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THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
IMPLICIT IN THE PROCLAMATION OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST

A Thesis presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of New Testament Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

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¹ Matt. 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking figures presented to the reader of the gospel accounts is that of the forerunner of the Messiah, commonly called John the Baptist. Although the account of his life and message consumes only a relatively small portion of each of the four gospels, it is nevertheless an extremely important part for in it we find the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament era.

When we study the message of John as it is related in each of the gospels we find that the climax of his message appears in the announcement of the coming one who shall baptize with the Holy Ghost.¹ In two of these, the accounts of Matthew and Luke, we have the addition of the phrase "and with fire." The fact that this announcement appears at the end of his proclamation in each of the gospels points to it as the climax of his message. It came as an answer to the questions which were directed to John after his opening message with its exhortations to repentance, questions which in the final analysis demanded an answer

¹Matt. 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33.

to the searching question, "Are you the Christ?"²

It is at this point that the ministry of John is brought to its completion, pointing men forward to the one who is now to hold their attention, the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

The fact that the passage "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire" is very difficult to interpret to the satisfaction of all who consider it is attested to by its frequent occurrence in the Bible classes, on radio programs which attempt to answer questions on Biblical problems sent in by listeners, and by the varying interpretations which have been given on occasions such as these. The answers of course only reflect the various interpretations which are found in commentaries treating the subject.

There are principally five interpretations which have been proposed for the clarification of this passage. The first is that John is here really referring to only one thing, a cleansing by fire. This school of interpretation maintains that the passage must be interpreted in the light of the thought and environment present at the time the words were spoken. In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Alexander Bruce ably represents this group. He says:

Notable here are the words $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \pi\nu\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\mu\alpha\tau\iota\ \acute{\epsilon}\chi\acute{\epsilon}\omega$. They

²Luke 3:15.

must be interpreted in harmony with John's standpoint, not from what Jesus proved to be, or in the light of St. Paul's teaching on the Holy Spirit as the immanent source of sanctification. The whole baptism of the Messiah as John conceives it, is a baptism of judgment. It has been generally supposed that the Holy Spirit here represents the grace of Christ, and the fire of His judicial function; not a few holding that even the fire is gracious as purifying. I think that the grace of Christ is not here at all. The $\pi\tau\epsilon\tau\alpha\delta\ \&\ \chi\lambda\omicron\upsilon\gamma$ is a stormy wind of judgment; holy, as sweeping away all that is light and worthless in the nation (which after the Old Testament manner is conceived of as the subject of Messiah's action, rather than the individual). . . . John . . . thinks of three elements as representing the functions of himself and of Messiah: water, wind, fire. He baptises with water, in the running stream of Jordan, to emblem the only way of escape, amendment. Messiah will baptise with wind and fire, sweeping away and consuming the impenitent, leaving behind only the righteous.³

This view is also held by a number of other men, among whom Kraeling is one of the more important.⁴

The second interpretation which has gained much prominence is the view that John is here referring to Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples. The baptism of fire which John speaks of is supposed to be a prophecy with regard to the tongues of fire which appeared on the heads of those who were filled with the Spirit at this time. This is a view which has been quite generally held. Lenski, in particular, maintains that this view is

³Alexander Balmain Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," The Expositor's Greek Testament, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), I, 84.

⁴Carl H. Kraeling, John the Baptist (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 61.

correct.⁵

Two other views which have been presented as an interpretation of the passage are indicated in the quotation above. The first of these is that "the Holy Spirit" symbolizes the grace of Christ while the word "fire" represents his judicial function. The second is a variation of this view in that the fire as well as the Spirit is considered as gracious since it is a purifying element.⁶

A fifth interpretation which has been proposed is that the Holy Spirit represents the grace of Christ while fire is understood to represent the fiery trials which await the disciple who accepts Christ's baptism.⁷

Of the views presented above, the first has been rejected by nearly all commentators on the basis of the fact that Holy Spirit is not taken in the sense of Holy Wind in either the Old or the New Testament. The second has also been rejected by some on the grounds that few, if any, of the Baptist's hearers were among those who received the

⁵R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1954), p. 27.

⁶Marcus Dods, "The Gospel of St. John," The Expositor's Greek Testament, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), I, 84.

⁷Alfred Plummer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke," The International Critical Commentary (4th edition; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1901), p. 95.

Spirit at Pentecost and the fact that *Kai πνεύλι* is not added in Acts 1:5.⁸ All interpretations have, however, been retained by some exegetes.

The primary purpose of this thesis will not be to determine the correct interpretation of this entire phrase, but to determine what the hearers of John understood when he announced "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

A secondary purpose of this thesis will be to arrive at a clearer understanding of the concept of the Holy Spirit. While we may not be in the position of the "disciples of John" of Acts 19, our ideas on the subject of the Holy Spirit are at least in many instances very vague. In this thesis it will be shown that the position and message of John demands that we use the Old Testament as the starting point for an interpretation of his proclamation. Before we can come to a clear understanding of the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, we must understand the instruction which is given on this subject in the Old Testament, for the former naturally assumes acquaintance with the latter. For a clear understanding of the doctrine of the Spirit in the Baptist's message we must determine what the thinking of the Jewish mind was on this subject at the time of John and our Lord.⁹

⁸Ibid.

⁹Henry Barclay Swete, The Holy Spirit in the New Testament (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1921), p. 1.

CHAPTER II

JOHN AS A PROPHET

In reading the sections of the New Testament which concern the life of John and his message, one thought stands out above all others: John was a prophet.¹ This was the fact which caused so great a stir among the people of the time. The Jewish nation which had been accustomed to the voice of prophets from the time of Samuel to the time of Malachi had not been privileged to hear a prophetic voice for the past three or four centuries. It is no wonder then that the breaking of this silence caused a thrill to run through the entire Jewish population.²

That John was to be an extraordinary person was evident already from the time of his birth and from the circumstances surrounding it. The announcement was made supernaturally. The birth itself was supranatural, in the sense that the

¹Ernst Lohmeyer, "Johannes der Täufer," Das Urchristentum (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1952), I, 3. Lohmeyer, while agreeing that John performed a prophetic function, appears to find the Baptist's connection with the Old Testament in the institution of the priesthood. He refers to John as the high priest of baptism and finds this priestly note in nearly everything which John says and does. This is particularly true of John's baptism, which he relates to the Old Testament offering.

²Alfred Plummer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke," The International Critical Commentary (4th edition; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1901), p. 80.

parents were at this time too old for reproduction. The sign given to his father, together with these facts, clearly pointed to this child as one who was to play a unique role in the history of his people.

In addition, it is clear that the parents were at times filled with the spirit of prophecy. It is evident in the visit of Mary to Elizabeth when she immediately recognized her as the mother of the Messiah.³ Again, it is shown in the words of the Psalm of Zacharias⁴ in which he prophesied, echoing the words of the angel Gabriel, whose message he had now grasped and could express in clearer terms.⁵

In the words of the angel, the keynote of the life of John had already been struck. His life was to be such as would reflect and bring to memory the lives of the Old Testament prophets and heroes. His was to be a life of abstinence, exhilarated by the Holy Spirit rather than by intoxicants, a life in this respect showing remarkable resemblance to that of Samson. Even more, he was to preach repentance with courage and force in the days of Herod as Elijah had done in the days of Ahab.⁶

³Luke 1:41-43.

⁴Luke 1:67-69.

⁵Henry Barclay Swete, The Holy Spirit in the New Testament (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1921), p. 14.

⁶Ibid., p. 13.

Moreover, the prophetic character of John is reflected in the description which is given of him in the gospels. The area of his work, the wilderness, recalls scenes from the Old Testament. It was here that God came to those who were to be his servants in a special sense. God met Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, Elijah under a juniper tree in the wilderness, and Amos in the wilderness of Tekoa. It is this phenomenon which makes the only possible answer to the question of Jesus, "But what went ye out for to see? A prophet?" the one which He Himself gives.⁷ In Jewish thought, both the prophet and the Messiah were closely associated with the wilderness.⁸

A further feature pointing to John as a prophet is the description of his personal appearance. While it may be true that the clothing of John was merely such as would fit the elementary requirements of the wilderness sojourn,⁹ it must also be admitted that there is a close resemblance between the description of the prophet Elijah and that which is given of John. The words used in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, 2 Kings 1:8, are almost identical

⁷Carl H. Kraeling, John the Baptist (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 29.

⁸Joachim Jeremias, "Der Ursprung der Johannestaufe," Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, XXVIII (Nov., 1929), p. 312.

⁹Kraeling, op. cit., p. 15.

with those found in Mark 1:6.¹⁰ From this very fact it would seem that the appearance of John is to recall the figure of the prophet Elijah.

The connection of John with men of the Old Testament is also brought out in the description of the food which sustained him in the wilderness. The fact that he partook of no strong drink and that his food consisted of locusts and wild honey would recall Samson to the mind of at least some of the Jewish people. The life of a Nazarite which John was leading would remind one of that well-known Nazarite Judge of Israel.

In spite of all these close resemblances, it cannot be stated with certainty that the clothing and food of John were chosen by him to bring his prophetic role and relation to Elijah before the people. We must agree with Kraeling who says:

That Mark and the other New Testament writers saw in the mantle and the girdle tokens of John's prophetic role and of his relation to Elijah is quite probable. For this they had other grounds and good and sufficient reason, but that John himself chose the garb in order to suggest prophetic authority and to conjure up allusions to Elijah is at least problematical.¹¹

This is also the opinion of Lohmeyer.¹²

¹⁰ 2 Kings 1:8: . . . και φώγην σερατιήνην περιεφωσμένον
την ὄσφην αὐτοῦ . . . ; Mark 1:6: . . . ἐνδεδυμένος τρίχας
καμηλοῦ και φώγην σερατιήνην περὶ τὴν ὄσφην αὐτοῦ.

¹¹ Kraeling, op. cit., p. 14.

¹² Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 50.

A more clear indication of John as a prophet in the Old Testament tradition is found in the call which came to John in the wilderness. Although it was a more comprehensive and important call than that which was received by the Old Testament prophets,¹³ it closely resembles that which they received. It is described in simple terms by Luke, ἔχενετο ῥῆμα θεοῦ ἐπὶ Ἰωάννην, and is the only allusion in the New Testament to the call of the Baptist. The words used show the relation to Biblical prophecy, for the phrase ῥῆμα θεοῦ is always used of a particular utterance as distinct from the general gospel message which is described as λόγος θεοῦ, and is the formula used in the Old Testament to express divine inspiration.¹⁴ The closest parallel to the call of John is that of Jeremiah which is described in the Septuagint, Jer. 1:1 as τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ ὃ ἔχενετο. In most other cases the preposition πρὸς is used rather than ἐπὶ.¹⁵ As the word had come to Jeremiah, Elijah, and the other prophets, so it now came to John, placing him in the line of the ancient prophets. From the day it came, Israel knew that it again had a prophet in John the Baptist.¹⁶ The call of John may have been more elaborate than that

¹³ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴ Plummer, op. cit., p. 85.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Swete, op. cit., p. 18.

reported in Luke,¹⁷ but since the gospels do not in any way indicate this, anything beyond that which is stated above is merely speculation.

Not only the call of John, but also his message places him squarely in the Old Testament tradition. His sayings concerning the threshing floor, the trees of the orchard, the brood of vipers bear directly on the theme of divine judgment, a theme which is prominent in all the prophets from Amos on.¹⁸ The very words occur in the Old Testament in such passages as Isaiah 41:15.16; 10:33.34; 61:3; Jer. 51:33; Psalm 1:3.

The arrangement of the words is also reminiscent of Old Testament prophecy. It is especially true of the words "spirit" and "forgiveness," and the idea of lustrations, which appear in close relation to one another in the Marcan account of the message of John the Baptist just as they appear together in Ezek. 18:31; 36:25-27. Taken together, the various parts of the message of John point him out as a bearer of prophecy. Again we quote Kraeling who says:

All these sayings have one thing in common. They represent not counsels of wisdom but rather the pronouncement of one who feels himself authorized to be a spokesman of God. They have about them the ring of authority. What they utter is threat, promise, and command. This means that they fall into the traditional

¹⁷Kraeling, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 38.

categories of prophetic speech as we know it from the Old Testament. With the pronouncements of the earlier days they share the vividness that comes from the use of metaphor (the winnowing fan, the threshing floor, the axe and the trees, the brood of vipers) and from the use of paradox (children from stones, baptism with Spirit). If they are rendered in prose rather than in the poetic form of so much of Israel's earlier prophecy, they do not by that token descend to the remoteness or copy the wild imaginings of contemporary apocalyptic writers. Their prose serves only to make them more direct and more and more brutally frank in character. That in words such as these many found the voice of prophecy reborn and bowed before its authority is readily intelligible.¹⁹

Not only the words, but also the spirit of the Old Testament prophets is found in the proclamation of the Baptist. One of the characteristics of the prophets was their break with the accepted customs and usages of the times. This is also true of John the Baptist. Like the prophets of old, he spoke words of warning at a time when the preoccupation with human affairs was supplanting the more important and lasting spiritual aspects and broke sharply and uncompromisingly with the tradition of the Jewish faith and people.²⁰

The reaction to the message of John was varied. Some accepted him, while others rejected him. It is clear, however, that the majority of the people received him as a prophet. The thoughts which the gospel attributes to the Pharisees as a result of the question of Jesus indicate that

¹⁹Ibid., p. 37.

²⁰Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 3.

this is true. We are told that "they reasoned with themselves . . . if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed."²¹ Even without this testimony, the accounts of the large crowds which came to him indicate their acceptance of him. Their desire for his baptism showed their belief in him as a prophet.²²

In the words of Jesus, John was a prophet, and more than a prophet. As a prophet, he, as well as the ancient prophets, prepared the way of the Lord, but he did it with greater directness and plainness of speech than any of the Old Testament prophets. He heralded the near approach of the Kingdom of Heaven.²³ His historical position was much like that of Moses who saw the promised land and spoke of it but did not enter it.²⁴ It formed a connecting link between the old order and the new order in which Jesus was to perform his ministry. Therefore, as one who prophesied before the beginning of the new order, we must look for the root and meaning of his message in the Old Testament. The close connection of John with prophetic tradition shows

²¹Mark 11:30-31.

²²Plummer, op. cit., p. 88.

²³C. J. Heuer, "Johannes der Täufer," Synodalberichte Minnesota Distrikts (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1912), p. 31.

²⁴Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 29.

that his message embodies a call to return to Old Testament righteousness.

Although the account of the proclamation of John varies in the gospels, the essential points in it are identical.¹ While the charge of Erasing that the evangelist John is not as reliable as the synoptists cannot be accepted as true, his view that the apostle telescopes the Baptist's utterance in perhaps correct.² For a more complete account of his message we must consult the synoptic gospels.

In his proclamation we find two concepts that are particularly rich in meaning and which summarize much of his message. These are the ideas of baptism and repentance. Since, as was noted in the previous chapter, John's message has its roots in the Old Testament, we must understand these terms in the light of the Old Testament.

Both ideas are clearly found in the writings of the prophets and often appear in the same immediate context. In the message of the Baptist they are so closely linked together that there is no doubt that they must be considered

¹It is quite evident that in a number of places in his gospel John presupposes a knowledge of the synoptic accounts.

²Carl H. Erasing, John the Baptist (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 30.

CHAPTER III

THE PROCLAMATION OF JOHN

Although the account of the proclamation of John varies in the gospels, the essential points in it are identical.¹ While the charge of Kraeling that the evangelist John is not as reliable as the synoptists cannot be accepted as true, his view that the apostle telescopes the Baptist's utterances is perhaps correct.² For a more complete account of his message we must consult the synoptic gospels.

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¹It is quite evident that in a number of places in his gospel John presupposes a knowledge of the synoptic accounts.

²Carl H. Kraeling, John the Baptist (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 34.

together and their meaning determined in this way.³

The idea of baptism occurs in the Old Testament in connection with regulations concerning ritual purification. All the ceremonial washings of the Jewish people contain the idea of purification as a preparation for appearance before the Lord. In the New Testament Jesus uses the word for baptism in connection with the purifying rites which the Pharisees practiced. A specific instance of purification of this sort recorded in the Old Testament is found in the act which Naaman performed at the command of Elisha. It appears that this idea of purification is present in the minds of the synoptists in connection with John's baptism⁴ as well as in the account of Josephus.⁵ Bernard feels that the baptism is also symbolical of dedication in view of the fact that Jesus submitted to it at the beginning of His ministry.⁶

The idea of baptism or lustration, however, also contained Messianic overtones in the Old Testament. The prophets certainly associated lustrations with the Messianic

³Ernst Lohmeyer, "Johannes der Täufer," Das Urchristentum (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1932), I, 74.

⁴J. H. Bernard, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John," The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), I, 51.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

era.⁷ We have only to think of such passages as Jer. 33:8; Ezek. 36:25; Isaiah 44:3; Zech. 12:10; 13:1; and Joel 1:33. The last passage cited is particularly important, for here not only a baptism or pouring out is indicated, but more specifically, a pouring out of the Spirit. It would appear that this passage is especially significant in an attempt to determine the meaning of John's climactic proclamation.

A third association to be considered in connection with the term "baptism" is the practice of proselyte baptism. That this is in part the meaning John's baptism is the view of such men as Williams⁸ and Schniewind.⁹ Such a view must, however, be approached with caution for there is very little evidence of such baptism in New Testament times. It may, nevertheless, be legitimate in view of the fact that references to such a custom appear in the Mishna and are not likely to have been introduced into Judaism after the appearance of the Christian baptism.¹⁰ In this case John's baptism would signify that the Jews were considered as

⁷Henry Barclay Swete, The Holy Spirit in the New Testament (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1921), p. 19.

⁸R. R. Williams, "Baptize," A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 27.

⁹Julius Schniewind, "Das Evangelium nach Matthäus," Das Neue Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1950), p. 24.

¹⁰Williams, op. cit., p. 27.

heathen in the sight of God and must undergo the moral and ritual cleansing which he proclaimed in order to be accepted into the Messianic community.¹¹

Repentance is one of the concepts which appears most frequently in the Old Testament. It is in this word that the connection of John the Baptist with the prophets appears most strongly. Kraeling, however, feels that we cannot look to this source to determine the meaning of the word but must rather seek its interpretation in historical probabilities. He, however, weakens his position and makes it untenable by the following admissions:

These two things have to be admitted in taking this adverse position. The first is that repentance is nowhere defined in the New Testament whether by John, Jesus, or the Christian writers. The second is that the God-fearing Jew can and does pray to the Lord to make him truly repentant, and thereby acknowledges his complete dependence on the divine initiative. Yet the first of these facts implies only that the nature and contents of repentance could be taken for granted because it was interpreted in traditional terms while the second suggests only a healthy reverence for God's assistance in all that man can achieve, and does not in the least imply the inability of the human will to assert itself actively, in this case to perform the act of repentance.¹²

As we have seen previously, John does follow in the prophetic line and it is therefore only logical that we should look to the Old Testament for a clear and correct interpretation. As they had done, so he broke with the accepted

¹¹Schniewind, op. cit., p. 24.

¹²Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3.

Jewish ideas and traditions and called for a return to the worship of God through repentance rather than mere ceremony.

Although Matthew is the only evangelist who records the command to repent, it is definitely implied in the accounts of the other synoptists.¹³ His message is much the same as that of the prophets who preceded him since it contains this command. Lohmeyer says:

Einst riefen alttestamentliche Propheten dem Volke zu: Kehret um! Was für einen Hosea, Jeremia und Andere Inhalt ihrer Prophetie war, das wäre es auch für diesen neuen Propheten. Busse ist dann der Entschluss des menschlichen Herzens, "den Sinn zu ändern" und aus seiner bisherigen Richtung zum Bösen in die entgegengesetzte zum Guten zu wenden.¹⁴

For these men repentance was not a work of man but was solely the work of God. It is God who turns a man to repentance¹⁵ or renews him¹⁶ and lays the ground for repentance.¹⁷ Repentance is not something which is created by the resolve of man to turn to God from his evil ways, but is an act of God dealing with men.¹⁸

Mark reports that John came preaching the baptism of repentance. From this two things may be gathered. The

¹³Kraeling, op. cit., p. 69.

¹⁴Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 67.

¹⁵Ezek. 36:26.

¹⁶Psalms 51:10.

¹⁷Psalms 19:7.

¹⁸Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 69.

first is that not only repentance, but also the baptism of John was a gift and revelation from God. The second, that these two words are without doubt to be considered together. The grammatical construction is clearly indicated in the latter, while the former is also attested to by the question which Jesus addressed to the Pharisees and the answer which is implied.¹⁹ The fact that these words must be taken together is of great significance. The baptism is called a baptism of repentance and thereby signifies that in and with this baptism God converts men.²⁰

In spite of all this, however, it must not be said that John proclaimed a new birth with his baptism. If this were true, nothing would be left for the coming one whose way he was preparing. Rather, his baptism had an eschatological meaning. It was a proto-type of the Spirit baptism which was to come and of Him who was to baptize with the Spirit. Again we quote Lohmeyer, who says:

Sie ist nur Weg, noch nicht Ziel, nur Zeichen, noch nicht Wirklichkeit, Morgendämmerung, noch nicht Tageshelle. Aber dasz sie dieser erste Anfang ist, das gibt ihr auch den vordeutenden Schimmer, den die verwirklichte Fülle jenes Tages in sich schlieszt. So wird man sagen dürfen, dasz die Busztaufe des Täuflings Sinn und Sein, Erkenntnis und Wesen heiligt, damit er, um Worte des Epheserbriefes von der christlichen Taufe zu gebrauchen, "ohne Fehl oder Makel oder etwas derart sei sondern heilig und untadelig." Er wird das reine, das von Gott gereinigte Gefasz, das der Fülle des Geistes noch wartet, die der

¹⁹Matt. 21:25.

²⁰Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 77.

letzte Tag bringen wird.²¹

This thought is also brought out by the second portion of John's proclamation, which points forward to the approaching Kingdom of Heaven. It is here that we see his proclamation as essentially a proclamation of difference. He is not the one who is to come, the Messiah; he merely prepares His way; the one who is to come is stronger than John; He must be the one on whom men focus their attention while John fades into the background. Most important of all, John can only baptize with water, but He shall baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. It is this tremendous difference which forms the climax of the Baptist's message. This was the entire purpose of his ministry. As Swete says:

In this propaedeutic purpose there lay the deeper aim of his ministry, which seems to have been revealed to him with a force of a second 'word of God.' It was not until his preaching of repentance had raised expectations which he was unable to fulfill that he began to speak of one who should come after him and baptize with the Holy Spirit. The same voice which sent John to baptize with water guided him to the Person who possessed the fountain of the Spirit. Thus the ministry of repentance grew into a witness concerning the Light. The Spirit led the Baptist on from one step to another until his whole task was fulfilled, and he could welcome the waning of his reputation in the rising glory of the Christ.²²

²¹Ibid., p. 80.

²²Swete, op. cit., p. 19.

CHAPTER IV

SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Since it is clear that John the Baptist followed in the prophetic tradition and that his entire message is closely related to that of the Old Testament prophets and preachers, it is only natural for us to look to the Old Testament for the background of his climactic message, the promise of baptism with the Holy Spirit. In looking to this source, it is not at all difficult to find references to the Spirit, for the doctrine is one of the most prominent features of Old Testament theology and is contained in every section of the collection of books, the law, prophets, and the writings.

The vocabulary for this concept is very simple, consisting only of the word רוח, which is used in the sense of breath, wind or spirit.¹ The root רוח from which the word is derived means primarily to breathe out with violence. Ordinarily when it is used in the sense of breath it carries the idea of power and indicates the strong, heavy breathing in contrast to ordinary, quiet breathing.² Typical examples of this may be found in such passages as Job 8:2;

¹Francis Brown, et al. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 925.

²Norman A. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 185 f.

Isaiah 33:11; and Psalm 18:15. When used in the sense of wind, the word often has the connotation of power and violence. Prov. 27:16 speaks of the folly of trying to retain the wind; Ezek. 17:10; 19:12 speak of the east wind withering a vine; and Isaiah 7:2 of the trees of the forest bowing before the wind. These are three typical examples which indicate the power and destructive force of רוח, wind. The winds are also spoken of frequently as the agents of God and the media through which He exercises His power. For this use of the term we may cite such passages as Psalm 135:7; Jer. 10:13; Ex. 10:13. However, when רוח is used in the sense of belonging to man or God it has the meaning "spirit." This meaning has its natural foundation in the idea of wind. The point of comparison appears to be in the unlimited power which is common to both wind and spirit. Both are powerful, invisible forces bordering on the supernatural whose origin no one knows, but which no one can deny.³ When used in relation to man the word appears as a psychological term denoting dominant disposition. For example, Num. 5:14 speaks of the רוח of jealousy coming upon a man; Psalm 51:12 of a free רוח or generous disposition which gives freely and without reserve; and Isaiah 37:7 of a רוח which will cause the Assyrian king to return to

³Otto Proksch, Theologie Des Alten Testaments (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1950), p. 459.

his home since he has been terrorized by a rumour. In man it is the spirit which dominates him and forces him to take a particular line of action.

We are, however, most concerned with $\Pi\eta\eta$ in its relation to $\eta\eta\tau\aleph$ or $\square\aleph\aleph$, for while the word $\Pi\aleph\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ occurs in the New Testament also in the sense of breath, wind or spirit, it is the $\aleph\eta\tau\aleph \Pi\eta\eta$ in which the $\Pi\aleph\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ $\aleph\chi\iota\omicron\nu$ has its basis.⁴

One of the striking ways in which the Spirit of God is presented in the Old Testament is in the position of the Spirit as the creator and sustainer of life. This idea occurs very early in the Old Testament. In Gen. 1:2 the Spirit of God appears as hovering over the primaeval chaos impregnating it with life; it is God breathing into the lifeless form shaped from the dust of the ground which makes man a living soul (Gen. 2:7);⁵ when the Spirit of God is withdrawn, the things which God has created die (Psalm 104:29). The Spirit of God therefore appears as the living principle of creation.⁶ The idea is brought out most forcefully in

⁴Snaith, op. cit., p. 230.

⁵In this instance it should be noted that the verb $\square\psi\aleph$ is used rather than $\Pi\eta\eta$. It is nevertheless the breath of God which produces the life, and this makes the connection with $\Pi\eta\eta$ possible.

⁶Henry Barclay Swete, The Holy Spirit in the New Testament (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1921), p. 1.

Ezek. 37:1-10, where it is the breath of God which causes the dry bones upon which sinews, flesh, and skin have been stretched to spring to life. Without this breath they were but lifeless bodies. It is the breath of God which is the difference between life and death, which is the secret of vitality.⁷

The Spirit of God is also that which is conceived of in the Old Testament to be a source of strength and leadership. No book brings this out more clearly than the book of Judges. It is said of Samson that the Spirit of the Lord began to move him (Judges 13:25) and that it came upon him when he killed the young lion (14:6). It may be safely said that the Spirit of God was the source of leadership in such Judges as Deborah, Gideon, and Jephthah, since they were called by God to be spiritual soldiers fighting against the enemies of Israel.⁸ Later, Saul was filled with the Spirit and was moved to fight against the enemies of Israel (1 Sam. 11:16). The same Spirit filled the successor of Moses, Joshua, preparing him for leadership in the conquest of Caanan (Deut. 34:9). Above all, however, it is the great leader Moses who appears as one who was the bearer of the Spirit (Num. 11:29). It was this invasion by the Spirit, therefore, which endowed the heroes of Israel with physical

⁷H. Wheeler Robinson, The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), p. 5.

⁸Proksch, op. cit., p. 461.

strength and with courage enabling them to become leaders of their nation.⁹

Furthermore, the Spirit in Hebrew thought is regarded as the source of increased mental and spiritual capacities. The demand of Pharaoh for a man in whom was the Spirit of God to interpret his dreams indicates that Joseph was such a man (Gen. 41:38); it was the Spirit of God which filled one of the architects of the tabernacle, enabling him to carry out his task (Ex. 31:3); it filled the seventy elders of Israel in the wilderness giving them power and wisdom to judge the people correctly (Num. 11:17); Wisdom cries out, "Turn you at my reproof; Behold I will pour out of my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you" (Prov. 1:33); in the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah the Spirit of the Lord is referred to as the spirit of wisdom and understanding (Isaiah 11:2). From all these passages it can be seen that wisdom and discernment are regarded as attributes of the Spirit, gifts with which men are endowed when they are filled with the Spirit.¹⁰ This pouring out of the Spirit has nothing of the mystical or magical connected with it; for in spite of the invasion by the Spirit, the individual

⁹Frederick W. Dillistone, The Holy Spirit in the Life of Today (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 25.

¹⁰George Johnston, "Spirit, Holy Spirit," A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 235.

personality is not lost in the process. The thought of a mystical element is entirely foreign to the Old Testament. Rather, the filling with the Spirit of God brings about an exaltation of the physical and spiritual life over the natural powers of the recipient of the Spirit.¹¹

While the Spirit is regarded as the source of strength, wisdom, and discernment, it is more particularly regarded as the source of the gift of prophecy. The prophet is a man of the Spirit. The Spirit of God seizes him, filling his mind, and he is at times controlled by this spiritual force outside himself.¹² David ascribes his words to the Spirit of the Lord in his dying testimony (2 Sam. 23:2); Micah says of himself, "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin" (Micah 3:8); early in the history of Israel prophecy is ascribed to the Spirit in Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream which concerned the future of Egypt (Gen. 41:38); the Spirit causes Balaam to prophesy good things concerning Israel contrary to his will (Num. 24:2); Moses is the bearer of the Spirit and bestows it upon others (Num. 11:17, 25); Hosea speaks of the prophet as the "spiritual man" (Hosea 9:7); Elisha considers his teacher as a man of the Spirit and asks for a

¹¹Proksch, op. cit., p. 461.

¹²Swete, op. cit., p. 2.

double portion of that Spirit (2 Kings 2:9); Micaiah's prophecy to Ahab and Jehoshaphat is attributed to the working of the Spirit (1 Kings 22:19 ff.); Isaiah implies that his prophecy is from the Spirit of God (Isaiah 30:1). In Old Testament thought, therefore, the Spirit of God is conceived of as the origin of prophecy, whether in visions or in direct revelation. Most clearly of all, Joel ascribes the gift of prophecy to the Spirit of God which in the Messianic Age will be poured out upon the sons and daughters of Israel, enabling them to prophesy (Joel 3:1 ff.).

As already indicated, in addition to the knowledge that the Spirit of God was present and active in the life of Israel and particularly in the lives of the prophets, there was also the expectation of a future and greater outpouring of the Spirit. It had been foretold by the prophets and was an outpouring which was to take place in the coming Messianic Age, reaching its culmination in the Messianic King upon whom the Spirit was to rest permanently.¹³ This period would be one in which the Spirit of God would breathe on a dead people and they would live (Ezek. 36:26; 37:9-14); it would be an age in which every member of the congregation of Israel would prophesy, see visions, and dream dreams (Joel 3:1.2); it would be the fulfillment of the expressed desire of Moses that the Lord would put His Spirit upon all

¹³Ibid., p. 3.

His people in order that they might prophesy (Num. 11:29). In the Messianic Age it was the leader of the people of God who in particular would be filled with the Spirit of God (Isaiah 11:1.2; 61:1). In the words of Swete:

Great as had been the energy of the Divine Spirit in their own experience, it was foreseen by the prophets that the new Israel of the Messianic Age would be inspired both in head and members with a fuller strength and deeper wisdom corresponding with the larger mission on which it was to be sent.¹⁴

The pouring out of the Spirit in the Messianic Age would be the means of drawing together the people of God from all nations. This is indicated by the prophet Joel who tells of God gathering His Israel from all nations and is particularly clear in the prophecy of Zech. 12:1-13:1. Here is shown the fact that acknowledgment of sin and the desire for the grace of God are dependent upon the fact that the Spirit of God has been given to men. The transformation which is brought about by the Spirit extends first to the eyes of men who look upon Him whom they pierced and then to the voices which are raised in sorrow over this circumstance. In this lamentation all men become one. The fellowship which has been broken by sin is once more restored by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who brings the individual members of the people of God together and forms them into one body.¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Hellmuth Frey, Das Buch der Kirche in der Weltwende, Die Kleinen Nachexilischen Propheten (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1948), pp. 315-316.

While it is never said in the Old Testament that God is a Spirit or that the Spirit of God is God, the idea of the Spirit as a personality and as God is quite clearly indicated in several places. In making such a statement we must take into account the use of parallelism in Hebrew literature.¹⁶ Psalm 51:11 makes the absence of the face of God parallel with the absence of His Holy Spirit. In Psalm 139:7 the Spirit and God's presence are equated by parallelism in this way: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" Haggai 2:4,5, expresses the same thought, for here the Lord exhorts Joshua and Zerubbabel to be strong, for He is with them, and then immediately adds, "According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt so my Spirit remaineth among you." Isaiah virtually hypostasizes the Spirit when he says of the Israelites in their relation to God in the wilderness, "But they rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit, therefore he was returned to be their enemy and He fought against them" (Isaiah 63:10). The thought is brought out strongly in Ezek. 39:29, where the Lord says, "Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel." From these passages, it is certainly at least possible to discover the implication that the Spirit is God and that where God is present the Spirit is also

¹⁶Robinson, op. cit., p. 11.

there. Evidently the presence of God among His people also means the presence of the Spirit of God.¹⁷ We may here agree with Robinson who says of 2 Cor. 3:17:

We must not read back the full content of these words into the Old Testament conception of Yahweh. . . . But at least we may see some preparation for them in the way in which His activity is described as His presence (lit. "Face") and this paralleled with His ruach.¹⁸

In drawing together what has been said of the Spirit in the Old Testament we find that the doctrine is represented by the key words of personality, vitality, service, and fellowship.¹⁹ The Spirit appears to be a personality, present and active where God is present; it is the source of life, being the source of both physical creation and of the spiritual creation of the people of God; it is the source of prophecy and of the exaltation of all spiritual and physical powers which are used for special purposes for the people of God; and it is the force which draws the individual members of Israel together into one body in close fellowship with itself and with one another. In the coming Messianic Age it would be a force poured out in greater measure than had previously been done. All this could have been and perhaps was understood by those who heard John proclaim that the Coming One was to baptize with the Spirit.

¹⁷Johnston, op. cit., pp. 236f.

¹⁸Robinson, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 8.

CHAPTER V

REFERENCES TO JOHN'S BAPTISM AND PROCLAMATION

Before final conclusions can be drawn as to the meaning of John's proclamation, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit," several passages of the New Testament dealing with the sending of the Spirit and with John's baptism must be considered. Reference has already been made to one of the instances in which Christ spoke of the baptism of John, that in which he demanded of the Pharisees the origin of the Baptist's baptism.¹ The few additional references which we have to his work are recorded in the Book of Acts.

The first of these is that which occurs in Acts 1:5 where Jesus tells His disciples immediately preceding His ascension to heaven to wait in Jerusalem "for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard of me, for John baptized with water but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" In Acts 1:8 the Savior also says, "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." This proclamation is without doubt a reference to the message of John the Baptist with its promise of baptism which could not be fulfilled until the ascension of Jesus to His Father had been completed.²

¹Matt. 21:25; Mark 11:30; Luke 20:4.

²John 7:39.

The promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when those who were gathered together were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues.³ Peter interpreted this event as the fulfillment when he said of Christ in Acts 2:33 "Being therefore exalted and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you see and hear." It was also a fulfillment of the promise of the Spirit given by Joel⁴ and would be realized in all who repented of their sins and received baptism in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins.⁵

This was the time referred to as "the end of days," the breaking-in of the Messianic Age, and it resulted in such an outpouring of the Spirit as had never been in evidence before. It was manifested not only in the working of signs and miracles and the speaking of tongues on the part of the apostles, but also in their true and fearless witness to the work of the Messiah who had come (Acts 5:32) and in their inspired teaching (1 Cor. 2:10-13). Furthermore, it was

³Ernst Lohmeyer, "Johannes der Täufer," Das Urchristentum (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1932), I, 84. The close connection of the Spirit and tongues of fire need not be considered here and does not in any way point to the fact that Spirit and fire are to be considered as one in the proclamation of John. It should also be noted that in the New Testament, with the exception of Acts 1:5 and 11:16, the giving of the Spirit is not referred to as baptism.

⁴Joel 3:1 ff.

⁵Acts 2:38.

evident in the spiritual gifts present among individual Christians regardless of their position or rank in life. The Corinthian church furnishes an excellent example of this.⁶ From the manner in which these spiritual gifts are spoken of, it appears that they were quite common, also in other churches.

This phenomenon of spiritual gifts was very evident at the time of the conversion of Cornelius and his household.⁷ As Peter preached to them the Holy Spirit fell upon them and it became clear to all who witnessed this scene that the Spirit had been imparted to these people because they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. From this incident it can be seen that baptism with the spirit was accompanied by outward signs which appeared not only among members of the Jewish nation who accepted Christ, but also among the believing gentiles. It appeared among all members of the true Israel which as had been prophesied would be gathered from all nations and people.

There is one final reference to the baptism of John and to his followers. This reference deals with the incident regarding the twelve "disciples of the Baptist" whom Paul found on one of his visits to Ephesus. While the origin of these disciples is not certain, it may be

⁶1 Cor. 12-14.

⁷Acts 10:44.

hesitantly conjectured that these men had been instructed in the proclamation of John and baptized into his baptism by Apollos, of whom it is said in the previous chapter that he taught of Jesus but knew only the baptism of John.⁸

His instruction concerning Jesus was perhaps that which John had given, namely, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

It is this incident which has caused the greatest confusion with regard to the teaching of John. In particular, it is Acts 19:2 which causes the confusion, for here the disciples who were baptized into John's baptism say that they have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. This passage has led some to the conclusion that in view of the declaration of these disciples, John, in his proclamation, did not speak of a baptism with the Holy Spirit, but that this portion of his message is a later addition of Christians who wished to emphasize the superiority of Jesus. With regard to this view, it need only be said that what these disciples did or did not know can hardly be used as a norm for the reconstruction of the Baptist's message.⁹ Others have been led by this passage to believe that these were disciples who either did not retain the true teaching of John and did not accept the Christ to whom he pointed

⁸Acts 18:24-25.

⁹Carl H. Kraeling, John the Baptist (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 59.

or formed a separate cult of adherents to the Baptist.¹⁰

It is, however, not necessary to draw either of these conclusions. The statement of these disciples is capable of an altogether different interpretation which allows for John's proclamation of the Spirit and for the true adherence to his teaching. It can be taken in the sense that these disciples were not aware of the fact that the Spirit had been poured out after the ascension of Christ, that it was already present, a fact which was self-evident to Paul.¹¹ Possibly neither these disciples nor their teacher were present when John pointed to Jesus as the one who was to baptize with the Spirit and they therefore did not realize that the "end of days" had come, that the Messianic Age had arrived with its pouring out of the Spirit. The infancy narrative of John indicates that the Messiah who was to come was the one who would dispense the Spirit and therefore corresponds closely to the Jewish tradition concerning the "end of days." It would favor the idea that the promise of the Spirit formed a part of John's proclamation. This incident in Ephesus thus shows how closely the tradition of the Baptist and his baptism was followed.¹² He spoke of the

¹⁰ Georg Stöckhardt, Die Biblische Geschichte des Neuen Testaments (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1899), p. 587.

¹¹ Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 25.

¹² Ibid.

Coming One who was to baptize with the Spirit. These disciples knew of his proclamation but they did not yet know that the Coming One had come and had poured out the Spirit on all flesh, for they had not yet seen nor experienced the baptism of the Spirit as it manifested itself in outward phenomena.

The final point which should be noted is the manner in which the Spirit is given in each of the incidents cited above in which the baptism of John is mentioned. In the first instance there is no circumstance or agent through which the Spirit is disposed. In his Pentecostal sermon Peter indicates to his hearers that they shall receive the Holy Spirit if they repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. At the conversion of Cornelius and his household the Spirit is given before baptism while Peter is still preaching. In Ephesus the Spirit is given with the laying on of hands by Paul. Apparently the disposition of the Spirit is not limited to any particular time or manner. The only point of similarity in these accounts is that the Spirit is given to believers in Christ.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

It now remains for us to determine exactly what the Baptist meant when he declared "I baptize you with water . . . He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." We have already noted several interpretations of this passage and have rejected them for various reasons. In particular the idea that $\pi\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ ἁγίου is to be taken in the sense of "Holy Wind" has been rejected, as well as the belief that $\pi\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ and $\pi\upsilon\rho$, which appear in close relation to each other in the gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke, are to be taken together either in the sense of a gracious, purifying action or an action of judgment. These two factors are rather to be understood as opposing each other. This is made clear by the illustration which John himself gives. The axe is already laid to the root of the tree and the unfruitful one shall be cut down; the chaff shall be burned in everlasting fire while the grain will be gathered into the granary. Evidently everything that is ungodly or unholy is to be consumed with fire.¹ This is a concept which appears already in the Old Testament.² In this way the baptism with

¹Ernst Lohmeyer, "Johannes der Täufer," Das Urchristentum (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1932), I, 84.

²Psalm 97:3, Isaiah 9:18, Amos 5:6.

fire becomes clear and suggests that which is found in its fulness and clarity in the Revelation of St. John, the Apostle.³ It is widely held among commentators that this is the correct interpretation of John's proclamation of a baptism with fire. It is in the area of baptism with the Spirit that the greatest difference of opinion occurs in discussions of the proclamation of the Baptist.

It has been suggested by some that John's baptism was only symbolical and that it was not an effective rite. It was entirely devoid of the operation of the Holy Spirit and merely symbolized repentance anticipating the gift of righteousness which the Holy Spirit conveys.⁴ John's baptism was therefore only preparatory. This, however, cannot be the case, as is already shown by the fact that the baptism of John was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins and therefore must include the action of the Holy Spirit. As Lenski also notes, such an interpretation would exclude the working of spiritual effects by the Spirit in the Old Testament.⁵

Others have suggested that in his proclamation John had reference to the pouring out of the Spirit on the day

³Rev. 19:20.

⁴Willoughby C. Allen, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew," The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 25.

⁵R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels (Columbus: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), p. 27.

of Pentecost with its extraordinary manifestations.⁶ There can be little doubt that such an outpouring of the Spirit was present in the mind of John although he may not have clearly perceived the method or manner in which this was to occur. The references in Acts 1 and 2 show conclusively that Pentecost was regarded as a fulfillment of the proclamation of John. But, in view of the later references in Acts, baptism with the Spirit cannot be limited only to the outpouring of spiritual gifts on the day of Pentecost. These later references have led some to make a distinction between regeneration by the Spirit and baptism with the Spirit, referring the latter only to special, supernatural, outward acts.⁷ The prophecy of Joel, however, is so comprehensive that it does not seem that baptism with the Spirit is to be understood in this restricted sense.⁸ In addition, it must be taken into consideration that a distinction is nowhere made between regeneration and baptism with the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, special gifts are bestowed only upon believers.⁹

While Pentecost and special gifts of the Spirit are therefore included in John's proclamation of the Spirit, the

⁶ William Arthur, The Tongue of Fire; or The True Power of Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1868), p. 27.

⁷ R. A. Torrey, The Baptism with the Holy Spirit (London: James Nisbet and Co. Limited, 1904), p. 12.

⁸ Paul E. Kretzmann, The Baptism or Gift of the Holy Ghost (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924), p. 4.

⁹ Ibid.

understanding of his climactic message must not be restricted to this circumstance. The full meaning of John's proclamation must also include a recognition of his historical position. He stands on the threshold of the Messianic Age and his proclamation should therefore also be considered from this eschatological viewpoint.¹⁰ The position of John and his relation to Christ as forerunner at least strongly indicates that the baptism of John and the baptism of the Spirit are to be thought of in their relation to eschatological events. From this point of view, the baptism of John is a sign and testimony of the coming baptism with the Spirit; it is the beginning of the eschatological events, while baptism with the Spirit is the middle and end. The connection between the two lies in the word "baptism." The former is only a temporary rite and is merely a forerunner of the eternal Spirit baptism. It is a temporary institution because it foreshadows and indicates the last period before the "day of the Lord," the breaking in of the Messianic Age.¹¹ This does not in any way detract from the validity of John's water baptism. In its time it was the appointed way of entrance into the fellowship of the people of God, but with the coming of the Messianic era it was

¹⁰ Lohmeyer, op. cit., p. 81.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 179.

superseded by the Spirit baptism.¹² The appearance of the Messiah in history ushers in a new era, an era in which God Himself is present, for the presence of the Holy Spirit means the presence of God among His people. With the baptism of the Spirit a new eon is created, an eon consisting of the fellowship of the people of God.¹³ This also was foretold in the Old Testament, particularly in the prophecy of Zechariah referred to in a previous chapter.

We may therefore say that those who heard the proclamation of John understood his message in the sense of an announcement of the fact that the Messianic Age was near at hand. In this Messianic Age the presence of God would be evident, not only in supernatural signs and wonders, but in a new and fuller and clearer proclamation of God's will, in the establishment of His kingdom, and in the fellowship of believers. They would have understood that John's baptism was a preparation for this new age which was about to break in upon the history of the world, a foreshadowing of the baptism with the Spirit. It would have been understood in the sense that God would be present in the world with judgment for evildoers and vindication for the repentant and believing.¹⁴

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁴Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, "Das Evangelium nach Lukas," Das Neue Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1949), p. 57.

The understanding of John's proclamation is meaningful for all who live in the new era. It is particularly meaningful for those who are members of the kingdom of God. For them it means that God is present among His people, not in a vague transcendent way, but immanently, personally, powerfully, and in action. He is present in His function as the ruler of nature creating and sustaining all living things. He is present in His function as the source of wisdom and discernment, opening the eyes, minds, and hearts of men to the truth of the Gospel, creating a new Israel in which all the members are priests, spiritual leaders. He is present in His action of judgment and of vindication binding together into one body, the church, the individual members who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. In that body He is present raising up spiritual leaders comparable to the Old Testament heroes who are continually led into a fuller and deeper understanding of His word, enabling them to proclaim it with clarity and effectiveness.

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