*, the *Ruach* fell on them on them and they were filled, they were immersed in His Spirit. Tongues of fire were seen above their heads. According to what John said, they were immersed with fire, the visual image of the inner spiritual cleansing which took place. Fire burns away impurities and their lives were cleansed of themselves in order to fully follow Yeshua. Yeshua has that same immersion for us, but we must submit our spirits to His Spirit and then not take back what we have submitted. If we remain committed to Him, we also have that power from on high, power not only to be His witnesses, but the fire of the Holy Spirit which keeps the impurities out of our lives.

The second point in these two verses is brought up by John's words: *But the One coming after me is mightier than I am; I am not worthy to carry His sandals* (Matthew 3:11b TLV). There is both a spiritual and a legal point being made in these words. John, by saying, “I am not worthy to carry His sandals,” is using *remez* to hint at the *goel*, the Kinsman Redeemer. Read the Book of Ruth and learn how Boaz was the kinsman redeemer for Ruth. Because her husband had died, the closest relative who would take this responsibility could redeem the deceased husband's property, but also would take his widow in marriage to raise up children for his name. It was made legal by the *goel*, the one in line to inherit, and here there was one ahead of Boaz, taking off his sandal and handing it to Boaz. This officially made Boaz the *goel*, the kinsman redeemer, for Ruth. John, by saying “I am not worthy to unlatch His sandals,” was saying: “I am not the *goel*.” They were relatives and that is an important point with regard to John making this statement. John was the forerunner, the one who prepared the way, but, he clearly stated: “I am not the Messiah.”

Yeshua is the kinsman redeemer of Israel, the only one in the line of David who could both spiritually and physically redeem Israel. At the Jordan River, He accepted this responsibility of becoming the *chatan*, the groom to Israel, His *challah*, His bride. He spiritually redeemed His bride through His death as the spiritual sacrifice and has now gone to prepare a place for His bride. When He returns as Son of David, *Melekh Yisra'el*, the King of Israel, He will consummate His marriage with Israel. Israel, the waiting bride, includes not only Jews, but those from the nations who have entered into covenant with Yeshua.

13 Then Yeshua came from the Galilee to John, to be immersed by him in the Jordan. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be immersed by You, and You are coming to me?” 15 But Yeshua responded, “Let it happen now, for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:13-15 TLV). So John yielded to Him. It was very necessary that

Yeshua would be immersed by John. In order to fulfill all righteousness, to make everything right in the prescribed order of things, Yeshua had to be anointed for His office. Before He could assume the office of *Goel* and *Mashiach*, He had to be immersed, anointed. We pointed out earlier some of the different offices which required immersion before entering. To be *Mashiach*, an Anointed One, as were the kings of Israel, one had to be immersed. Yeshua's anointing was His immersion in the Jordan River by His cousin *Yochanan*, whom we know to be the second Elijah. In Matthew 11, Yeshua confirmed that John was Elijah for this generation. He said: 13 "For all the prophets and the Torah prophesied until the time of John. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 11: 13-15 TLV)!

Just as the Prophet Elisha was anointed by the Prophet *Eliyahu*, Elijah, at the Jordan River, Yeshua was anointed for His office at the Jordan by the second Elijah, John. We usually don't immediately see it, but it was Yeshua Himself, who went to John in order to be immersed by him. Verse 13 tells us that: 13 Then Yeshua came from the Galilee to John, to be immersed by him in the Jordan. It wasn't just an accidental thing. Yeshua knew that it was necessary. And, it couldn't have been anyone else. It had to be John. Both were required in order to fulfill everything which righteousness required, that is, what is right according to ADONAI's plans and standards. Yeshua's *tevillah*, His immersion, was necessary in order to receive His Father's divine approval.

16 After being immersed, Yeshua rose up out of the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and he saw the *Ruach Elohim* descending like a dove and coming upon Him (Matthew 3:16 TLV). In the TLV, the "He" in "He saw the *Ruach Elohim* descending" is capitalized. I have changed it to lower case because I believe that the "he" is John and not Yeshua. John was the one who saw the Spirit of G-d descending on Yeshua like a dove. The part about the dove is also interesting. Dove is a symbol which we use for the Holy Spirit, but I don't believe that the intent of these words were to picture the Spirit as a *yona*, a dove. My personal belief is that the *Ruach* descended gently upon Yeshua in the manner of a dove descending and landing on the earth. It was about how the *Ruach* descended and not about the physical appearance of the *Ruach*. ADONAI's Spirit coming upon Yeshua was another part of the fulfillment of righteousness, that He, Yeshua, who already possessed the Holy Spirit, received ADONAI's Spirit as confirmation of His anointing both as *Goel* and *Mashiach*. Yeshua, being the Son of G-d, had the *Ruach* before His immersion, but *tevillah*, immersion and the descent of the *Ruach* on Him was necessary in order to fulfill the requirement according to ADONAI's plan.

17 And behold, a voice from the heavens said, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17 TLV)! In the events of chapter 3, the last thing that we hear is ADONAI's voice. In Judaism, a voice coming from the heavens is referred to as a *bat kol*, literally, a daughter of a voice. If we analyze this verse, we find key phrases from the *Tanakh*. In the context of what we've just seen in the anointing and consecration of Yeshua as Messiah, it seems very likely that "My Son" refers to the Davidic king to whom ADONAI refers as His son in Psalm 2. 6 "I have set up My king upon Zion, My holy mountain." 7 I will declare the decree of Adonai. He said to me: "You are My Son— today I have become Your Father" (Psalm 2:6-7 TLV). We've already mentioned "the Servant" from Isaiah 42 and His part in the context in John's words, "a voice crying in the wilderness." "With whom I am well pleased" in the Father's statement may be a *remez* reference to Isaiah 42 which speaks of the Servant: 1 "Behold My servant, whom I uphold. My Chosen One, in whom My soul delights. I have put My Ruach on Him, He will bring justice to the nations"

(Isaiah 42:1 TLV). Yeshua is the Servant, ADONAI's Chosen One, the One in whom ADONAI delights; with whom He is well pleased. He has "put His Spirit in Him" is what has just happened; the Holy Spirit descending on Yeshua. The final phrase, "justice to the nations" is the charge of G-d's anointed, the Davidic King.

Matthew chapter 3 continues to be very Jewish. He uses *remez* and Scripture from the *Tanakh* to portray the anointing of Yeshua, the *Mashiach*, by the *Eliyahu* figure, the Elijah figure of that generation, John. The two are linked not only by their relationship as Messiah and Elijah, but also by their family relationship through their mothers. There is possibly much more to be discovered in their relationship when Yeshua returns. Here is a Scripture which we all should remember: *1 Then what is the advantage of being Jewish? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 2 Much in every way. First of all, they were entrusted with the sayings of God* (Romans 3:1-2 TLV). The "oracles" of G-d, or the sayings or utterances of G-d, are all of the Holy Scriptures. Not only were the Jews entrusted with them, but they wrote them in their own Hebraic way. To best understand ADONAI's message to us, we must seek to understand how it was originally written. The understanding is not to be found in modern plain language versions of the Bible. Seek to understand the underlying Jewishness of every book, Genesis to Revelation, and you will have a more complete understanding of ADONAI's message to us, His children, about our Messiah. *Shalom aleichem and shalom shalom!*