



Jesus the deliverer King

The biblical-historical connection between the baptism of Jesus, the giving of Spirit, and the wilderness temptation

After the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit of God descended from heaven upon Christ and immediately afterward He was *“led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil”* (Matthew 4:1). The purpose of this study is to explore the proximity of these three key events in the life of Jesus — His baptism, the sending of the Spirit, and the Spirit leading Him into the wilderness — and identify their significance in the wider context of Messianic expectation and fulfillment, and in particular how they point to Jesus as the Deliverer King of Israel.

It will be demonstrated in this study that the three events identified above are tightly linked, and an examination of the Old Testament narrative in Judges and 1 Samuel will present compelling evidence that (1) the baptism of Jesus represented His earthly anointing as King of Israel; and (2) Jesus being driven into the wilderness by the Spirit of God to fight with the devil was a fulfillment of His role as Deliverer King. It should be noted that several streams of Old Testament prophecy and expectation merged together in the baptism and temptation accounts; e.g., Jesus was ideal Israel in the wilderness; Jesus was Last Adam resisting the devil’s temptations. As well, the giving of the Spirit to Jesus by the Father has rich Trinitarian significance. The purpose here is not to ignore or disallow these important considerations, but rather to isolate one of these prophetic streams — Messiah as Deliverer King of His people — and demonstrate its fulfillment in the baptism and subsequent ministry of Jesus Christ.

Biblical historical pattern in the book of Judges

In the days before the kings, Israel repeatedly fell into sin and apostasy. As a result, God used the surrounding nations to judge His rebellious people, bringing them into servitude. When foreign oppression became unbearable, the people made supplication to God for deliverance. In faithfulness and covenant mercy, God heard the cries of His people and sent salvation in the form of a deliverer (or “judge”), who was empowered and equipped by the Spirit of God to save the people from their enemies. After a period of rest, the judge died, the people returned to their evil ways, and the cycle would repeat.

This historical pattern of sin, servitude, supplication, and salvation by the Spirit-led deliverer is stated in summary form in Judges 2:11-19, and repeatedly demonstrated in the narrative portion of the book (e.g., 3:7-11; 3:12–30; 4:1-5:31; 6:1-8:35, etc.). This repetition is accompanied by an increasingly downward spiral of corruption (2:19) and spiritual anarchy (17:6), to the point near the end of the era where the author laments that *“everyone (in Israel) did what was right in his own eyes”* (21:25).

Thus the deliverers of Israel were raised up by God in periods of spiritual darkness and foreign oppression. The Lord equipped these judges to deliver the Israelites by the power of the Spirit coming upon them (cf. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6; 14:19; 15:14; and implied elsewhere). Of particular interest for this study is what happened immediately after the Spirit came upon a judge. In every case, the judge was stirred to successful battle against Israel’s enemies. Thus Othniel went out to make war against the king of Mesopotamia (3:10); Ehud was stirred to attack the king of Moab (3:15-16); Barak was called to defeat the Canaanite army (4:6-7); Gideon was summoned Israel to fight against the Midianites, Amalekites, and their allies (6:33-34); Jephthah was aroused to battle with the sons of Ammon (11:29); and Samson was moved to wreak havoc against the Philistines (13:25-14:4; 14:19; 15:14-17).

Thus, when God called individual judges to deliver Israel from her enemies, He sent them His Spirit as a divine investiture of heavenly glory and strength, to equip them for their tasks. Soon after this divine investiture, the judges were moved by the Spirit to battle, resulting in great deliverance for the nation.

Biblical historical pattern in the call of king Saul

Samuel, the last judge of Israel and the first in a line of kingly prophets, was called to appoint the first king of Israel (1 Samuel 8:22), a man of God's own choosing. Soon after, God spoke to Samuel, indicating the time and place where the Lord would send to him the man He had chosen as king (9:15-16). The next day, when Samuel saw Saul coming toward him, God spoke to the prophet, saying, *"There he is, the man of whom I spoke to you. This one shall reign over My people"* (9:17).

After meeting with Saul, Samuel took a flask of oil and anointed the new king, explaining that the Spirit of God would soon come upon him (10:1-8). Later that same day, the Spirit did come upon Saul, and he prophesied (10:9-10)

Soon after, Saul was presented to Israel as the new king (10:17-26), and the Spirit came upon him once again (11:6), provoking him to wage war against the Ammonites who were threatening his brethren (11:7-10). The Israelite army, under the direction of its Spirit-led king, completely routed the Ammonites (11:11).

Saul later proved disobedient to God (13:7-13), and the Spirit was taken from him (16:14) and his kingdom removed (13:14; 15:28; 28:17). Nevertheless, the basic pattern evident in the period of the judges was repeated in the early days of Saul's reign — disobedient Israel was oppressed, God appointed a man to deliver the nation from its bondage, and God sent His Spirit upon the chosen man to equip and provoke him to battle. The differences are as follows:

1. God now appointed a king to be the deliverer of Israel (as the people had requested).
2. The prophet of Israel was providentially directed to meet with the new king.
3. God spoke to the prophet, identifying the new king.
4. The prophet anointed the head of the new king.
5. After the anointing by the prophet, the Spirit of God came upon the new king.
6. Soon after, the king was provoked by the Spirit to fight against Israel's enemies.
7. The Spirit-filled king and the armies of Israel won a great victory over their enemies.

Biblical historical pattern in the call of king David

After the Lord rejected Saul as king, Samuel was again called to appoint the new king of Israel, once again a man of God's choosing (1 Samuel 16:1). The Lord directed Samuel to the house of Jesse, and as the sons of Jesse were presented before him, the Lord passed over each in turn until David arrived. Just as He had done in the call of Saul, God spoke to Samuel when the prophet laid eyes on the young man: *"Arise, anoint him; for this is the one"* (16:12). Samuel immediately took a flask of oil and anointed David as king, *"and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward"* (16:13).

Soon after, the Philistines arrayed themselves in battle against Israel, and their champion, Goliath, challenged King Saul's armies to send out a champion to fight him (17:1-10). The Israelites, and apparently even Saul, were afraid of Goliath, but David, being led by God's Spirit, was provoked to fight against the Philistine giant (17:26). David subsequently met Goliath in battle, defeating him in dramatic fashion and turning the Philistines to flight (17:40-51). Emboldened by this turn of events, the Israelite army pursued their fleeing enemies and routed them (17:52-53). Thus the historical pattern in the call of King Saul was repeated in the call of King David:

1. The prophet of God was commanded to anoint a king.

2. God providentially directed the prophet to meet the new king.
3. God spoke to the prophet, identifying the new king.
4. The prophet anointed the head of the new king.
5. After the anointing by the prophet, the Spirit of God came upon the king.
6. The king was then provoked to fight against Israel's enemies.
7. The Spirit-filled king and the armies of Israel won a great victory over their enemies.

Biblical historical pattern in the call of King Jesus

(Matthew 3:1–4:1)

When Jesus began His ministry, the Roman Empire was in firm political and military control of Palestine. The illusion of an Israelite kingdom was offset by the occupation of Romans troops, Roman tax collectors, and the leadership of a corrupt foreign king, the Roman puppet Herod Antipas.

Foreign oppression was bad enough, but the Jews suffered under another type of subjugation more fearsome than Rome — demons were everywhere. Seemingly every community in Israel was afflicted with the presence of evil spirits, explaining why so many Israelites ultimately came to Jesus to be delivered from demonic possession.

This underscores two important historical realities:

1. The Israelites at the time of Christ were extremely corrupt (Jesus referred to them as “an evil and adulterous generation,” Matthew 12:39) and under God's severe discipline, being oppressed by fearful enemies both seen (Romans) and unseen (demonic hordes).
2. Consistent with the historical pattern in the periods of the judges and the earliest kings, God in His mercy sent a Deliverer (His Son) to Israel during a time of spiritual darkness and foreign subjugation, to save His weak and sinful people from their bondage.

We note in the context preceding Christ's baptism (Matthew 3:1-12) that John had been preaching the coming of God's kingdom: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” The prophet's announcement anticipated the appearance of the new king on Israel's stage (Matthew 3:11-12; cf. John 1:26-27). We learn, too, that God had spoken to John about how to identify the king: “*He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit*” (John. 1:33).

With these first-century conditions in mind, and the OT backdrop of Judges and 1 Samuel also in view, we will now examine the events surrounding the baptism of Jesus and His subsequent wilderness temptation. Below is Matthew's account (3:13-4:1):

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Jesus came to John to be baptized, and it is not entirely clear what John understood about the Lord's request. The prophet clearly knew Jesus had no need for repentance, and he also knew that Jesus was greater than he was (cf. Mark 1:7). It seems John also understood by this point that Jesus was the pre-existent Lamb of God (cf. John 1:29-30) and thus the divine Son (John 1:34). For these reasons, John was resistant to baptizing Jesus, until Jesus persuaded him with these cryptic words: “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Whatever

one makes of this statement, it is clear that after John heard it, he relented and was willing to baptize Jesus.

Immediately following the baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, accompanied by God's voice declaring Him to be His Son. Jesus was then compelled by the Spirit to go to the wilderness to face off with the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). After defeating the devil's temptations, the Spirit-filled king followed up by waging a successful campaign against the devil's armies who were oppressing His people, sending the panic-stricken spirits to flight (Mark 1:23-27, 32-34, 39).

Analysis & implications

Measured against the backdrop of the call of the first two kings of Israel, the events surrounding the baptism of Jesus are striking:

1. God told the prophet (John) that a new king was to be ordained and presented to Israel.
2. God arranged the climactic meeting between the prophet and the new king (Jesus came to John and they spoke).
3. God spoke audibly to the prophet, identifying the new king (occurred before Christ's baptism, and then again when the heavenly voice declared Jesus to be the Son of God).
4. The prophet anointed the head of the new king (with water instead of oil).
5. After the anointing by the prophet, the Spirit of God came upon the king (vision of the Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove).
6. The newly-anointed king was then provoked by the Spirit to fight against Israel's chief enemy (Jesus compelled into the wilderness to encounter the devil).
7. The Spirit-filled king won a great victory over Israel's enemies (Jesus defeated Satan and then his hosts initially a one-Man rout, and later joined by the apostles when they were commissioned and empowered to drive out demons; cf. Mark 3:13-19; 6:7-13).

Thus the historical pattern of 1 Samuel was reproduced in the events surrounding the baptism of Jesus. If we connect the dots of the biblical story as intended, this sequence of events establishes Jesus as the ultimate Deliverer King of Israel, the Son of David called by God to save His people from their enemies.

Furthermore, these observations clarify why Jesus refrained from performing miracles and exorcisms before His baptism. Certainly He had power as Deity Incarnate (John 1:1-18) to perform such deeds at any time, but as the divine Son ("*true man and true God*," Heidelberg Catechism Q47), Jesus was fully submitted to His heavenly Father's will (John 6:38). It was evidently the Father's will, in keeping with the historical pattern of King Saul and King David, 1) first for the prophet of Israel to anoint Jesus as King, 2) then for the Father to empower Jesus from on high with the Holy Spirit (explains why the miracles of Jesus were accomplished by the power of the Spirit instead of His own omnipotent power), 3) then for the Spirit to provoke Jesus to battle against the greatest and most fearful enemies of Israel. After the anointing, empowering, and provocation of Jesus were completed, the Lord was thereafter free to engage the enemy at will, sending the demonic hosts to flight and rescuing His people from their bondage to their other previously unassailable adversaries — sin and death.

Conclusion

Against the historical backdrop of God raising up Spirit-empowered judges, and the subsequent anointings of Saul and David as the first two Spirit-empowered kings of Israel, we conclude that the giving of the Holy Spirit to Christ was a divine investiture of heavenly glory and power, marking Jesus as King and equipping Him to deliver Israel from her enemies. The anticipatory preaching of John the Baptist pointed to the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of David, who was introduced to Israel by the prophet. The baptism of Jesus was therefore His anointing as King. The subsequent anointing of the Holy Spirit from heaven, and the great spiritual victory gained by Jesus and His followers over Satan and his legions climaxed by the greatest of all victories, Christ's

sufferings on the cross and His resurrection from the dead — demonstrates that Jesus is indeed the ultimate Deliverer King of His people.

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