

TUTORIAL
2.7

God's Representative

This tutorial looks back at the history prior to the birth of John. Then we look at Jesus' birth, baptism and temptation, and His life as God's Son and Representative on earth. What significance do all of these things have for us today?

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: **Luke 1:15,76, 4:14,18-19, John 1:32, Matthew 4:1.**

Last time

We remembered how God made a Covenant with the Israelite people. They were unable to even begin to live up to God's perfect standards as laid out in the Law. We gratefully reminded ourselves of the fact that under the New Covenant that we have entered into by faith, Christ has fulfilled God's requirements Himself and paid for our violations completely with His blood. We then took a virtual tour through the tabernacle, noting what the different things there meant for the Israelites...and, in contrast, the amazing freedom, forgiveness and complete access we have to God as New Covenant people.

A brief overview of a millennium

In this brief overview of the Narrative we covered previously we don't have the time to linger on all the amazing things God has embedded in His Narrative that are a challenge and encouragement to His children...including for us who are in Christ under the New Covenant.

But to summarise: during that period, the Israelites who'd left Egypt - or rather their children's generation - did finally make it to the land that God had promised to Abraham. On the whole, the Israelites were victorious in the struggle for territorial supremacy with other people groups, but the threat of invasion continued for much of this period. In time, a monarchical dynasty was instituted, but only a handful of the kings over the centuries it lasted, truly followed the Creator God. After the death of the third king, Solomon (who constructed the temple in Jerusalem), the nation divided into north and south kingdoms. Despite numerous warnings from God through His prophets, the majority of the rulers and their people - in both kingdoms - continued to be drawn into the polytheism and cultic practices of neighbouring ethnic groups.

Eventually God used two of the regional super-powers of the time, Babylon and Assyria, to bring His judgement on the respective Israeli kingdoms through devastating military defeats and mass captivity. On their return in the 6th century before Christ, they rebuilt the temple that had been destroyed in the invasions. The temple would later be greatly expanded and virtually rebuilt by King Herod. For 400 years God did not add to His Narrative through the prophets. During this time Greek culture spread throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond, soon to be followed by the Roman Empire. Israel was invaded and occupied by Rome. The scene was set for the arrival of Jesus, the fulfillment of so many promises and prophecies.

John, the messenger

Just like with Creation, the Incarnation - God the Father sending His Son into the world as a human - took place with a high level of involvement by God's Spirit. We see this first in the events leading up to the arrival, and then in the life, of John...the one who would be known for challenging the Jews about their sin, and then helping them demonstrate their repentance through baptism. Luke records the pronouncement of one of God's messenger angels who said that John would be controlled by God's Holy Spirit right from his birth (Luke 1:15).

God's Spirit had a significant role throughout the entire first Covenant period. He was the one who gave special abilities for certain tasks such as the construction of the tabernacle and temple. He was also the one who guided God's designated storytellers - His *prophets* - with the insights and the words they would record in the written Narrative. But from this point on, and certainly following Jesus' return to the Father after His resurrection, the Spirit would increasingly feature in the Narrative.

At John's birth, his father Zacharias was given special ability by God's Spirit to foresee what would shape his son's life. He announced that John was to have the unique privilege of proclaiming God's truth in order to prepare people for the coming Messiah (Luke 1:76).

Jesus' relationship with the Father and Holy Spirit

The way that God's Son became a human being was a miracle that God's Spirit Himself brought about. In an event wrapped in mystery to our limited minds and far beyond the narrow sphere of science, the Creator and Sustainer of life became a human embryo in the womb of a virgin. This life of the promised Saviour was mothered *naturally* by Mary, a young woman of the first century from the town of Nazareth...but fathered *supernaturally* by the eternal God of Heaven.

As close relatives, and with only six months difference in age, the young John and Jesus may well have spent time together...the Narrative doesn't say. There's actually only one recorded encounter, but it is a highly significant one. One day, among the group of people coming to be baptized in the Jordan, John was startled to see his cousin, Jesus. John knew by this stage that this was the long-promised Messiah, and he says that it would be much more appropriate for Jesus to baptize *him*. But Jesus insisted. Even though He had nothing for which to repent, by being baptized, He demonstrated His obedience before God. He also associated Himself with the common people, with *us* in fact.

His baptism was also full of important symbolism related to what was ahead. In going down under the water, Jesus was portraying the death and burial that He would go through as our representative. Then, coming up out of the water was a picture of His resurrection that would bring new life to everyone who, like us, believes in Him.

Everything was now ready for Jesus to launch into the next three years that would prove to be so important, and which would end in His death. But He wouldn't launch into all that on His own...He was committed to being reliant on God for everything He needed. And He was given God's full support. First of all, a complete endorsement from His Father who announced that this was His Son who He was completely pleased with. Then the Spirit, represented in the physical world by a dove-like shape, came down from heaven to "rest on Jesus" as the text describes it (John 1:32). What God was indicating was that His Spirit would be with Jesus to give Him the resources He needed to do everything the Father asked of Him. He would live with Him, not to "possess" and annihilate His personhood in the way the evil spirits love to do, but to be there. This was different to the kind of limited assistance given by the Spirit to individuals for a specific task as we see in the Narrative of the First Covenant. Jesus would have constant access to God's power and wisdom through His Spirit. As we'll see in the ongoing Narrative, this is exactly the kind of relationship we have with God. Jesus paved the way, and modeled for us, how God wants to relate to us as His children. His complete approval of Jesus applies fully to us. The Spirit also comes and lives permanently with us to give us all the resources we need to live as the Father wants us to, and to do the work He gives us.

The relationship tested

As we noted before, this close relationship with God was immediately probed for weak spots or flaw lines...could Jesus be tempted to place a higher value on anything over the relationship with His Father and the Holy Spirit? God's Spirit leads Jesus into the uninhabited, desert wasteland to face God's Enemy. (Matthew 4:1)

Thousands of years before, Satan had tested Adam and Eve in a similar way and found, to his great satisfaction and their great loss, that they were willing to forego their relationship with God for a sense (a false one as it turned out) of self-determination and freedom. Would Jesus fall for this as well? We know that He did not. Each time, as God's Enemy looked for a point of vulnerability, Jesus relied, not on His own eloquence or cleverness, but on God's wisdom already accessible in His Narrative. The thing He wanted to know and then apply to whatever area He was being tested in, was *what God has said*...what had God revealed about Himself that was relevant to the situation and how could He apply it to this real-life situation? Which - as other parts of His Narrative describe - forms the *armor* and *ammunition* that is available to us to handle similar attacks.

The candidate for representative of the human race before God had proved Himself worthy. At that initial trial, and with every single thing He did and said over the next three years He would demonstrate beyond a shadow of doubt that He was entirely different from the first representative, Adam. So for us who are under Jesus' leadership, Satan no longer has authority over us. Our Representative has triumphed and *in Him* so do we!

Jesus begins His work in earnest

Having received God's complete endorsement and with His Spirit providing guidance and resources...and having proved Himself worthy in the face of Satan's attack, Jesus launched head on into the Task He had come for. Luke tells us that Jesus now returned to His home area of Galilee, "filled with the Holy Spirit's power" (Luke 4:14). He started travelling around to local towns, going to the synagogues and showing how God's Narrative - only the First Covenant part was completed then, of course - all pointed towards Him.

Luke describes an occasion one Saturday - the Sabbath - when Jesus was in the synagogue of His home town of Nazareth. He chose a passage written by God's prophet Isaiah that everyone present would have known was talking about the Messiah...what we now identify as verses 18 and 19 of chapter 4. Most likely He was reading in the original Hebrew, words the New Living Translation expresses in English like this, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for He has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come.*"

As we look back from our vantage point we can appreciate the far-reaching implications of these words much more fully even than those people from His home town. God most definitely cares deeply about the physical and emotional pain human beings experience in this fallen, corrupted world. In fact, in the coming weeks and months, Jesus would circumvent so-called 'natural' laws to alleviate pain and suffering for many needy people He encountered. But as the Narrative unfolds it becomes obvious that these miracles are motivated by a

concern that goes well beyond their immediate *felt*, and even *real* needs. He used those miraculous signs to demonstrate His power as God's Son because He wanted them to see Him as the Cure for the thing that really ailed them. Every problem, disadvantage, handicap, obstacle or injustice people can legitimately point to is overshadowed by their one really big dilemma...their need to be made right before a perfect, holy, righteous God.

So when we hear those words Jesus read to the people in His home town, they resonate deeply with us. In the ways that really matter - in dimensions that extend beyond this physical world - we are beggars who've inherited enormous wealth; death-row prisoners breathing the free air; people blind from birth now luxuriating in sight; members of a tyrannized class getting used to acceptance and honor. That's what Jesus was telling those people from His home town that God's Spirit was giving Him the ability and authority to achieve. Of course as we know, they rejected Him and His message, as did most of His countrymen.



DISCUSSION POINTS

God's Representative

1. In your own words, what do you think it means when God's Word says that Jesus was "filled with the Holy Spirit's power"? Do you think there was any time when Jesus was more or less filled with the Holy Spirit than another? Please explain.
2. If a friend who claims to be a Christian said to you that they don't really feel free - that they've always had a sense of being restricted and weighed down in their faith - what would you say to them? How would you express how you feel about freedom and liberty as God's child?