

Adult Wed. P.M. Class

September 16, 2020 – December 09, 2020

A Character Study: The Apostle Peter

Our aim for Westside bible classes are to always be immersed in God's word to get a better understanding of who God is, and what his will is for us as a people and as individuals and what our roles are in his kingdom, his holy church. So to do that we examine both Old and New Testaments, because the key to having a strong knowledge of New Testament doctrine is to have an even stronger understanding of Old Testament bible history. Jesus Christ is always the center of focus in our studies because Jesus is our personal Savior and has always been the chief representative of the Godhead to have direct contact with mankind, from the creation to the Garden of Eden, from choosing Abraham to make for himself a special people who have received his precious promises, to the giving of the Law to Moses and the Israelites, we study his interaction with them and how we learn from that history. We examine the prophecies and promises of a Savior who was to come, and then came, who redeemed us from sin to make it possible to one day have a home in heaven with him. He left for us his will and instructions to follow. In this study there is milk for the new babes in the Lord and meat for the mature. The study of types is interwoven in our study to give us a balanced diet of his word and how the two testaments are perfectly fit together to be one magnificent story of God's love for all mankind. As we walk through the bible in our Wednesday adult class, we will have our eyes focused on the Head of the church, our Blessed Jesus, and his disciple named Peter. Through Peter we will see that the Lord is able to take an ordinary 'working class stiff', who is filled with good traits and some flaws and turn him into a valuable asset in his kingdom. Through Peter we will learn that if God can use somebody like him to do great things, God can use us too; because there is a little bit of Peter in all of us. And God wants us to do great things, whether big or small for him, for his glory, honor and praise.

In the book of Malachi we are told the priesthood had failed in their mission and service to God so he cursed them. The final book of the Old Testament closes with a prophecy about what will happen at the start of the Christian era. Malachi, the last of the O.T. prophets gives the Israelites and in particular the remnant of Jews and Benjamites who returned from captivity in Babylon, hope.

Malachi 3:1, 4:5,6

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty."

"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

The gospel writers quoted from Isaiah concerning John the Baptist, which we will see later.

In this study, we will look at the same events in the different gospels, because often, each retelling of the event reveals something else that wasn't mentioned by the other, giving us a little bit larger picture as to what was going on.

Luke is the only gospel writer to tell us of Jesus and John's birth in detail.

Luke 1:5-25 the birth of John (read)

Vs.5: Good writers or historians of old would mark the events by the life or times of a principle person, or ruler.

Herod king of Judea, aka, Herod the Great 37-4 BC, was ruler at the time.

Vs.6: Luke points out Zacharias and Elizabeth are of the same tribe, Levi and of Aaron's bloodline. They were up right /righteous and blameless before God.

Vs.7: "Well along in years" doesn't mean they were old and wrinkled. Scriptures show that Zacharias couldn't have been over 50 years old because he was actively performing the duties of the priest's office, and they could not be performed beyond that age. God first set it up that the Levite would enter the service training at the age of twentyfive years old. At thirty years old they would enter into the service to actively work in the temple on their own.

After fifty, God retired them, they couldn't do that work any longer but they could be in the temple to pray, sing, praise and teach. Examine Numbers 4:3, 8:23-26, David changes start age (1 Chr. 23:24.)

Since Zachariah was actively serving he had to be under fifty years old, so Elizabeth was probably around the same age and barren.

King David divided up the priests into 24 groups, (courses or divisions) to better serve in the daily temple worship. (1 chron.24: 1-19, 2 Chron.8: 14) Zacharias was of the 8th course, Abijah. The priests would cast lots (Pro.16:33, Acts 1:26) to see what duties they would perform that day. (Burn incense, change the showbread, attend the fire on the alter etc.) The lot fell to Zacharias to serve in the sanctuary by burning incense (Ex.30:7-8).

He'd would enter the Holy Place twice daily, before and after the morning and evening sacrifices. This was a great honor for him to be picked by God, and we see God's providence at work through the casting of lots. God chose Zachariah and Elizabeth for a special purpose that was to be announced by the angel Gabriel. This angel appears to him in the Holy Place in the temple.

The angel Gabriel appears to Zacharias and makes 7 points.

1. He would have a son to be named John (the Lord has shown favor)
2. The son would bring joy to them and many will rejoice
3. He is to take the Nazarite vow (Num.6: No wine or strong drink [Gr.sikera:non-grape strong drink] no cutting of hair like Sampson & Samuel)
4. The son would be great in the sight of God

5. The son would be gifted by the spirit from the womb
6. He will bring back many to the Lord
7. He will go before the Lord in the "spirit" of Elijah preparing the people's hearts for the Messiah.

Vs.18: Zacharias though happy, showed doubt by questioning the angel as to "how can I be sure?"

Vs.19: Gabriel's gives testimony of who he is, and that he stands in the presence of God. In Daniel 9:24-27, it is he who explains the vision of 70 weeks, the prophecy of the coming Messiah, and here he announces coming the birth of the Messiah.

Gabriel's sign (punishment) to him was being a mute till John's naming.

Vs.22: When he finally comes out, the people knew Zacharias saw a vision.

Vs.24-25: Elizabeth became pregnant and secluded herself for five months. She said, "God looked on me with favor and took away my disgrace among men." God miraculously blessed her womb as he did Sara, Rachel and Hannah and soon to bless Mary's as well.

Luke 1:26-38, the birth of Jesus foretold (Read)

Vs.26: Here, time is in reference to Elizabeth's pregnancy, "In the 6th month". With this we know that John, Jesus relative, is 6 months older than he. Gabriel sent by God to Nazareth.

Vs.27: The angel Gabriel goes to Miryam (Mary) a virgin who is engaged to Yosef (Joseph) a descendent of King David.

Vs.28: Gabriel, "Greetings favored one, the Lord is with you!" "Blessed are you among women." Mary is not to be exalted, or worshipped; Luke 11:27 -28 "On the contrary blessed are those who hear the word and obey it."

Vs.29-30: Mary was perplexed/troubled: aggitaded with alarm, the angel could tell and calms her down, "Do not be afraid Mary..."

Vs.31: He makes 3 points in this verse; she would conceive in her womb, she was going to be impregnated; she would have a son; she was to name him Yeshua (Jesus) which means YHWH saves.

Vs.32-33: Gabriel makes several more points: He will be great; he'll be called Son of the Most High; God himself will give him the throne of David his father and he will reign forever. (Ps.132:11)

Vs.34: Mary's question to the angel is a legitimate question, asked in a child like spirit, "How will this be since I am a virgin?"

Vs.35: The angel does not punish her like he did to Zacharias, but explains to her what would happen. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

This image of 'overshadowing' is always used of divine power and used in the same sense as when the Spirit hovered over the water at creation (Gen.1:2) and when the cloud would fill the tabernacle (Num.10:34) and the same sense as when the cloud came over those who witnessed the transfiguration of Christ on the mountain top (Lk.9:34).

So by the power of God, Mary became immediately 'with child', supernaturally and for that reason the child is holy and called the Son of God.

This child is the answer to prophecies and promises. He will be the one to crush the head of the evil one (Gen.3:15), he is the 3rd promise to Abraham, the one who would bless all nations (Gen.12:3, 22:18, Gal.3:16) and to David that from his seed would come a king who's throne would last forever (2 Sam.7:12-13)

Vs.36: Gabriel gives Mary a sign, relative Elisheva (Elizabeth) who is old and barren has conceived a son and is 6 months along.

Vs.37: Encouragement for all mankind; nothing is impossible with God. (Gen.18:14 God's word to Sara about the birth of Isaac)

Vs.38: Mary shows great humility and submission to God's will. 'Bondslave', 'may it be done to me according to your word.'

Mat. 1:18-25 Joseph visited by an angel (read)

Vs.18: Joseph and Mary were "betrothed", "pledged", like being engaged. In O.T. times, it was regarded as being married, though the official ceremony had not taken place. Before they came together, (no sexual relations between Mary and Joseph) Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit. Mary, being young would still have lived with her parents.

Vs.19: We are not told if Mary told Joseph all that the angel told her to explain her pregnancy or if he just noticed her having a tell-tale prego profile but he realized she was carrying a child and decided to divorce her quietly. Joseph was a righteous and decent man, he didn't want to shame her or have her stoned for adultery.(Dt.22:23-24)

Vs.20: God knew Joseph's thoughts and sent an angel to tell him in a dream it's God's plan of salvation. The angel mentions Joseph's bloodline being of David's seed, because most people in that line were hopeful of this moment, and that he should not be afraid to take his wife Mary; that the child is from the Holy Spirit.

Vs.21: She will have a son, and to be named Yeshua because he will save his people from their sins. Yahweh saves.

Vs.22-23: The narrator Luke tells us this took place to fulfill Is.7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Vs.24: Joseph did as told and married Mary

Vs.25: They had no relations till after the child was born and Joseph named him Jesus. Some religions elevate Mary to a status of deity and that she remained a virgin forever; this is a false teaching.

The Hebrew language is clear; the plural name for the Godhead is Elohim and is masculine. In the comments earlier from Luke 1:28 in regard to Luke 11:27, when a woman exalts Mary, Jesus quickly contradicts her, and in this verse (25) the notion that she remained a virgin is debunked because the text says, "until after the birth of her son, so Luke implies by this language they did afterwards. (KJV & NKJV the Latin vulgate adds 'firstborn son', why? I don't know, Jerome was a translator, not an inspired writer, Lk.2:7?)

We infer from the text 'until after' means they did have normal husband wife relations. Mary and Joseph had children between them, Jesus had half brothers and sisters. We see that scripture tells us the sons names: James, Joseph, Simon and Judas and sisters (Mat 13:55-56, Mk.6:3) They argue that the word brother also means cousin, which it does not.

The Greek word for brother is: Adelphos: a brother literally or figuratively, and the Greek word for cousin is: Suggenes: cousin, kinsman or blood relative and is only used once in the N.T. of the relationship between Elizabeth and Mary (Lk.1:36) (that would also make John the Baptist and Jesus related, second cousins maybe?)

Luke 1:39-56, Mary's visit to Elizabeth. Read

Vs.39: Mary leaves right away, for a city in Judea where Levites lived, possibly Hebron or Juttah. We are not told if she went alone or went with her parents.

Vs.40-41: When Mary arrives, she greets Elizabeth and the baby leaped in her womb and Holy Spirit fills her and she prophesies.

Vs.42: Elizabeth prophesies about Mary, she could not have known Mary's condition otherwise. (the Spirit: Joel 2:28-29)

Vs.43-45: Honored the mother of her Lord was visiting her. Relays to Mary that when she heard her voice the baby leaped in her womb.

This acknowledges what Gabriel told her about her relative being with child. She then blesses her for her belief in what was foretold her by the angel. (at that point you could almost imagine Elizabeth shooting Zachariah a look)

Vs.46: Mary breaks out in song of praise to God. AKA Mary's magnificat. She magnifies or praises God. Many similarities to Hannah's song of praise to God (1 Sam.2:1-10)

Vs.47: Rejoices in God her Savior

Vs.48: Recognizes that God has blessed her in her lowly position, and that all generations would honor her as being blessed by God.

Vs.49-56: Praise to God and how he opposes the proud and lifts up his servant Israel, bestowing mercy and grace thru Abraham. Mary stays with Elizabeth for 3 months, so Elizabeth just gave birth or is close to giving birth when Mary returns home. (58?)

Luke 1:57-80 John's birth, read.

Vs.57: Elizabeth gives birth to John, neighbors and family are happy.

Vs.58: Neighbors and relatives knew God blessed her womb. Great Joy

Vs.59-64: On the 8th day according to the law, the baby was circumcised. They did not believe Elizabeth when she said his name "He is to be called John." No relatives by that name. They deferred to Zacharias. Zacharias writes it down and gets his voice back.

Vs. 65-66, "and fear came on all who dwelt round about them. Fear-religious awe and amazement. All of these matters were talked about by everyone in the region, they were thinking about it acknowledging the Lord was with the child, what will he be? News spread.

Vs.67: Zacharias was filled with Holy Spirit and praises God prophesying about John and Jesus.

Points in Zacharias prophecy.

1. God is happy to redeems His people
2. He keeps His promises; his covenant with Abraham and raised up a horn of salvation Gen.12:3, Ps.18:2
3. He enables them to serve him in holiness and righteousness without fear, no worry of enemies
4. John will be a prophet of the Most High
5. John is the forerunner of Christ to prepare the people
6. John will teach salvation/forgiveness of sins
7. John will be the bringer of light Is.9:1-2

John grows up physically and spiritually, and living in seclusion in the desert till his public ministry.

Luke 2:1-20 the birth of Jesus. Read

Vs.1-3: Around 6 months after John's birth, a decree went out from the first of the Roman emperors, Caesar Augustus of Rome that an census/enrollment was to be conducted in the Roman Empire. What was required was that everyone had to register in their hometowns.

Vs.4-5: Joseph and Mary left Nazareth and went to Bethlehem, being descendants of David's. (Bethlehem: house of bread/City of David) to register there. 5 miles south of Jerusalem.

Vs.6-7: Mary gives birth to Jesus in the most humble of circumstances, no room at the inns, used a manger. Fulfilling prophecy the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. (Mic.5: 2-4) 1st born son- privileges and consecration to God. (John 1:14 the Word became flesh)

Vs.8-17:Angelic announcement to the shepherds: Today in the City of David *is born for you* a Savior who is Christ the Lord. The angel gives them a sign how to identify him (swaddling clothes/manger). Then a multitude of angels appeared praising God.

"Let's go straight to Bethlehem to see..." The shepherds found the place where the Holy family was staying, praised God, and told them all what happened to them and what was said by the angels.

Vs.18: All who heard wondered...others were there to witness the shepherds testimony concerning the infant.

Vs.19: Mary treasured and pondered these things in her heart.

Vs.20: Shepherds return home glorifying God for all that was told them. Do you think they kept the matter to themselves?

Luke 2:21-40 Jesus presented at the temple

Vs.21: On the 8th day, Jesus was presented at the temple, circumcised and given the name Jesus. YHWH Saves

Vs.22-24: After the 40-day purification, they went back to Jerusalem to present Jesus to the Lord, being the first-born son. (Ex.13:2, Lev.12: 1-8, 1st born son dedicated to God) (Girl 80-day purification)

Joseph and Mary fulfilled all the requirements of the law concerning Jesus. (Lev: 12:6-8, offer 1yr. Lamb, or 2 turtledoves, they were poor and offered 2 turtledoves)

Vs.25: Introducing Simeon, righteous and devout, possibly one of the many 'retired priests' who were often busy in the temple, he was **looking** for the consolation of Israel. He was filled with God's Spirit.

Vs.26: Spirit told him he would see the Messiah before his death.

Vs.27: Simeon was guided by Holy Spirit when Mary and Joseph came into the temple to carry out the custom of the law.

Vs.28-32: He takes the baby in his arms and blesses God and prophecies about Jesus; 1.) Your Salvation, in the presence of all peoples, 2.) he'll be a light of revelation to the gentiles, 3.) and be the glory of the people of Israel. Now he can 'depart in peace'.

Vs.33 Mary & Joseph 'amazed at what was said about their baby.

Vs.34: Simeon blesses them and gives this parting revelation about the child: 1.) 'fall of many'; Is.8:14, Mat.21:42,44, Rom.9:33, 2.) 'the rise of many', Rom.6:4, Eph.2:6, 3.) 'a sign to be opposed', think of the sign posted on the cross- Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews and how the Jewish leaders greatly opposed it, and how even today many worldly scholars and the most of the Jewish leadership still reject him as the Messiah, that is what is meant.

Vs.35: and the last points being that Mary would witness the cruel death of her son and that experience would be as agonizing to her even as to the sword that was plunged into Jesus' side it was as if it was also plunged into her soul.

The thoughts of many hearts being revealed is seen in the choosing whether to believe in the Christ or reject him. These words though seemingly harsh are actually able to soften the blow when for her when it does happen.

Vs.36: Enter Anna, a prophetess, a widow most of her life, she is now the second witness for God to confirm what has been told them about Jesus.

Vs.37-38: Anna dedicated her life to worshipping God with prayer and fasting. So this tells us that all this took place in the 'court of the women' in the temple. Thanks God and witnesses for Christ.

Vs.39-40: They returned to Nazareth in Galilee, and Jesus grew and became strong; filled with wisdom and God's grace was on him.

Vs.41-42: Every Passover, they went to Jerusalem. Jesus was twelve.
Vs.43: After Passover Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. Parents were unaware. Joseph was still living.

Vs.44-47: A day's journey out they realized Jesus wasn't with them. Second day, arrive in the city and looked for him. Third day they found him with the teachers in the temple court. He amazed them with his questions and understanding.

Vs.48-52: Astonished/anxious. Why have you treated us this way? Why were you looking for me? Did you not know I had to be in my Father's *house*? They didn't understand his statement. He was in subjection to them and he grew in wisdom, stature and favor with God and men.

Read Matthew 2:1-12

Vs.1-2: Jesus was born in Bethlehem of *Judea*, distinguished from Bethlehem of Zebulun (Josh.19: 15) around 6-5 B.C.

Time marked in reference to King Herod. Herod the Great, son of Antipater, appointed by Caesar as Procurator of Judea. He was an Idumean or Edomite, a relative to Esau.

Wise men from the east, the magi, went to Jerusalem, which is the main religious center, so they inquired there as to the new born king's location. They were expecting people to know about this. Magi were of a priestly cast of the Babylonians, Persians and Medes.

Many believe that they were of the remnant of Jews who stayed behind, like Daniel did, in the east after the seventy year punishment from God. That could explain why they were aware of a Messiah to be born in Israel in the first place. They were learned men who were often administrators in their country and their field of study was medicine, astrology and natural science.

We were not told there were 3 of them or if they had an entourage with them; perhaps that number was assigned to them due to the number of gifts presented to Jesus.

They saw His star: not Halley's comet (12-11 B.C.) some think maybe it was the conjunction of planets; Mars, Saturn and Jupiter that happened in the years

7-6 B.C. It could have been a supernatural star, see vs.9, 'it went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the child was.'

Num. 24:17, Balaam's prophecy; a star will come out of Jacob, a scepter out of Israel. (Balak/Moab)

The wisemen asked, "Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? We have come to worship him." The idea of worshipping the new king also lends to the idea that they were Jews, otherwise they would have simply honored him.

Vs.3: this troubled Herod, and *all Jerusalem with him*. Remember the comments earlier about Herod, he had ten wives, and had no reservations killing his own sons if he felt threatened in any way. The people in the city were stirred up with this news, adding to the excitement for the much awaited Messiah.

So now the surrounding regions and the people of the city are all talking about the many strange events that have taken place of late.

Vs.4: Herod assembles the learned men, the chief priests and scribes and finds out where the King is to come from.

Vs.5-6: Micah 5:2, Bethlehem.

Vs.7: Herod secretly tries to use the wise men to get an exact time the star appeared.

Vs.8: He shares with them where the child would be and under false pretense asks the wisemen to report back to him when they find him.

Vs.9-10: They leave Herod's presence and follow the star where it stopped at Joseph and Mary's house. They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

Vs.11-12: Upon seeing Mary and the child they fell on the ground and worshiped the Messiah. They presented him with treasure of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The wise men were warned in a dream by God not to go back to Herod, they left by another route back to their country.

Mat.2:13-15 Read

Vs.13: Upon the wise-men's departure an angel gives specific orders to Joseph to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus until further notice because Herod was going to murder him. God's providence was at work, the money that the Magi gave them made this trip and stay in Egypt possible.

Vs.14: No pondering, deliberating or debating, Joseph was faithful to the message and they left that night.

Vs.15: The Holy Family stayed in Egypt until Herod's death.

This was to fulfill what was spoken by God through the prophet Hosea, "Out of Egypt I called my son." This was an antitype/type. The type being Jacob and family being sent to and called from Egypt. The antitype fulfilled here.

Read Matthew 2:16-23

Vs.16-18: Herod was enraged when he saw that he was tricked by the magi, what did he expect from magicians? So he commits infanticide. All the male babies 2 and under were murdered in and around the vicinity of Bethlehem.

(**Jer.31: 15**, "Yahweh says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.")

When Jeremiah wrote these words the first meaning was for that current time and is about the people of Ramah Judah, the area of Bethlehem, being massacred men, women and children, by the Babylonian army, the second meaning being fulfilled here as told by Matthew via the Spirit of God. These children were the 1st martyrs for Christ.

In either case, what does it have to do with Rachel, why is she inconsolable? O.T. history teaches us that Rachel was jealous for children of her own with Jacob. **Gen.30:1** says, "Give me children or else I'll die". And the reference here alludes to where Rachel died, and how she died. As she was giving birth to her second son, she died in child birth.

Genesis 35:18-19 (NRSV)

"As her soul was departing (for she died), she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)", Ben-oni means 'son of my sorrow'. That is why Rachel was weeping for the children in both time periods.

Vs.19-20: They were in Egypt until Herod's death which happened shortly afterwards (a couple months), he had a most unpleasant death, caused by kidney disease and Fournier's Gangrene. In 4 B.C. April 1. Archelaus his son succeeded him the next day. A 3rd dream where an angel of God tells Joseph to go back to Israel because Herod is dead. (**Hos.11:1**, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.")

Vs.21-22: When Joseph learned Herod's son, Archelaus succeeded him he was afraid, so God warned him in a dream to move his family to Nazareth, Galilee rather than Bethlehem.

Vs.23: This was to fulfill what the prophets said, "He will be called a Nazarene."

Nazareth was not mentioned in the O.T. But that's not to say that one of the many minor/ or unrecorded prophets didn't say this. Isaiah 11:1, "A shoot will come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots will bear fruit." may allude to the location of Nazareth, since Nazareth means "shoot or branch".

Now let's look at John the Baptist's work in the 4 gospels. Matthew 3:1-17, Mark 1: 1-11, Luke 3: 1-22, John 1: 15, 19-34

First read Mat.3:1-17

Vs.1: John started his public service to God at about 30 years of age, in the Judean wilderness. (Don't forget; at 25, Levites started their training under the older Levites as pupils. At 30, Levites were to enter their service in the temple. At 50 they stopped their service. (Num.8: 24,25))

John preached for nearly 2 years, 1 year simultaneously during the start of Christ's ministry. John had been empowered by Holy Spirit since birth. He is the forerunner of the Christ, preparing the people for the coming of their Holy King and Messiah.

Vs.2: His message was, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repent comes from the Greek word, *metanoein*. It is a compound of two Greek words, "meta", which means "after, with", and the Greek verb, *noeo*, which means to perceive or to think. The compound word means, "to think differently after." (H.Leo Boles)

Vs.3: By John actively preaching is the fulfillment of Is. 40:3
"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

Vs.4: He wore a camel hair garment and leather belt, and he ate wild honey and locusts. The poorest of the people would gather the shed fur of camels and make a coarse cloth.

The leather belt was most likely an untanned skin of an animal. The poor people would gather locusts and eat them, even as they do today. This was permissible under the law because they were considered a clean insect. (Lev.11: 22) Honey was abundant in the "land that flowed with milk and honey", that is what John ate.

He lived a life of self-denial (asceticism) he lived in poverty. John's whole life had been consecrated to God, with the Nazarite vow.

Vs.5-6: People were flocking to him, confessing their sins and being baptized in the Jordan river. John is the first to use the ordinance of baptism by the command of God. (Mat. 21:25) This was full immersion baptism.

The Greek word "baptizo" means immerse. *Bapto* means to dip, and the root *baph* means bath. Unlike most of the prophets of old, he preached in the wilderness, rather than go to Jerusalem. The people came to hear him.

Vs.7: He calls out the Pharisees and Sadducees, 'you brood of vipers... '

They were representatives of the Jewish leadership, John calls them a 'brood of vipers'; meaning their fathers were vipers before them and they were their offspring bearing the same traits; their teaching of (Judaism (Mat.15:19) and hypocrisy) and their influence over the people, were like the poison of vipers.

Jesus likewise said of them,

Mat 12:34 "You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks."

Mat 23:33 "Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"

Joh 8:44 "You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and doesn't stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks on his own; for he is a liar, and the father of lies."

It is interesting that Jesus implies they are the 'seed of the serpent'. By calling Satan, the devil, their father, remember the curses in the garden of Eden? "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel."

The woman's seed represents the Messiah and his church, Satan's seed represents Satan, his demons and wicked men.

So John and Jesus are both saying that the Pharisees and Sadducees and the Jewish leadership are of Satan's seed, those who oppose the Messiah's mission; and will be crushed under the Messiah's heel.

..."Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

The coming wrath is twofold here, first, the destruction of Jerusalem is just on the horizon. That will bring an end to Jewish Old Testament religion and second, much farther down the timeline is the Messiah's second coming that will bring about the destruction of the world, Satan and his angels and all who reject the gospel.

Vs.8: "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance."

Though this message was directed at the Pharisees and Sadducees, it applies to all who repent. Bearing fruit is evidence of a changed heart and evidence of being a disciple (John 15:8), A fruit can be fruits of the Spirit; Gal.5:22-23, Mat.7:16-19, which is evidence of a change in character and fruits can be good works, Eph 2:10 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.'

And fruits can be turning others around from sin, back to God.

Proverbs 11:30 (NIV) The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise. **James 5:19-20 (NIV)** My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Luke's account of this gives us more detail as to what John considers good fruits of repentance.

Luke 3:10-14 (NASB)

And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." And *some* tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to."

Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And *what about us*, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse *anyone* falsely, and be content with your wages."

Vs.9: Having the Spirit John knew their thoughts and took their false assumption away from them before they could even say it, the assumption that they are saved just because of family lineage, being children of Abraham by birth. They used that argument with Jesus later (Jn.8:31-59), but true children of Abraham are spiritual children, this applies to Jews and gentiles,

Galatians 3:26-29 (NASB)

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.”

It is a spiritual relationship, not one of ancestry. You may have realized that **we** are 'children of Abraham' but did you ever see yourself as a 'spiritual Jew'? (Rom. 2:23-29) And to drive the point home how useless their argument would be, he says, 'God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones'.

Vs.10: “The ax is already laid at the root of the trees;” This verse has a dual meaning and is prophetic in nature concerning judgment. The first and most obvious is meant for **all people** everywhere, to repent and believe in the Son of God who comes after him. If they reject him, or if they believe but do not produce fruit for the Lord, they will be destroyed in the final judgment with unquenchable fire.

'The ax is already' means the clock is ticking for judgment day. It began at the start of John's ministry, when the command was spoken by him for the people to repent, and a response is to be made by the people, which is to obey the command, to repent, be baptized and believe in the one who comes after John, that is; the Messiah.

The second meaning was that a judgment upon the Jewish Nation and religious system would soon take place in 70 A.D..

The Jewish people had already broken covenant with God during the time of the kings, and they were punished for that by being carried away into captivity for seventy years.

Zechariah the prophet said in chapter 11:8-10 that since the people broke covenant with God, God broke the covenant with them. And during that same time Jeremiah the prophet said in chapter 31:31 that God would one day make a new covenant with them.

But the Jewish leadership did not bear the fruit of love and righteousness God was waiting for, and most of them rejected the gospel John was preaching to them because most of them did not get baptized by him. (Luke 7:30)

So in this verse, Rome would be the ax that God uses to strike the roots of the trees, the trees being the old Jewish religious system; the temple, the priesthood, and the Law. Striking the roots would make it impossible for the tree to come back to life. Jerusalem was leveled by Titus in 70 AD.

Vs.11-12: John here clarifies part of his mission, "I baptize you with water for repentance." Then tells them in so many words that the one who comes after him is greater than he and giving the sense that Jesus is the true object of our attention, obedience, adoration and worship.

John makes an analogy between their works, as John baptizes for repentance; making the people ready for the Messiah, Jesus the Messiah would baptize '*you*' with the Holy Spirit and fire. Who gets these baptisms? '*You*' do.

The obvious questions that may be asked are; does '*you*' mean all of them present in John's audience? Or does it mean some of the '*you*' in his audience? Does '*you*' mean all people who will hear the Lord? Or some of those who hear the Lord? So, does '*you*' mean '*all*' or does it mean '*some*'?

Then you may ask; will the 'you' receive both Holy Spirit baptism and fire baptism? Or just one or the other? On the surface it seems like John made a straight forward statement that applies to all, but as you ponder it, it becomes more and more ambiguous.

So we must mine it out. How many baptisms are mentioned in the bible? By my count there is seven, only 1 is valid now as mentioned by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians.

1- Eph. 4:5, "...one Lord, one faith, one baptism...", this is the baptism commissioned by Jesus Mat.28:19 " baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit", and with it we receive forgiveness of sins like John's baptism but different because we receive the gift of Holy Spirit as we see by John 7:39 "But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

2- John's baptism, was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and to prepare the people for the Messiah. Acts 19:1-5, " And finding some disciples 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." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?"

So they said, "Into John's baptism." 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." When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

So here we have an example of rebaptism, showing John's baptism was replaced by Christ's baptism and the difference being; it was done 'in the name of Jesus', and; they received the Holy Spirit.

3- A baptism of suffering or death. This is a term used in the figurative sense that Jesus used to describe what he was about to go through at the hands of the Jewish leaders and the Romans to James and John, after their request to sit next to him in heaven. It is just as figurative as his description, 'drinking the same cup'

Mar 10:38 'But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" It's not commanded by God.

4- Baptism for the dead. As we went over in our 'elementary teachings' class on the resurrection, Paul mentions as part of his argument in defense of Christ being raised from the dead, sites a practice that ignorant people were doing based on a false teaching, while speaking in the 3rd person, meaning it was not authorized by God or approved by him, those people were doing this in hope that someone could be credited with a post-mortem baptism done vicariously by a living person.

It can't be done! Where is the hearing and believing? Where is the repentance and confession? It is as useless as infant baptism, which is not authorized in the bible either!

5- Baptized into Moses. This was mentioned by Paul in 1st Corinthians 10:1-4, " Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."

This was an Old Testament type/antitype exercise that Paul made concerning the Messiah who would be the Antitypes, and the things the Israelites experienced in the exodus out of Egypt as the types.

The Angel of the Lord, who was the preincarnate Messiah, the second figure of the Godhead, and Great I Am was the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, protecting them from harm and giving them peace and security, he was the Spiritual Rock that provided them with water for life and provided the manna to eat.

So Israel was baptized into Moses and the law, and we are baptized into Christ and his covenant. This baptism does not apply to us, just Israel.

6- Baptism of the Holy Spirit. This was an exclusive two time event. The first time was upon the twelve apostles in Acts 2. Jesus told the apostles after their commission, "Do not depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," *He said*, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Act 2:2-4 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The second was the gentile Cornelius and his household. It was a special message from God that the Gentiles were to be included into his fold. Peter gives us a synopsis of that. Act 11:16-18 'And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.

Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave* us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

Those were the only two such recorded times that happened. Plenty of people were recorded being saved that were baptised and received the Spirit in between those times; but only these two had a loud sound like violent rushing wind, and tongues of fire that divided and rested upon each one of them and they started speaking in tongues. It didn't happen to the 3,000 or the Samaritans, or Simon the magician or the Ethiopian eunuch or even Saul.

God got the apostles attention better this way than using a giant flashing neon sign that read, "Go Save the Gentiles!"

Peter had to think back to when *they* received this special anointing because it was the only other time it happened, and has not happened since, since we have no record of it.

7- Baptism of fire. This baptism nobody wants. This is the eternal punishment after final judgment. John uses two metaphors to describe this baptism, the first; in verse 11, the ax that cuts the unfruitful tree down and is thrown into the fire. And second; in verse 12, when the Lord gathers his wheat into the barn but burns up the chaff with unquenchable fire. There is no doubt this refers to hell.

Revelation 21:8 (KJV)

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

So the wicked and unfruitful and unbeliving get the baptism of fire.

So to the best of my understanding after reviewing all the different baptisms, the 'you' John is speaking to are all people for all time who fall into either two classes of people, the hearers and the deaf, those who see and those who are blind, the obedient and the disobedient, the faithful and the unfaithful, the believers and the disbelievers, the doers of the word and those who do not.

Jesus too speaks in these terms like John giving warning after warning to flee from the coming wrath- the baptism of fire. Is it any wonder that the baptism that saves us through water is also the very thing that can put eternal fire out?