

Second Sunday in Lent

OLD TESTAMENT – Genesis 12:1-9

The Call of Abram

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” 4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. 9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

12:1 *Lord* – It was the Savior-God who spoke to Abram. (PBC)

said. God had spoken to Abram “while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran” (Ac 7:2). (CSB)

The way God dealt with Abram is typical of the way God deals with every sinner. It is important to note that if contact is to be established between God and the sinner, the initiative must start on God's end, not ours. He also deals with us, as He dealt with Abram, not in terms of demand but primarily in terms of promise. (PBC)

that I will show you.† Abram must leave the settled world of the post-Babel nations and begin a pilgrimage with God to a world of God's making (see 24:7). (CSB)

“Get thee out” (KJV), though entirely correct, sounds too sharply imperative in the English of our day; for *lekh-lekha* is a mild “go for thyself,” *lekh* being either a dative or merely an ethical dative, its force being like the English “do go. This command is attributed to Yahweh, whose mercy controls all that He does in this connection in singling out an individual who is to become the ancestor of the Savior's line. (Leupold)

Abraham and his family were to be separated from and separated to. Abraham was to “leave” and Abraham was to “go.” He was to be separated from the comforts and idolatry of both Ur and Haran. The moon-god was worshiped in both places. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

The Lord called Abram out of idolatry (Jsh. 24:2), in which he deserved nothing but condemnation and eternal death. This was not because Abram merited God's favor. Instead, God demonstrated His mercy and grace in calling an idolater, out of pagan surroundings and afflictions, setting him apart from the world of false belief to live by the promise of His grace. By choosing Abram, an idolater, God demonstrated that it is not by works but by grace that we are saved. (TLSB)

your father's house – This indicates a larger complex of people who were part of the clan of Terah. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

Abram heard God say those words twice in his lifetime. This first time it was in Ur, in southern Mesopotamia when he, together with his father's and brother's families left their homes. Following established trade route of the day, they moved north to Haran. It was in Haran that Abram heard God speak those words a second time. Humanly speaking, it must have been more difficult for Abram to obey them the second time. (PBC)

Haran still offered too many dangers to this man whom God's grace singled out, so also did "relatives," those who were tied to him by blood and were exerting a more subtle and powerful influence than the individual usually realizes. (Leupold)

I will show you – Though Abram did not know where he was going, he followed the direction provided by God provided by His Word. How the Word of God came to Abram is not specified, but Luther writes, "I am convinced that he was not called directly by God without the ministry" (AE 2:249). (TLSB)

12:2–3 God's promise to Abram has a sevenfold structure. (CSB)

The covenant number seven prevails here, even though there is no explicit covenant involved. (Leupold)

(1) "I will make you into a great nation,"

I will – The covenant God makes with Abraham is completely one-sided. God give seven promises and asks nothing in return. Abraham is not chosen for any virtues of his own. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

make you a great nation – Abraham was seventy-five years old and did not have a son. Genesis 11:30 says that Sarah was barren. At this time she was sixty-five years old and seemingly past the childbearing age. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

God's promise was given to a man who was resigned to being childless (11:30). Here, God promises that from Abram will come not only the people of Israel but also the Church of Christ, which encompasses baptized disciples of Jesus from all nations (Mt. 28:19). (TLSB)

At the time of his call Abram had the reputation of being a well-to-do cattleman. But that isn't the reputation Abram has on the pages of the Scriptures. He is a man with whom God shared some of His sacred secrets. He is called the friend of God; he is the father of believers; he is the father of the Israelite nation; he is an ancestor of the Messiah. (PBC)

The word for "nation" is *goy*, usually used of the heathen nations, but here, as in 35:11 and Exodus 19:6, in reference to Israel, to signify that, as nations go, Israel shall be great. "Great nation," of course, implies more than great numbers. Since the greatness is of God's making, it involves true greatness in every sense. If ever there was a great nation, it was Israel. The force of this word must naturally be reckoned over against the fact that at the time when it was spoken Abram had no son. (Leupold)

(2) "I will bless you,"

I will bless you – Only God can bless. Man can only wish and ask for God’s blessings on himself and others. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

God blessed Adam and Eve, telling them to be fruitful and multiply (1:28). God blessed Abram indicating that his descendants would fill the earth and that all nations would be blessed through him. (TLSB)

Bless – Hebrew *barak*, “to bestow ability for success” (from the greater person to the lesser) or “to praise a person’s ability for success” (from the lesser person to the greater). Refers to bending the knees, perhaps to kneel and receive a pronouncement of inheritance with all its wealth (cf Gen. 27). “Bless the Lord” has the sense of “greet” and is common in the Psalms, expressing thanks and praise (34:1; 145:1, 10). In faith, praise is the greatest gift we can offer to our Lord. The blessing that came from the temple at Jerusalem now resonates through the Church, brought by pastors, missionaries, teachers, and other Christians who proclaim the Gospel of Christ’s sacrifice. (TLSB p. 842)

A man is blessed when due to the gracious working of God all goes well with him (cf. 39:5); the things that he undertakes thrive; and true success crowns all his endeavors. This certainly is a promise that was realized in Abram’s life. (Leupold)

(3) “I will make your name great,”

make your name great – The name equals the person. Abraham is called “the father of a multitude” (17:5); “the man in God’s confidence” (18:17-19); “a prophet” (20:7); “a prince of God” (23:6); God’s servant (Ps. 105:6) (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

Even the heathen speak well of God’s people Israel (Deut. 4:6-7) because of God’s faithfulness in keeping His promise to them. St. Paul calls Christians the offspring of Abraham (Gal. 3:29), indicating how widely God has extended the patriarch’s name on account of the Gospel. (TLSB)

Abram personally became famous. The various names that are given to Abram display a part of this fame. He is called “the father of a multitude” (17:5); a prince of God (23:6); the man in God’s confidence (18:17-19); a prophet (20:7); the servant of God (Ps. 105:6); and the friend of God (20:7). Even without such names he could still be famous. But this fame is not a personal achievement of his but a divinely wrought favor. (Leupold)

(4) “you will be a blessing,”

BE A BLESSING – The Hebrew form of the verb “be” is imperative (*wehye*). Abraham was not only to receive blessing but to become a blessing through the Spirit’s work in his heart. He had a moral responsibility to live such a life so that thereby others would be blessed by it. (Concordia Journal – January 1987)

Ultimately fulfilled in Christ, but also in various temporal ways, as when God blessed the Egyptians through Joseph, the Ninevites through Jonah, even the Babylonians during Israel’s exile (cf Dan. 2:48; 6:28. (TLSB)

This is something that God does: God is the One, who in the last analysis makes Abram to be a true blessing unto others. But at the same time, a moral responsibility of Abram’s is involved: he should do his part that he may become a blessing to others. Consequently the imperative, “be thou a blessing.” He personally should aim to live such a life that others are blessed by it. (Leupold)

(5) “I will bless those who bless you,”

Abram would experience opposition as, for the last century of his life, he lived a nomad in lands belonging to others. But God promised him he would be so closely identified with the work of God that to curse him, to despise him, would be tantamount to opposing God. (PBC)

For this difference between God’s blessing and man’s blessing are the wishing of good, God’s blessings the impartation of good. Besides, it should be noted that divine grace presupposes that there will be many that wish Abram well; therefore mebharekhe’kha, plural, “thy blessers.” (Leupold)

The Lord promises that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His people (Mt. 16:18). No effort on Satan’s part would undermine God’s promise to redeem the world in the promised Savior. Thus, Pharaoh’s threat was drowned in the Red Sea (Ex. 14:28), kings Sihon and Og were destroyed (Deut. 2:33; 3:3), even world powers such as Babylon, Greece, and Rome suffered defeat., while God faithfully upheld His people and the promise of the Gospel. On the other hand, those who befriended His people, such as the midwives in Egypt (Ex. 1:20) and Rahab the harlot (Josh. 6:25), were blessed. (TLSB)

(6) “whoever curses you I will curse,”

The Hebrew uses two different verbs – ‘arar for God’s judicial cursing and galal for man’s injudicious or blasphemous cursing. Again divine grace presupposes that there will not be many that wish this friend of God ill: Therefore meqallekha, singular, “thy curser.” The deeper reason behind all this is that Abram will be closely identified with the good work of God, that to curse him comes to be almost the equivalent of cursing God. (Leupold)

(7) “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” God’s original blessing on all mankind (1:28) would be restored and fulfilled through Abram and his offspring. In various ways and degrees, these promises were reaffirmed to Abram (v. 7; 15:5–21; 17:4–8; 18:18–19; 22:17–18), to Isaac (26:2–4), to Jacob (28:13–15; 35:11–12; 46:3) and to Moses (Ex 3:6–8; 6:2–8). The seventh promise is quoted in Ac 3:25 with reference to Peter’s Jewish listeners (see Ac 3:12)—Abram’s physical descendants—and in Gal 3:8 with reference to Paul’s Gentile listeners—Abram’s spiritual descendants. (Leupold)

Not merely a promise of temporal blessing, but the promise of the Gospel that in Christ Jesus – Abraham’s Seed (Gal. 3:29) – people of all nations and times will have the eternal blessing of God’s forgiveness. There is no greater blessing than that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor. 5:19). (TLSB)

The unfaithfulness of the Shemites could threaten once again to plunge the whole race into spiritual darkness, but the love of God took the initiative to guarantee that would not happen. God promised Abram that a great Descendant would be born to his family who would bring blessings to every member of the human race. The way Abram was saved is the same way sinners are saved today. God didn’t have one way for people of the OT times to enter His family and a different way for us of the NT period. There has always been only one way: to trust God’s promises as these center in Jesus Christ. (PBC)

A blessing so great that its effect shall extend to “all the families of the earth” can be thought of only in connection with the promised Savior. This word, therefore, is definitely Messianic and determines that the Messiah is to emerge from the line of Abram. (Leupold)

12:4 *Abram went as the LORD had told him.* See Heb 11:8. Prompt obedience grounded in faith characterized this patriarch throughout his life (see 17:23; 21:14; 22:3). (CSB)

Luther: “Promise and faith belong together” (AE 2:266). What God promised to Abram worked faith in him and caused him to act in faith. Cf. Rom. 10:17. (TLSB)

There are no complaints or hesitation, somewhat common among other called heroes of faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

In His marvelous conversation with Abram, God had really said all that there was to say. All Abram could do was to speak the “Amen” to what God had promised. The Bible calls this “faith.” Faith, then, is the hand which takes God’s promises and makes them our own. By contrast, unbelief closes its hand into a fist and makes it impossible for God to give us His blessings. (PBC)

Hebrews 11:8 “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”

and Lot. See 13:1, 5. Lot at first was little more than Abram’s ward. (CSB)

The pain of separation is eased in part by the coming along of Abram’s nephew Lot. God’s mercy is displayed in this fact, for He it was, not doubt, who disposed Lot’s heart to desire to accompany Abram. (Leupold)

seventy-five years old. Although advanced in age at the time of his call, Abram would live for another full century (see 25:7; see also note on 5:5). (CSB)

He is even according to the standards of that time a middle-aged man (Leupold)

12:5 *people they had acquired.* Wealthy people in that ancient world always had servants to help them with their flocks and herds (see 15:3; 24:2). Not all servants were slaves; many were voluntarily employed. (CSB)

Servants, laborers, and children and relatives of the same. Luther: “not simply his household but the true and holy church in which Abraham was the high priest” (AE 2:280). (TLSB)

Land of Canaan – From this Abram realized he would not be able to homestead this land; it was already occupied. Before his descendants could live here as their home, they would have to dispossess the Canaanites. This had to be a sobering realization for Abram. God was training Abram to believe what God had said, first of all, about the Promised Land. (PBC)

No one can fully realize the greatness of the things promised to the posterity of Abram until he remembers that the land promised to the posterity of Abram was already occupied by the Canaanites. But Abram’s faith is not daunted by this seeming difficulty. (Leupold)

12:6 *oak tree of Moreh.* See perhaps 35:4; Jdg 9:6, 37. A famous sanctuary was located at Shechem in central Canaan, and a large tree was often a conspicuous feature at such holy places. But Abram worshiped the Lord there, not the local deity. (CSB)

Once in Canaan, Abraham had an opportunity for idolatry. The tree mentioned here signals the usual tree or grove of trees accompanying a site of idol worship. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

Canaanites were in the land – Moses reminds us that God’s people, though called to be separate, are still in the world, surrounded by enemies against which the Lord protects His elect (John 15:18-19; 17:11-21). (TLSB)

12:7 *The LORD appeared.*† The Lord frequently appeared visibly to Abram and to others. (CSB)

No one can see God and still live (Ex. 33:20), and “no one has ever seen God” (1 John 4:12; cf 1 Tim 6:16). Novatian: “It was not the Father who was seen...but the Son who has both been accustomed to descend, and to be seen because He has descended. For He is the image of the invisible God” (ANF 5:628; cf Col. 1:15). (TLSB)

Here God appears to renew his promise of offspring and land. Where Abraham might have worshiped an idol he instead builds his first of several altars at significant places of blessings. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

At this critical moment for Abram, the Lord, the Savior-God, appeared to him, to reaffirm and clarify his promise and to bolster Abram’s faith. He made it clear that Abram was not to try to take immediate possession of the land. It was only for Abram’s descendants that the land of Canaan would become a new homeland. Each new promise of God nourished and exercised Abram’s faith. (PBC)

1 Corinthians 10:13 “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

to your offspring I will give this land – For the development of God’s purposes in the seed of Abram it is essential that a definite land be available within which this seed comes to its normal development. So the promise of the land as held in safekeeping by God for Abram’s sees it not a capricious promise but one that ties up definitely with the needs of the case. From this point on it will be seen that every new promise fits into the development of God’s purposes as into an organic whole which is going through a normal process of growth. (Leupold)

an altar. The first of several that Abram built at places where he had memorable spiritual experiences (see v. 8; 13:18; 22:9). He acknowledged that the land of Canaan belonged to the Lord in a special way (see Ex 20:24; Jos 22:19). (CSB)

Abram established an altar there because the Lord appeared to him. Abram does this throughout his life. (TLSB)

Now look at Abram’s response to the Lord’s appearance. In a land full of Canaanites and Canaanite religion, he built an altar to the Lord, the true God, the God who had appeared to him and restated His promise. To the heathen Canaanites, as well as to the men and women of his own household, Abram’s worship announced: “I don’t know whom you’re going to worship, but I want you to know that the only God deserving of your worship is the God who has appeared to me with all His grace and His favor. (PBC)

A word from God requires a response on the part of man. Abram felt himself impelled to give personal public testimony to God’s mercy displayed in this appearance. (Leupold)

12:8 *Bethel.* Just north of Jerusalem, it was an important town in the religious history of God’s ancient people (see, e.g., 28:10–22; 35:1–8; 1Ki 12:26–29). Only Jerusalem is mentioned more often in the OT. (CSB)

Remember that Moses originally wrote the book of Genesis for the ancient people of Israel, who at the time had not yet entered the land. Can you imagine how mentioning the names of cities which they would one day inhabit would awaken anticipation for their new home? Each of the historic spots Abram visited and where he worships would have special meaning for his descendants when they one day occupied the homeland God had picked out for them. (PBC)

Ai – This is common noun meaning “heap of stones.” (Leupold)

called on the name of the Lord – This is a public invocation of Yahweh’s name, an act which could hardly be performed without proclaiming the works and the character of Yahweh – a fact which leads Luther to translate: “he preached concerning the name of the Lord.” This expression specifically means “to use the name of the Lord in worship.” (Leupold)

“(Prayer) includes the entire ministry” (AE 2:287. Hebrew allows the translation “H proclaimed in the name of the Lord.” Luther proposed that Abram may have learned of the Lord more fully through the ministry established by the patriarch Shem. (TLSB)

12:9 *journeyed on* – Nasa’ actually means “to pull up stakes,” a natural expression in nomadic days. To convey the idea that this kept on for quite a while the absolute infinitive (nasoa’) is joined to the finite verb, as well as the absolute infinitive of the verb “to go” (halokh) which almost equals our adverb “continually.” (Leupold)

Negev. The dry wasteland stretching southward from Beersheba. The same Hebrew word is translated “south” in 13:14. (CSB)

This lies south of Hebron. It is an arid region in parts of which isolated flocks may be tended, at least down as far south as Beersheba. It may have been less desiccated in patriarchal day. (Leupold)

12:1–9 God calls an idolater to faith, giving him a promise that God Himself would fulfill for all people. God’s Spirit works faith, when and where He pleases, through the Word. He is faithful to do as He has said. He made Abram into a great nation, blessing all the world through the Son. As Abram’s offspring by faith, we have the blessing of God’s forgiveness and life without end. • Heavenly Father, call us to trust the Word of God in the water of Holy Baptism, to cling to everything You command, and to live by the blessing of Your Word. In Jesus’ name. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Romans 5:1-8, 13-17

Abraham Justified by Faith

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” 4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in [a] him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: 7 “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; 8 blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

Luther: “After the first three chapters, in which sin is revealed and faith’s way to righteousness is taught, St. Paul begins in chapter 4 to meet certain remonstrances and objections. First he takes up the one that all

men commonly make when they hear that faith justifies without works. They say, ‘Are we, then, to do no good works?’ Therefore he himself takes up the case of Abraham, and asks, ‘What did Abraham accomplish, then, with his good works? Were they all in vain? Were his works of no use?’ He concludes that Abraham was justified by faith alone, without any works, so much so that the Scriptures in Genesis 15[:6] declare that he was justified by faith alone even before the work of circumcision. But if the work of circumcision contributed nothing to his righteousness, though God had commanded it and it was a good work of obedience, then surely no other good work will contribute anything to righteousness. Rather, as Abraham’s circumcision was an external sign by which he showed the righteousness that was already his in faith, so all good works are only external signs which follow out of faith; like good fruit, they demonstrate that a person is already inwardly righteous before God. (TLSB)

“With this powerful illustration from the Scriptures, St. Paul confirms the doctrine of faith which he had set forth in chapter 3. He cites also another witness, David, who says in Psalm 32[:1–2] that a man is justified without works—although he does not remain without works when he has been justified. Then he gives the illustration a broader application, setting it over against all other works of the law. He concludes that the Jews cannot be Abraham’s heirs merely because of their blood, still less because of the works of the law; they must inherit Abraham’s faith, if they would be true heirs. For before the law—before the law of Moses and the law of circumcision—Abraham was justified by faith and called the father of all believers. Moreover the law brings about wrath rather than grace, because no one keeps the law out of love for it and pleasure in it. What comes by the works of the law is thus disfavor rather than grace. Therefore faith alone must obtain the grace promised to Abraham, for these examples too were written for our sakes [Rom. 15:4], that we too should believe” (AE 35:373–74). (TLSB)

4:1 Having shown that circumcision does not merit salvation, Paul now applies this to Abraham, the first to receive God’s covenant of circumcision (Gn 17:10–14). (TLSB)

Abraham, our forefather.† The great patriarch of the Jewish nation, the true example of a justified person (see Jas 2:21–23). The Jews of Jesus’ time used Abraham as an example of justification by works, but Paul holds him up as a shining example of righteousness through faith (see Gal 3:6–9). (CSB)

The key example Paul chooses is Abraham. The term “forefather” (προπάτωρ) occurs only here in the NT. The referent of “our” is most interesting. Initially, as indicated by the phrase “according to flesh,” “our” has the obvious meaning of Paul and his fellow Jews. They are Abraham’s children according to physical lineage. This is reflected in how Scripture describes Israel as “the seed of Abraham” (Ps 105:6; Is 41:8; see Rom 9:7–8). Here “flesh” need not have any negative sense (a nuance of “flesh” present thus far in Romans only in 2:28). Instead, “according to flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα) has the same meaning as when applied to the sinless Christ in 1:3 and 9:5. (CC)

“Our forefather according to the flesh.” If one receives something by the flesh, he receives it by works of his own deeds and efforts. The apostle also thinks of the good works that Abraham did after he was converted, after he became a servant of the living God, of all his glorious virtues for which Scriptures praise Abraham. The works of the converted, though done in the power of God, are still the deeds of man. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

While the primary focus of “our forefather according to flesh” is, at least initially, the Jewish people collectively, it is not necessary to restrict this description as a return to the second person singular “you” used to interact directly with a Jewish person in 2:17–27. The question-and-answer format is able to dialog with all who are listening (as in 3:1–8). This is particularly evident in how the application of “our” expands as the chapter progresses. Father Abraham has children beyond these (see 4:12, 16). (CC)

4:2 Hypothetical point. Many rabbis assumed that Abraham was justified by keeping the Law perfectly. If this were true, Abraham had reason to boast. But he could not boast before God, who knew that Abraham was not justified by works but by faith. (TLSB)

The engaging diatribe format continues in 4:2 with a non-committal conditional. It expresses, at least initially, the possibility that perhaps “Abraham was declared righteous from works” (ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη). If so, the verse continues, then “he has a boast” (ἔχει καύχημα). Dunn points out that an affirmative response to this conditional is “the normal or at least widely accepted way of thinking about Abraham among his fellow Jews.” Indeed, Matera articulates this in even more exclusive terms by stating: “Although Jewish tradition recognized the importance of Abraham’s faith, it never argued that Abraham was justified by faith. Jewish tradition was more inclined to view Abraham as righteous because he was obedient to God.” (CC)

Although Paul does not directly diminish the character of Abraham in any way in Romans 4, the most challenging reply to all these assertions comes from Scripture itself. First of all, Luther points out: “If you should ask what Abraham was before he was called by a merciful God, Joshua (24:2) answers that he was an idolater, that is, that he deserved death and eternal damnation.” In that passage, Joshua reminds Israel, “Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, ‘Across the River [the Euphrates] your fathers lived long ago, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods’ ” (Josh 24:2). Second, the narrative of Genesis itself hardly depicts Abraham as perfect after Yahweh’s call. Twice he lies about the fact that Sarah is his wife (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–18). His conduct in regard to Hagar and Ishmael is also far from exemplary (Gen 16:4–6). (CC)

4:3 Elderly Abraham believed God’s promise that he would be the father of a great nation (Gn 15:1–6). His faith is noted, not his works. (TLSB)

The reference is to Ge 15:6, where nothing is mentioned about works. (CSB)

counted. Abraham had kept no law, rendered no service and performed no ritual that earned credit to his account before God. His belief in God, who had made promises to him, was credited to him as righteousness. (CSB)

Abraham did not act righteously; God declared him righteous because of his faith. “Faith itself is credited for righteousness. Faith is the thing God declares to be righteousness. Paul adds that righteousness is credited freely” (Ap IV 89). (TLSB)

Paul counters that Abraham’s righteousness before God was not based upon works. Later in 4:9–11, Paul will use the chronology of the narrative account to deal with the matter of circumcision as a supposed basis of, or requirement for, righteousness. In 4:3, however, his evidence is provided by a direct quotation from the authoritative “Scripture” (γραφὴ; see γραφαῖς in 1:2): “for what is the Scripture saying?” Note the present tense of the verb “is saying” (λέγει). It conveys that God’s Word continues to speak, as stated regarding the Law in 3:20. It also reinforces that when a perfect tense is used, the emphasis is on the present impact. (CC)

elogistha auto “was reckoned to him.” The passive construction highlights the passive role of the believer in the doctrine of justification. God is the active agent; he is the one who justifies. The believer is the passive one who is acted upon. The believer does nothing, contributes nothing. He receives the promise in faith, but even this is not his doing, because faith is worked in him by God’s promise. Paul takes this from Genesis 15 which is still two chapters before the requirement of circumcision. Abraham was justified by faith before any works of law were asked of him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

4:4-5 Including works in salvation destroys grace. If we save ourselves, then God is not our Savior! God justifies sinners who cannot deserve His grace. (TLSB)

Before proceeding there, Paul provides an everyday illustration, as true today as it was then. While 4:4 has terms loaded with theological nuances, it is best to read the verse simply as it stands: “now to the one who works, the payment is not credited as a favor, but according to what is owed.” The noun “works” (ἔργα, as in 4:2, 6) is typically suspect in Paul and the phrase “works of the Law” (e.g., 3:20, 28) is always negative. However, Paul does use the verb “to work” (ἐργάζομαι in 4:5) in positive expressions elsewhere (Rom 2:10; 1 Cor 16:10; Gal 6:10; Col 3:23). The sense here is more neutral. It reflects the secular working world, where a person’s “wages” or “payment” (ὁ μισθός) is not credited by the employer as a gracious favor (κατὰ χάριν) or even as a gift. Instead, “payment” denotes the sum the employer is obligated to pay the worker, “according to what is owed” (κατὰ ὀφείλημα). If unpaid, this might become a debt, but that is not the sense in 4:4. (CC)

4:4 *his wages* – misthos means “pay, earnings” and stands in opposition to faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

his due – opheilama is a debt owed and is the opposite of grace. Apology IV, 89, Tappert 120 says: “Therefore he excludes even the merit of works according to the moral law; for if by these we earned justification before God, faith would not be accounted for righteousness without works. Romans 4:4-5.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

4:5 *who does not work*. “But to the one who is not working, but believing on the One who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is being credited for righteousness” (4:5). This brief expression encapsulates Paul’s Good News in a manner reminiscent of 3:28. In so doing, Paul retrieves the key terms of Gen 15:6 in a manner which he will utilize throughout the rest of the chapter. Rom 4:4–5 also enables us to define “believe” (πιστεύω) most simply. To work is to be owed (4:4). To believe is to not work (τῷ δὲ μὴ ἐργαζομένῳ πιστεύοντι δέ, 4:5). Thus faith is the opposite of works (as in Rom 3:28; Gal 2:16; 3:2). In relationship with God, there is *either* the “works” approach *or* there is faith. (CC)

But what about those who believe in both faith *and* works (synergism)? Paul does not even bring up that alternative. “It is faith, therefore, that God declares to be righteousness; he [Paul] adds that it is accounted freely and denies that it could be accounted freely if it were a reward for works” (Ap IV 89). Thus righteousness is credited “to the one who is not working, but believing” (Rom 4:5). (CC)

Herein lies Paul’s fundamental charge against human thinking about God, thinking which has all too often influenced Jewish and Christian attitudes. Our dominant worldly view generally wants to follow the employment metaphor in desiring to receive what is owed or fair from God based upon works (4:4). Paul has endeavored to explode that type of thinking in 1:18–3:20. He continues to do so in Romans 4 by proving such was never the case, even with our forefather Abraham (4:1). The scriptural account of Abraham declares that what was in his account before God was not there from his working, but rather because righteousness was credited to him by God himself. (CC)

Ungodly. The grenade Paul tosses right in the midst of “believe” (πιστεύω), “declare righteous” (δικαιώω), “credit” (λογίζομαι), “faith” (πίστις), and “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) is the word “ungodly” (ἀσεβής). Dunn understates the case in suggesting that this term “would be distinctly more provocative.” In 1:18, Paul asserts: “indeed, [the] wrath of God is being revealed from heaven upon every ungodliness [ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ἀσέβειαν] and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” “Ungodliness” (ἀσέβεια) is a powerful, derogatory word which depicts an absolute rejection of the existence of God with a corresponding dishonorable lifestyle. Now Paul asserts that these are exactly the kind of people whom God credits as righteous! More precisely, righteousness is credited to the one

“believing on the One who declares the ungodly righteous” (πιστεύοντι ... ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ, 4:5). Paul’s primary assertion, once again, then, ultimately is not about people, but about God. God is the one who “declares righteous” (an active participle of δικαιοῶ in 4:5, as in 3:26); by him is a person “credited” (a divine passive of λογίζομαι in 4:5, as in 4:3) with righteousness. (CC)

Thus Jesus himself exemplifies what Paul here says about the God who declares the ungodly righteous. Jesus fulfills the prophecy that “the righteous one, my Servant, shall declare many to be righteous,” and he does this not for those who are already righteous, but for “transgressors” laden with “iniquities” (Is 53:11–12). The problem with the Pharisees and others who scorned and derided Jesus for associating with “sinners” was their refusal to acknowledge their own ungodliness. Jesus, however, does not avoid the topic in his scathing accusations against the Pharisees (e.g., Lk 11:37–52; 16:14–15), something Paul similarly reinforces in Rom 2:17–29 and 3:9–20. (CC)

4:6-8 Paul cites further evidence for believing on the God who declares the ungodly righteous from Psalm 32. As in the quote from another psalm of David, Psalm 51 in Rom 3:4, one could delve into the narrative of David’s life for examples which affirm his personal experience as illustrative of the truth. But in Romans 4, it also seems best to simply regard David as the author of the words which corroborate the theological reality Paul is expounding: “just as David also pronounces the blessing of the person ...” (4:6). Though David is long dead, the words God inspired him to sing are also cited with the present tense Greek verb λέγει, “is saying,” as in 4:3 (although translated differently here because of the context; see the second textual note on 4:6). David still speaks of real blessedness or, more accurately, continues to actually pronounce the blessing to a person through the words of Psalm 32. (CC)

4:6 imony of Genesis regarding the relationship between righteousness and faith and works. Here again God is at work. God is in charge; man is the recipient. (Franzmann)

apart from works. “For the holy apostle Paul writes, ‘Of grace,’ ‘without merit,’ ‘without Law,’ ‘without works,’ ‘not of works.’ All these words together mean that we are justified and saved through faith alone in Christ” (FC Ep III 10). (TLSB)

Saints under the OT were saved in the same way as saints under the NT: not on account of their own works, but on account of Christ, and through faith in Him. (CB)

4:7-8 Ps 32:1 shows how the OT teaches justification through faith. The confession reveals that David was not relying on his works, but on grace. Although we are sinners, God forgives us and covers us with His righteousness. (TLSB)

To introduce the quotation in Rom 4:7–8, Paul first announces that this blessing rests on the person who is like Abraham, the person “to whom God is crediting righteousness apart from works” (4:6). It is, therefore, intriguing that the psalmist does not actually use the vocabulary of “righteousness” or “works,” but of the forgiveness of sins. However, it is his emphatic use of the accounting term λογίζομαι, “to charge; credit,” which drives Paul to the LXX version of MT Ps 32:1–2. While the presence of this same verb connects the passage with LXX Gen 15:6 and Romans 4, “Paul’s argument is not merely verbal but substantial.” (CC)

Paul’s quotation of this flows nicely out of what he asserted in 4:5. The faith which is credited *for* righteousness is one which believes on the God who declares the ungodly righteous. Stated positively, 4:7–8 asserts that such a person’s blessedness lies in that fact that his lawless acts “were forgiven” (ἀφέθησαν) or, in Hebrew, “lifted up, taken away” (רָפוּ) by God. Furthermore, their sins “were covered over” by God (ἐπεκαλύφθησαν is another divine passive). These verbs bring to mind the OT picture of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, the blood applied to the mercy seat or covering placed over the

ark that day, and sacrificial blood in general (Leviticus 16). This reinforces the association of OT roots for “redemption” (ἀπολύτρωσις) in Rom 3:24, as well as “atoning sacrifice” or “mercy seat” (ἱλαστήριον) and “in his blood” (ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι) in 3:25. Finally, the psalmist speaks emphatically about the Lord not crediting or, better, *not* charging sin against a person (“whose sin the Lord will in no way charge [to his account].” Thus λογίζομαι now expresses *both* the sense of credit *and* debit (charge). The faith of the ungodly in God is *credited for* a declaration of righteous in 4:5. Now, on the basis of the psalmist’s words, Paul says blessing resides in sin *not being debited against* a man. (CC)

4:7 *whose sins are covered* – Not punished but forgiven. (CB)

4:8 *blessed is the man* – The quotation is from Psalm 32. A repentant King David is speaking as he recalls his own sorry past. Initially stubborn and unrepentant, David tried to minimize and ignore his sin, but that didn’t work. He now admits: (PBC)

“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.” (Psalm 32:3,4)

Brought to his knees, David resorted to the only thing that works: looking in faith to the God who justifies the ungodly. David had no good works to bring, only ungodliness to confess. And he does just that: (PBC)

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”— and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” (Psalm 32:5)

God forgave the guilt of David’s sin. This free forgiveness through faith without the addition of any works or merit is precisely the same pattern that Abraham had experienced. And it forms the basis for David’s cry of joy and relief (Psalm 32:1,2), which Paul quotes almost word for word. (PBC)

The Promise Realized Through Faith

13 For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. 16 That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

4:13 *the promise* – God promised to multiply Abraham’s descendants (Gn 15:5) and to bless all nations through him. This was a prophecy about Jesus. (TLSB)

If Paul wants to speak about the Gospel in the OT, he typically uses “promise” (ἐπαγγελία). Prior to the second century BC, however, that Greek word simply meant any type of “announcement” (literally, “a message upon”), and thus it rarely occurs in the LXX. But since ἐπαγγελία had later developed the notion of “promise” or “pledge,” it is a favorite term for Paul. It occurs particularly as an expression of God’s Word of future blessing to the patriarchs or “fathers.” (E.g., Rom 4:13, 14, 16, 20; 9:4, 8, 9; 15:8; 2 Cor 1:20; 7:1; Gal 3:14–29; 4:23, 28; Eph 2:12; 3:6; see also Acts 13:32; 26:6) (CC)

In Jewish circles, “what is striking is the way in which when the concept ‘promise’ emerges it is subordinated to or its effects seen as mediated through the law.” A couple of examples, which also include the notion of inheritance, illustrate the point. Psalms of Solomon 12 contrasts the deeds of the wicked with the devout who refrain from doing evil. It concludes with this plea: “and let the pious of the Lord inherit the promises of the Lord” (καὶ ὅσοι κυρίου κληρονομήσασιν ἐπαγγελίας κυρίου, Ps Sol 12:6). Prior to the purification of the temple by the Maccabees, 2 Macc 2:17–18 states: “it is God who has saved all his people, and has returned the inheritance [τὴν κληρονομίαν] to all, and the kingship and the priesthood and the consecration, as he promised through the law [καθὼς ἐπηγγέλματο διὰ τοῦ νόμου]” (NRSV). (CC)

Whether Paul was aware of the Maccabees text or not, the clause which opens 4:13 marks a striking contrast: “indeed, *not* through the Law was the promise” (οὐ γὰρ διὰ νόμου ἢ ἐπαγγελία). Paul then affirms the positive alternative at the end of the verse: the promise is, rather, “through the righteousness of faith” (διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως). This expression has, of course, been expounded in regard to Abraham throughout the first half of Romans 4. But the “Law versus faith” dichotomy reaches back to 3:19–22, 27, 28, 31. In all cases, righteousness is related to faith and apart from works of the Law. (CC)

Now this is also shown to be true in regard to the promise to Abraham. The addition “and to his seed” is rooted in numerous OT expressions of the promise.^c Here it opens the door to all those for whom Abraham is father as just articulated in 4:11–12, and also hints toward the “our/us” (ἡμᾶς) of 4:24. Paul expands on this idea in Gal 3:16, where he points out that Abraham’s seed is ultimately one, Christ, which points ahead to Rom 4:24–25. But here in Romans 4 the more expansive application, which Paul proceeds to make in Gal 3:29, is more pronounced. This is particularly true in light of 4:16, where the promise is “to *every* seed” and Abraham is “father of *all* of us.” (CC)

The specific element associated with the promise in 4:13 is that Abraham is “the heir of the world.” While that exact phrase may not be used in the OT, Cranfield goes too far when he asserts that “nowhere in the OT is the promise to Abraham couched in terms at all close to τὸ κληρονόμον αὐτὸν εἶναι κόσμου.” The notion of inheritance (usually expressed with a verb for “inherit” or “possess” rather than a noun such as “heir”) is pervasive in regard to those who would receive the promises to Abraham (e.g., Gen 15:3, 4, 7, 8; 21:10) and in reference to the promised land of Canaan (e.g., Num 26:53–56; 32:18–19; 33:53–54; Deut 1:8, 21, 38–39). Furthermore, the notion that Abraham, and his seed, would inherit the world: (CC)

succinctly summarizes the three key provisions of the promise as it unfolds in Genesis: that Abraham would have an immense number of descendants, embracing “many nations” (Gen. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:4–6, 16–20; 22:17), that he would possess “the land” (Gen. 13:15–17; 15:12–21; 17:8), and that he would be the medium of blessing to “all the peoples of the earth” (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). Particularly noteworthy is the promise in Gen. 22:17b that Abraham’s seed would “possess the gates of their enemies.” (CC)

Thus, rather than being an illegitimate expansion, Paul’s phrasing encompasses the implications of the overall promise. Indeed, the OT itself speaks repeatedly of God’s people inheriting the “land/world” (יְרֵאָה, e.g., Pss 25:13; 37:9, 11, 22; Is 57:13; 60:21). Sirach 44:21 similarly extends the implications of the promise: (CC)

Therefore with an oath he [the Lord] assured him [Abraham] that the nations would be blessed in his offspring, that he would multiply him as the dust of the earth, and that as the stars he would exalt his offspring, and that he would give them an inheritance from sea to sea and from the River to the end of the earth. (CC)

The initial point Paul makes in Rom 4:13 is that the Abrahamic promise was not received “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου). The referent of νόμος must surely be the revealed Torah, and not merely a “principle” or “system.” It is interesting to notice that Paul just utilized a chronological argument in rejecting a

relationship between Abraham's righteousness and circumcision in 4:9–11. It is interesting to ponder why he does not employ the same type of temporal argument regarding the Law here, especially since he does utilize it in Gal 3:15–18. The most plausible reason is that whereas Galatians was focused more narrowly upon the Mosaic Law, in Romans Paul expands the reach of νόμος beyond those who have received it in revealed form. Despite Jewish assertions to the contrary (see the commentary on 4:2), there is no scriptural warrant for presuming Abraham knew the commands of the revealed Law. He fits among those between Adam and Moses who lived apart from the revealed Law (2:12; 5:13–14). Thus the description of Rom 2:15, where Paul asserts that “the work of the Law [is] written in their hearts,” more appropriately characterizes Abraham's awareness of the Law, both when uncircumcised and circumcised. If the point, then, is not temporal, on what basis does Paul exclude one's receiving of the promise “through the Law” (4:13)? (CC)

not come through law. Not on the condition that the promise be merited by works of the law. (CSB)

Paul is thoroughly Jewish in his language, and yet his thought is worlds apart from that of Judaism. He describes the promise given to Abraham and his descendants in a phrase that the Jewish rabbis used: “That they should inherit the world,” and at the same time he brushes aside the Judaic interpretation which made the promise given to Abraham God's reward to Abraham for his keeping of the Law, his good works. (Franzmann)

The way of salvation through faith in Christ is suited to all classes and conditions of men. None are so good that they can be saved in any other way; and none are so bad that they cannot be saved in this. (CB)

his offspring. All those of whom Abraham is said to be father (vv. 11–12). – This means all believers throughout history. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2) (CSB)

heir of the world.† “World” here refers to the creation, as in 1:20. No express mention of this heirship is made in the Genesis account of Abraham. He is promised “offspring like the dust of the earth” (Ge 13:16) and possession of the land of Canaan (Ge 12:7; 13:14–15; 15:7, 18–21; 17:8), and that all the peoples on earth will be blessed through him (Ge 12:3; 18:18) or his offspring (Ge 22:18). But since, as Genesis already makes clear, God purposed through Abraham and his offspring to work out the destiny of the whole world, it was implicit in the promises to Abraham that he and his offspring would “inherit the earth” (see Ps 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34; Mt 5:5). (CSB)

As Abraham became the father of many nations, the world would, in a sense, belong to him. (TLSB)

The point he's making is that an heir doesn't have to do anything for the stipulation of the will to go into effect. (PBC)

4:14 The form of the conditional in 4:14 is again non-committal (see 4:2). For the sake of argument, Paul proposes, “For if those from the Law [οἱ ἐκ νόμου] are heirs, ...” Dunn suggests the phrase “those from the Law” might describe “those who quite naturally saw their participation in the inheritance promised to Abraham as identical with their membership [in] the covenant people, the people of the law.” However, the presence of “from” (ἐκ) brings out a more specific possibility, which Dunn also acknowledges, that “the phrase is thus also an abbreviated form of the fuller phrase οἱ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου [‘those from works of the Law’].” This is more consistent with Paul's use of variations of that formula, particularly in 3:20 and 4:2 (see also Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10 and the excursus “The Background of ‘Works of the Law’ ” following the commentary on 3:9–20). Cranfield suggests that the phrase depicts those who contend that they “have a claim to the inheritance on the basis of their fulfilment of the law.” He concludes this is “confirmed by the parallel protasis in Gal 3:18 (εἰ ... ἐκ νόμου ἢ κληρονομία [‘if the inheritance (comes) from the Law’]).” If so, “the apostle shows that there is something wicked in hoping for an inheritance by the

law.”²⁸ However, in light of the identical phrase stated in the singular in 4:16, Moo’s paraphrase is likely the best understanding: “If those who have only the law are heirs ...” The point is that the definition of who is an heir is not simply equivalent with one’s ethnicity or possession of the revealed Law. As 4:16 reveals, the referent of Paul’s supposition encompasses those who are “from the Law *only*” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου μόνον), but who are *not also* “from the faith of Abraham” (ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ). (CC)

If, for the sake of argument, those from the Law are heirs, then, 4:14 contends that faith is like a cup which has been poured out and remains empty (κεκένωται); God’s promise is similarly rendered null and void (κατήργηται). These are probably not divine passives. Instead, those who are of the Law alone, that is, who pursue righteousness from works and apart from faith, have themselves emptied what comes “through the righteousness of faith” (διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως), as expressed in 4:13. The promise is similarly made ineffective, not because humans can nullify God’s promise, but because they can seek to attain it “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου), an avenue which Paul has just excluded (4:13; see also 3:27; 9:30–10:5). (CC)

Here Paul does not explicitly state why the promise is not through the Law, but it is certainly evident from his previous statements (e.g., 2:21–27; 3:9–20), as well as in what follows. Here in Romans 4 the case of Abraham simply illustrates that “from the Law” (ἐκ νόμου, 4:14) is not the way it is with the promise of God. It is not about anything which proceeds from Abraham, or us, toward God “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου, 4:13). The promise comes by God crediting it to Abraham and his offspring through the righteousness of faith. “Hence to ask more than the faith of Gen 15:6 is to nullify the promise of Gen 15:5.” Why this is so is expressed in Rom 4:16. (CC)

the adherents of the law. Those whose claim to the inheritance is based on the fulfillment of the law. (CSB)

promise – oi ek nomou means “those who base their relationship on works.” The best example is that found in John 8:39 where the Jews claim Abraham as father but Jesus immediately denies it. They were not children of Abraham because they based everything on physical descent and on human works and worthiness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

The promise is God at work. (Franzmann)

the heirs. Those receiving the blessings promised to Abraham. (TLSB)

4:15 But first, yet another “for” (γάρ) explains that, instead of being a vehicle for receiving the promised inheritance, “the Law brings about wrath” (4:15). Earlier, Paul summarizes how the Law’s continued speaking leaves every mouth silent, holds all the world accountable, and is a means by which humans become fully cognizant of sin (3:19–20). There the phrase “from works of the Law” (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, 3:20) depicts human works done in accordance with the Law with an aim toward righteousness. Now, instead of merely silencing or giving awareness, “the Law” (νόμος) also actively accomplishes something: it works “wrath” (ὀργή). The reappearance of “wrath” recalls 1:18, where the “wrath of God is being revealed from heaven upon every ungodliness and unrighteousness of people” (see also 2:5, 8). But to contend that “the Law” itself accomplishes “wrath” is shocking, particularly to those who “rely upon the Law and ... boast in God” (2:17). Thus this brief thought regarding the Law, as well as those in 5:20 and 6:14, must be explained further. And so they will be, particularly in Romans 7. At this point, Ambrosiaster makes an important distinction: “The law itself is not wrath, but it brings wrath, i.e., punishment, to the sinner, for wrath is born from sin.” (CC)

Before returning to the faith side of the equation, Paul shoots off one more seemingly tangential phrase: “but where the Law is not, neither is there transgression [of the Law]” (4:15). For Paul the absence of transgression does not equate to the absence of sin. Rom 2:12 has already asserted that one can sin, and

perish as a result, apart from transgressing the revealed Law. Thus “while every ‘transgression’ is also a ‘sin,’ not every ‘sin’ is a ‘transgression.’ ” Paul will elaborate further in 5:13–14. At this point, Rom 4:15 hearkens back to 2:23, where those who boast in the Law are charged with dishonoring God “through the transgression of the Law” (διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως τοῦ νόμου). “Transgression” (παραβάσις) describes “sin in its relation to law, i.e., to a requirement or obligation which is legally valid or has legal force.” Paul now implies that the Law brings about wrath by the judgment it pronounces upon those who transgress its commands. The Law thereby turns “their sin into conscious transgression and so render[s] it more exceeding sinful.”³⁵ Thus, rather than leading to the promised inheritance, the Law actually makes things worse (see 5:20; 7:7–13). (CC)

Humans inevitably violate God’s Law and are condemned by it. “The Law always accuses and terrifies consciences” (Ap IV 38). (TLSB)

law brings wrath. The law, because it reveals sin and even stimulates it (see 7:7–11), produces wrath, not promise. (CSB)

It does so not because the Law is evil, but because the nature of man is fallen. Apology IV, 38, Tappert: “Paul does not say that by the law men merit the forgiveness of sins. For the law always accuses and terrifies consciences. It does not justify, because a conscience terrified by the law flees before God’s judgment.” Apology IV, 270, Tappert 147: “But without Christ this law is not kept. It always accuses the conscience, which does not satisfy the law and therefore flees in terror before the judgment and punishment of the law.” Apology XII, 88 Tappert 195: “The law will always accuse us because we never satisfy the law of God.” God dealt with Abraham not through law, not on the basis of the law, but on the basis of a promise. Abraham, of course, was sinful. But that did not destroy God’s promise. The promise was not conditioned by fulfillment of the law, it was altogether independent of the law. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

transgression. Overstepping a clearly defined line. Where there is no law there is still sin, but it does not have the character of transgression. (CSB)

The Law stands as a boundary. Without such a boundary, there can be no violation. (TLSB)

But where the promise of God, the grace of God, the Christ of God determine that relationship, there is no transgression either. There the promise given to God’s people through Micah is fulfilled for all people. (Franzmann)

¹⁸Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. ¹⁹You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19)

There will be men who, believing in the God who justifies the ungodly, will in the beggary of faith turn to God their gracious King (Matthew 5:3) and in meek dependence of faith will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5) (Franzmann)

4:16 The reason(s) why the promise is “through the righteousness of faith” (διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως) and not “through the Law” (διὰ νόμου, 4:13) is a question which has been lingering. Paul profoundly articulates his answer in 4:16. This verse also introduces the thoughts he runs with all the way to the climactic end of the chapter. However, Cranfield observes: “The first part of the verse is strikingly elliptic.” The expression “on account of this” (διὰ τοῦτο) usually draws a conclusion from what precedes. But here it primarily points ahead (see the textual note), as Paul goes on to express the reason why the

promise is “from faith” (ἐκ πίστεως). This shorthand prepositional phrase occurs twice in the thematic verse 1:17, as well as in 3:26 and, specifically in reference to the circumcised, in 3:30. Additionally, the same thought is encapsulated by “through faith” (διὰ πίστεως) repeatedly (3:22, 25, 30, 31) and “by faith” (πίστει) in 3:28. In essence, Paul “says that only faith can accept the promise. He therefore correlates and connects promise and faith” (Ap IV 50, after citing Rom 4:16). (CC)

In the middle portion of 4:16, Paul specifies two reasons why the promise is received “from faith.” The first expresses purpose: “in order that [it is] in accordance with grace” (ἵνα κατὰ χάριν). Based upon the clause to follow, where “the promise” is the subject, one is intended to assume that “the promise” is the subject (“it”) here as well. Thus “the promise” is “from faith” in order that “the promise” be “in accordance with grace.” In 4:4, “in accordance with grace” (κατὰ χάριν) was excluded when a worker simply received what was owed. Instead, 4:5, by implication, expresses what is “in accordance with grace”: “not working, but believing” is grace. Believing upon a God who declares the ungodly righteous (τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ) is a further expression of grace, for “his faith is being credited for righteousness” (λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην, 4:5). On the basis of 4:4–5, Dunn concludes: (CC)

The interlocking correlatives are ἐκ πίστεως [“from faith”] and κατὰ χάριν [“in accordance with grace”]: God’s gracious outreach to man is of such a character that it can only be received in unconditional openness. Whatever restricts or obscures that openness, and the character of faith as sheer receptivity and dependence on God, denies and restricts that grace. (CC)

The force of the second reason, “so that the promise is certain to every seed” (εἰς τὸ εἶναι βεβαίαν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν παντὶ τῷ σπέρματι, 4:16), is debated. Käsemann contends that “it is consecutive, offering the conclusion.” Dunn suggests that, as with the previous phrase, “the construction is again final and not merely consecutive.”⁴⁰ His use of “merely” brings up an important point in regard to such categories. Moule points out that “the Semitic mind was notoriously unwilling to draw a sharp dividing-line between purpose and consequence.” Wallace expounds: “In other words, the NT writers employ the language to reflect their theology: what God purposes is what happens and, consequently, ἵνα [‘so that’] is used to express both the divine purpose and the result” (cf. 3:8). Thus this clause, utilizing the comparable “so that ... is” (εἰς τὸ εἶναι), expresses *both why* God does it all “in accordance with grace” (κατὰ χάριν), *as well as his intended result*. Thereby it is God’s gracious intention that his promise be “certain” (βεβαίαν), that is, solid, certain, and guaranteed to every one of Abraham’s offspring. As with Abraham (4:2–3), the fact that the action all goes from God toward us excludes any notion of our works. “If the promise were conditional on our works, it would not be guaranteed” (Ap XX 10, after citing Rom 4:16). (CC)

Paul refers to Abraham’s “seed” in 4:13 and here in 4:16. He now provides his definition of “every seed” (παντὶ τῷ σπέρματι). In so doing, he uses the exact same phrasing “not only, but also” (οὐ ... μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ) as he did in 4:12 when expressing a similar thought. It is, therefore, most likely that the combination is to be understood in the same manner here, as well as in 4:23–24. In 4:12 Paul speaks of one and the same group; Abraham is the father of “not ... only, but ... also ...” He does so here as well, though in singular or individual terms. The promise is secure to “every seed, not to the one from the Law only, but to the one who is also from the faith of Abraham, who is father of all of us” (4:16). This definition both expands and narrows what was the prevalent Jewish understanding of those to whom the phrase in 4:1, “Abraham, our forefather,” applies. (CC)

Moo speaks of Paul’s definition as “a ‘qualified’ universalism.” The universal aspect is encompassed by the expression that he “is father of all of us” at the end of 4:16. But it is also present in “every [παντὶ] seed” earlier in the verse; the promise is certain to *every offspring*. The narrowing or qualification is that the promise is not simply or automatically to the seed who are “from the Law” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου). In 4:12, the phrase was “to those not from circumcision only” (τοῖς οὐκ ἐκ περιτομῆς μόνον). Here it is “not to the one from the Law only” (οὐ τῷ ἐκ τοῦ νόμου μόνον). In both places, “not only” (οὐ ... μόνον) is

immediately followed by “but also” (ἀλλὰ καί). Being “from circumcision” (4:12) and/or “from the Law” (4:16) are not, in and of themselves, determinative of membership in Abraham’s family. This was explained in regard to circumcision in 2:25–29. Now there is a “but also” for “from the Law” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου) as well. It is “*but to the one who is also from the faith of Abraham*” (ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ, 4:16). Being his seed does not depend on being circumcised (4:9–12); neither does it “rely upon the Law” (2:17). As 4:14 similarly asserts, the promised inheritance is not in any sense “from the Law” (ἐκ νόμου). Indeed, “the Law” (νόμος) works wrath instead (4:15). As a result, as Paul proceeds to speak of faith in the promise, “the Law” (νόμος) disappears from sight through the end of the chapter and all the way until 5:13. (CC)

At the same time, Paul’s phrasing also means that being circumcised and/or of the Law are not exclusionary. The definitive element, in both places, is being of the faith of Abraham. In 4:12 the “but also” was expressed as “*but to those who also follow [in] the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham which [he had while he was] in [the state of] uncircumcision.*” Here, Paul simply writes, “But to the one who is also from the faith of Abraham” (ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ). Abraham had this faith while uncircumcised, *and* he had this faith while circumcised. Thus one can have this faith while being “from the Law” (ἐκ τοῦ νόμου, 4:16). And one can have this faith while being “without the Law” (ἀνόμως, 2:12). The definitive element for all is being “from the faith of Abraham” (ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ, 4:16). (CC)

it. Salvation. “If the promise were to depend upon our works, it would not be sure.... When would we know that we had received it?” (Ap XX 87) (TLSB)

depends on faith – The grace of God is the efficient cause. Faith is the receiving cause. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

Faith, promise, grace – these three constitute an indivisible trinity. (Franzmann)

Ephesians 2:8-9, “⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.”

A summary of the thought of vv. 11–12. For the close correlation between faith and grace see 3:24–25; Eph 2:8–9. (CSB)

not only to the adherent of the law. Jewish Christians. (CSB)

who shares the faith of Abraham.† Gentile Christians who share Abraham’s faith but who do not possess the law. (CSB)

All who share Abraham’s faith. (TLSB)

4:17 Rom 4:17 points out how Abraham’s faith was in God’s Word of promise. The promise stated that he would not be father of one nation only. Instead, “just as it stands written: ‘I have placed you, and so you are, father of many nations’ ” (4:17). Paul does not quote the first part of Gen 17:5 in which God alters his original name, Abram (“exalted father”), to Abraham (“father of multitudes”), since Paul always refers to the patriarch as Abraham. (CC)

But what does “from the faith of Abraham” (ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ) mean? The remainder of 4:17 introduces Paul’s exposition of that all-important phrase. Thus 4:17 functions as a hinge which “not only” wraps up 4:13–16, “but also” drives ahead to define Abraham’s faith. (CC)

In the remainder of Romans 4, numerous references to God's Word and his spoken promise convey the basis or grounding of Abraham's faith. These include "just as it stands written" (καθὼς γέγραπται, 4:17), "according to that which was spoken and now stands in effect" (κατὰ τὸ εἰρημένον, 4:18), "the promise of God" (τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:20), "what was promised [by God] and still in effect, he [God] is powerful also to do" (ὃ ἐπήγγελται δυνατός ἐστιν καὶ ποιῆσαι, 4:21), and "written on his account" (ἐγγράφη δὲ δι' αὐτόν, 4:23). Yet, as in 4:5, Abraham's faith was not only in *what* God spoke, but also in the God *who* spoke. This emphasis begins immediately after the quotation of Gen 17:5 in the second half of 4:17: "before whom he believed God, the one who makes the dead alive and calls the things not being so that [they] are being." (CC)

Earlier, Paul described the faith which is being credited for righteousness as "on the One who declares the ungodly righteous" (4:5). In 4:17 Abraham "believed God," and the content of his faith is also expressed. God is further defined with two phrases connected by one distributive article, "the one" (τοῦ). The first phrase, "the one who makes the dead alive" (τοῦ ζωοποιούντος τοὺς νεκρούς), is affirmed elsewhere. For example, in LXX Deut 32:39 God declares, "I will kill and I will make alive" (ἐγὼ ἀποκτενῶ καὶ ζῆν ποιήσω). LXX Ps 70:20 (MT/ET 71:20) has the psalmist affirming to God, "You have made me alive" (ἐζωοποίησάς με). Similar is 1 Sam 2:6. At the end of this chapter, Paul will assert that this life-giving characteristic of God is exemplified by the resurrection of Jesus (4:24–25). He also extends God's power over death to give life to all believers; see further the commentary on 8:11 (see also, e.g., 1 Cor 15:22, 36, 45). Here, however, Paul is speaking of what Abraham believed, and he applies this reference specifically to God's life-giving power over the deadness. (CC)

as it is written – Paul quotes Genesis 17:5 to affirm the universality of grace. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

I have made you. God's promise, spoken before Abraham's son Isaac was born, was so certain that it is in the past tense: I have done this. (TLSB)

in the presence of God. God considers Abraham the father of Jews and believing Gentiles alike, no matter how others (especially the Jews) may see him. (CSB)

God personally spoke this promise to Abraham. It did not come through another person. (TLSB)

Paul gives a sort of case history of faith, which is more vivid and more revealing than a definition. (Franzmann)

the God who gives life to the dead. The main reference is to the birth of Isaac through Abraham and Sarah, both of whom were far past the age of childbearing (see Ge 18:11). Secondarily Paul alludes also to the resurrection of Christ (see vv. 24–25). (CSB)

God's power is seen in His gift of life and in creation. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – John 3:1-17

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"⁴ Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the

Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

3:1 *in those days* – This often pointed to the end times and the Last Day (Mt. 7:22; 24:19, 22, 29, 36; 26:29). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

The most remarkable thing about the opening phrase “now in those days” is precisely its ordinary character. Though the readers/hearers know the narrative has now passed from the time of Jesus’ early childhood to the time when he is an adult, this passage of years has no significance in the narrative. Beginning with the conception and birth of this Jesus, a new time has begun: “those days.” Only the insignificant particle *δέ* (*ἐν δέ* ...) separates chapter 3 from chapter 2. The chapters are linked by their *theological* continuity, which finds expression in the common phrasing of “in the days of Herod the king” (2:1) and “in those days” (3:1). Like chapters 1 and 2, chapter 3 stresses the fulfillment of OT Scripture in those days (3:3). The time of fulfillment has come (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23), the Baptizer himself also was spoken of in Scripture (3:3), and the plan of God is now being unfolded. “Those days” (3:1), about which chapters 1 and 2 have been speaking, are continuing in chapter 3. Structurally, this is one more indication that the first major section of Matthew’s Gospel extends on beyond the end of chapter 2. (CC)

John the Baptist. The forerunner of Jesus, born c. 7 B.C. to Zechariah, a priest, and his wife Elizabeth (see Lk 1:5–80). (CSB)

Son of Zechariah, an elderly priest, and his wife, Elizabeth, Mary’s relative (cf Lk 1:36; 57–66). (TLSB)

preaching. God called John to prepare the way for Jesus (v 3). (TLSB)

Desert of Judea. An area that stretched some 20 miles from the Jerusalem-Bethlehem plateau down to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, perhaps the same region where John lived (cf. Lk 1:80). (CSB)

Note from Mark 1:4 – Prophets and their activity are frequently set in the wilderness (e.g., Elijah; 1 Kg. 19:4-8). (TLSB)

After the exodus, grumbling Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness, and the prophet Isaiah often spoke of a second exodus in which God would again lead his people through the desert to repentance and salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

3:2 *Repent.* Make a radical change in one’s life as a whole. (CSB)

This exhortation, which John addressed to all Israel, called for a radical transformation of the entire person, a fundamental turnabout. To repent meant to be converted from unbelief to faith. “With one bolt of lightning, he hurls together both <those selling and those buying works>. He says: ‘Repent!’ [Matthew 3:2]. Now one group imagines, ‘Why, we have repented!’ The other says, ‘We need no repentance’ ” (SA III III 30-4.3.3.31). (TLSB)

metanoew –To turn. John urges his hearers to change their way of life as a result of a complete change of thought and attitude regard to sin and righteousness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

As John’s ministry of baptizing (3:4–6) and his ministry of denunciation (3:7–10) make clear, the Baptizer is calling upon Israel to turn and *be converted*, to become once again the flock of the divine Shepherd. The Israel of John’s day is a flock of lost sheep (10:6; 15:24), and John is calling them away from God’s final judgment to conversion and true faith in the God from whom they have wandered. As the textual note on 3:2 shows, every other Matthean use of this verb μετανοέω, as well as all Matthew’s uses of the noun μετάνοια and one of his three uses of the closely related μεταμέλομαι, has this same strong meaning of “be converted.” John is in the desert from which Israel first entered the promised land long ago, in the water through which they entered the land (Joshua 3–4), and he is calling them out of the land, to enter it again and become God’s people. By their unbelief they had become like the apostate Israelites who were exiled. As Is 40:3 announced the new exodus redemption that God was performing, which received preliminary fulfillment by God bringing Israel from Babylon back to the land after his people’s unbelief and judgment, so John stands in the desert to perform the same function. (CC)

the kingdom of heaven. A phrase found only in Matthew, where it occurs 33 times. Mark and Luke refer to “the kingdom of God,” a term Matthew uses only four times (see note on Mk 11:30). The kingdom of heaven is the rule of God and is both a present reality and a future hope. The idea of God’s kingdom is central to Jesus’ teaching and is mentioned 50 times in Matthew alone. (CSB)

This expression, used 32 times in Mt, means the same as “kingdom of God.” “Kingdom” might better be translated “reign” because it refers not to a geographical location but to God’s act of ruling. (TLSB)

The very nature of heaven when we have Jesus. Jesus was in their midst and therefore the kingdom was among them. Matthew favors “kingdom of heaven” over “kingdom of God” because he wants to remain sensitive to the Jewish reluctance to use “God” or his name. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

Throughout this commentary, the translation of βασιλεία will consistently be “reign” rather than “kingdom.” This is an attempt to capture the more dynamic, active sense of God’s reigning, God’s coming forth to rule and exert his royal power. The close proximity of the cognate verb βασιλεύω in 2:22 reminds us that the noun βασιλεία implies the *action*, the *activity* of kingly ruling. In this understanding, the genitive in the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν is subjective, that is, “heaven’s (God’s) act of ruling.” (CC)

At hand – The perfect indicative active form (ἤγγικεν) of the verb ἐγγίζω serves well to express the eschatological tension between the “already” and the “not yet.” The verb normally means “approach, draw near,” but not necessarily “arrive.” Yet the perfect indicative active form expresses an ongoing resultant state, hence the translation “stands near.” Is God’s kingly ruling activity fully present? No. Has it begun to operate? Yes, and John’s preaching is part of it. John’s connection to the reign of heaven is in view (cf. 11:12). (CC)

God’s rule was near in Christ. (TLSB)

3:3 All three Synoptic Gospels quote Isa 40:3 (Luke quotes two additional verses) and apply it to John the Baptist. (CSB)

Spoken by the prophet Isaiah – John the Baptist was the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3. “A voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

How could John the Baptizer appear in the desert and say such things? Matthew answers precisely this question, introducing 3:3 with the causal γάρ, “For this is the one ...” Why was it John, of all people, who proclaimed that the nation of Israel must return to its God because the end-time royal ruling activity of God stood near? He was the one spoken of in Is 40:3! In the original context of Is 40:3, the eighth-century prophet Isaiah describes a herald who will announce the good tidings of God’s mercy in restoring the exiles of Judah to the land. (CC)

A voice – The prophet Isaiah so described the Lord’s forerunner, John. (TLSB)

make straight paths for him. Equivalent to “Prepare the way for the Lord.” (CSB)

Repentance is compared to building a straight road. (TLSB)

Both the (מִסְלָחַ לְאֵלֹהֵינוּ, “a highway for our God”) and the ἅς τρίβους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν, “the paths of our God”) end with “our God.” Matthew’s rendering, literally, “the ways of *him*,” and John the Baptizer’s role as forerunner of Christ make it all the more certain that John is preparing the way for the κύριος, that is, Jesus, who is “God is with us” (1:23). Here is an instance of the most common way that the NT writers proclaim the deity of Christ: they take an OT citation or reality and put Jesus into the place of Yahweh, the God of Israel. (CC)

3:4 *John wore a garment* – He was dressed for the location. His appearance and his stern sermon illustrated how little we need fancy clothes. The message carries it self. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

In emphasizing John’s appearance and dress, the evangelist is drawing a parallel between the Baptizer and Elijah of old. The similarity in wording between LXX Ki 1:8, where Elijah is recognized precisely from his austere appearance, and Mt 3:4 is probably sufficient to show that Matthew intends this connection. The later teaching of Jesus about John’s unique significance in the history of salvation (11:7–15) makes the case certain: “He is Elijah, who is to come” (11:14). (CC)

Moses & Joshua / Elijah & Elisha / John & Jesus

locusts and wild honey. A man living in the desert did not hesitate to eat insects, and locusts were among the clean foods (Lev 11:21–22). John’s simple food, clothing and life-style were a visual protest against self-indulgence. (CSB)

3:5 *going out to him* – This is the imperfect tense which means “they kept coming to out to him.”

John’s preaching caused enormous excitement. (TLSB)

3:6 *were baptized him* – Those who were baptized and confessed their sins could be certain of the forgiveness of sins (cf Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3). John Chrysostom: “When the sacrifice was not yet offered ... how was remission to take place?... Had they not condemned themselves, they could not have sought after His grace; and not seeking, they could not have obtained remission. Thus that baptism led the way for this; wherefore also he said, that ‘they should believe on Him which should come after him’ ” (NPNF 1 10:62–63). (TLSB)

The goal of John’s Baptism at the Jordan River was to produce repentance. (TLSB)

It should be noted that John's baptism is *not* the same thing as Christian Baptism, although there are obvious shared characteristics. (CC)

There were various water and purification rites in Judaism of the first century AD, although there is not enough information available to us to know precisely how they functioned. In some ways, perhaps, John's baptism was similar to the rites of other groups in his historical context. Yet the uniqueness of John's baptism is shown in its relation to his preaching. Just as John shockingly addressed his call to conversion to *Israel*, and not to Gentiles or to a subgroup within Judaism, so John's baptism is for all *Israel*, and not for a subgroup in Israel or for Gentiles only. Just as John announced the in-breaking of God's end times and his kingly ruling deeds, so John's baptism "was eschatological and probably sealed the repentant, marking them as those who would pass through the coming judgment to enter the messianic kingdom." (CC)

What did John's baptism do? In the first place, it is necessary to distinguish, as John himself does, between his baptism with water and the baptism that Jesus himself will administer on the Last Day, a baptism "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:11). John's baptism prepared the people for that end-time event, but it was not that event. Nor should we equate John's baptism with Christian Baptism, the institution of which comes at the very end of Matthew's Gospel, and which incorporates the baptized into the Triune name of God. Christian Baptism seals the believer for salvation at the final end-time baptism that Christ will pour out, and it anticipates that end-time event. Christian Baptism thus joins the baptized to the Last Day. (CC)

What, then, did John's baptism do? Here in Matthew, there is an interesting sort of reciprocal relationship between John's preaching of repentance (that is, turning from unbelief and to faith in the God whom John is proclaiming) and John's ministry of baptism. On the one hand, the people who came to his baptism seem to have already repented, because as they were being baptized they were confessing their sins (see the textual note on 3:6). On the other hand, John's later words, when taken in what is probably their most natural grammatical sense, indicate that his baptism results in repentance ("I myself am baptizing you with water for/unto repentance"; see the first textual note on 3:11). Although Matthew does not give us any explicit information about the precise relationship between John's baptism and the forgiveness of sins, Matthew's narrative would surely accommodate the idea that God forgave the people's sins through John's baptism, since the people being baptized are confessing the sins from which they need to be saved, and from which Jesus will save them (1:21). We can conclude, then, that through John's baptism God granted forgiveness and further repentant faith. John's preaching had already moved the people to participate in this new, end-time reentry into the Promised Land and into membership in God's covenant people, and to look for the Mightier One and his end-time deeds. (CC)

The baptism of John was a baptism with water (John 1:33), of repentance for the remission of sin (Mark 1:4). It was administered in the name of the Triune God, who had commanded it (John 1:33), and was an effective means of grace (John 3:5). (Summary of Doctrine – Koehler)

During the public ministry of Christ His disciples likewise baptized (John 3:22; 4:2), which Baptism was essentially the same as John's. And it does not appear that those who were baptized by John or by the disciples of Jesus were later re-baptized, when Christ instituted His Baptism. However, after John had died, some of his disciples did not join themselves to Christ, to whom the Baptism of John pointed, but continued as a separate sect, and baptized "unto John's baptism" (Acts 19:3). The baptism of these later disciples of John was not commanded by God, did not point to Christ as the Savior from sin, and was, therefore, not valid. (Summary of Doctrine – Koehler)

From these verses it has been estimated that from 200,000 to 500,000 people were baptized by John. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

confessing their sins – This complexity shows that true repentance—the turning away from sin and unbelief and toward God in faith—comes by the Word of God, the end-time proclamation of the reigning activity that God is now beginning in Jesus. Thus John’s preaching produces repentance. That repentance continues to be expressed by the people confessing their sins as they are baptized with John’s baptism. Moreover, the gift that is John’s baptism also produces ongoing repentance and faith in the One whom John is announcing. (CC)

3:7 *Pharisees and Sadducees.* The Pharisees were a legalistic and separatistic group who strictly, but often hypocritically, kept the law of Moses and the unwritten “tradition of the elders” (15:2). The Sadducees were more worldly and politically minded, and were theologically unorthodox—among other things denying the resurrection, angels and spirits (Ac 23:8). (CSB)

Coming to his baptism – The grammar alone (literally, “were coming for his baptism”) does not indicate whether the religious leaders sought to receive John’s baptism or merely to observe the phenomenon. The other Matthean uses of ἔρχομαι plus ἐπί plus the accusative (here: τὸ βάπτισμα) are not decisive (3:16; 10:13; 14:34; 21:19; 23:35). However, the context supports the view that the religious leaders are actually intending to be baptized by John. John sarcastically wonders who warned *them* to flee the coming wrath, a comment that makes best sense if they were coming to be baptized, not just observe. Moreover, John’s demand that Israel’s religious leaders bring forth the deeds that mark a *genuine* repentance implies that they were claiming an external repentance, and thus a desire for John’s baptism, outwardly behaving the same as the others, who were “confessing their sins” as “they were being baptized” (3:6). Thus, in this context “for his baptism” almost certainly means “in order to receive his baptism.” (CC)

Brood of vipers – The negative force of this epithet, “offspring of vipers,” is naturally appreciated by considering the reputation of vipers throughout the Scriptures. This identical phrase is repeated in Mt 12:34; 23:33; and Lk 3:7. Mt 23:33 is similar to Mt 3:7 in that Jesus applies the phrase to the scribes and Pharisees, then asks how they could “flee” (φεύγω, as in 3:7) the coming judgment. The only other NT verse with ἔχιδνα is Acts 28:3, which indicates that it refers to a venomous viper, normally deadly. It is absent from the LXX it is not, however, a veiled reference to Satan, who is named ὁ ὄφις as well as ὁ δράκων. Also, if a reference to Satan were intended, one might expect the singular form, “offspring of the viper.” (CC)

Flee from the wrath to come– The coming wrath is eschatological but not limited to that. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

3:8 *bear fruit* – The Pharisees and Sadducees wanted John to baptize them without having repented and confessed their sins. Their works should give evidence of sincere repentance (cf. Lk. 3:10-14). “Confession, too, cannot be false, uncertain, or fragmentary. A person who confesses that everything in him is nothing but sin includes all sins, excludes none, forgets none. Neither can the satisfaction be uncertain, because it is not our uncertain, sinful work. Rather, it is the suffering and blood of the innocent Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (SA III 37-38) (TLSB)

3:9 *We have Abraham as our father.* See Jn 8:39. Salvation does not come as a birthright (even for the Jews) but through faith in Christ (Ro 2:28–29; Gal 3:7, 9, 29). (CSB)

The key lies in his statement in 3:9, “And do not think that you will go on saying among yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as father,’ for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise children for Abraham.” John has called the people out to a new exodus and back through the waters of the Jordan—in short, to conversion and faith again in the God who is about to manifest his reign on the earth in his Son.

The promises to Abraham will be fulfilled; God is able to do such as he pleases. Physical descent from Abraham, however, is no substitute for heartfelt brokenness and confession of sin. The only proper response to such a call is to acknowledge one's need, one's complete absence of merit, that all are completely poor in spirit (5:3). (CC)

Their spiritual confidence based on biological descent from Abraham was no substitute for repentance. (TLSB)

From these stones – (Jews sometimes referred to Gentiles as stones) Implicit in this statement is the idea that those not descended from Abraham, the Gentiles, God can raise up, despite their total lack of life. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

Raise up children of Abraham – This means “children of God, believers. The Jews predicated membership in the Kingdom on mere physical descent. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

3:10 *The ax is already at the root of the trees.* Judgment is near. (CSB)

What of those who refuse to repent, who would try to stand before God the King with anything other than complete dependence on his grace? The axe is laid to the root of such trees! These are the trees that, lacking true repentance, do not bear good fruit; they are about to be cut down and thrown into the fire! (CC)

Not fruit, limbs or trunk which are dead, but at the very root. Total cutting off is imminent. The wrath of God abides on him who rejects Christ. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

Jerusalem was destroyed 40 years later.

Thrown into the fire – The last four words denote its total uselessness (Cf. John 3:19-20). The works of the impenitent man are evil and useless. He hates Jesus, the Light, and refuses to come to Him, lest his works be made evident. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

3:11 *with water for repentance.* John's baptism presupposed repentance, and he would not baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees because they failed to give any evidence of repentance (vv. 7–8). (CSB)

Mightier – The word means “beyond” anything he could do.

Sandals – Only the humblest slave removed sandals.

with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Demonstrated in a dramatic way at Pentecost (Ac 1:5, 8; 2:1–13; 11:16), though here “fire” may refer to judgment to come (see v. 12). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all God's people was promised in Joel 2:28–29. (CSB)

Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit those who repent, but the unrepentant will experience the fire of eternal punishment. Jesus baptized His disciples with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:33) and continues to pour out the Spirit on believers through Word and Sacrament. (TLSB)

John, then, proclaims in 3:11 that Jesus will fully pour out salvation (“the Holy Spirit”) and judgment (“fire”) at the eschaton. Though Matthew's Gospel gives us no direct information about Pentecost and the pouring out of the Spirit on the church, we can suggest a relationship between Pentecost and the Last Day. The pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost was for salvation, for forgiveness and reconciliation with God; these gifts already given will avail for final salvation *on Judgment Day*. Moreover, we know that Paul

reveals that the Holy Spirit, who is already given through post-Pentecost Christian Baptism, is the down payment of our final eschatological inheritance (Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5). Accordingly, though John's words in Mt 3:11 do not refer directly to Christian Baptism, there is an unbreakable link between Christ's final work of salvation at the eschaton and the present giving of the Spirit in Holy Baptism. It is likely, however, that from his vantage point, John the Baptizer was not able fully to see this connection. (CC)

3:12 *His winnowing fork.* For the process of winnowing. Here it is figurative for the day of judgment at Christ's second coming. The OT prophets and NT writers sometimes compress the first and second comings of Christ so that they seem to be one event. (CSB)

A beautiful metaphor, the threshing floor. With finality grain and chaff are thrown up for the wind to drive the chaff away, never to be joined again. A stern warning: "If you reject this Christian baptism in impenitence you must face Christ as Judge." (Cf. Jn. 3:36) (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

Wheat into the barn – Just as the harvester saved the wheat, God will save His people. Barn here means pit or silo for storing grain. (TLSB)

Chaff...will burn – This likely refers to cleanup at the end of threshing season. Chaff had no value and so was burned. This is the eternal fate of those who refuse to repent. (TLSB)

Unquenchable fire – God's judgment (cf. Is.30:27; Mal 3:2). (TLSB)

3:1–12 John was a preacher of repentance, as was Martin Luther, who often emphasized that we believers must not only sincerely confess our sins but also be certain of forgiveness. Thank God for such preachers.

- Almighty God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Burn my chaff, but quench my sinful passions in the daily washing of Holy Baptism. Amen. (TLSB)

The Baptism of Jesus

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son,^[b] with whom I am well pleased."

The baptism of Jesus is placed in the larger context of the ministry of John the Baptist. From the birth of Jesus and the visit of the Wise Men, Matthew's gospel moves directly to the return of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus from Egypt to Nazareth. Matthew does not report our Lord's presentation in the temple or his encounter with the teachers in the temple when he was a boy of twelve. He leaves these details to other writers and focuses immediately on the ministry of John the Baptist. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

John knew his assignment and carried it out with deep conviction. He forcefully called all people to repentance and baptized those who confessed their sins. Yet he never lost sight of the fact that his ministry was not an end in itself, but by its very nature preparatory: "After me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Mt 3:11). A reading of the other synoptic gospels for additional details will enrich the preacher's

understanding (Mk 1:9–11; Lk 3:21–22). While St. John does not record the baptism of Jesus, the first chapter of his gospel is filled with references that flow from that event. A careful reading of those verses is strongly recommended for contextual perspective. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

3:13 Much is packed into this short text. First, it is significant that Jesus traveled from Galilee in the north to the Jordan to be baptized there. The Jordan of course is associated with a long history and theology. It was the eastern boundary of the Promised Land, and the scene of many miracles (Joshua 3–4; 2 Kings 5; etc.). This involves the so-called scandal of particularity: God chooses certain places, persons, things, and times through which he works. The fact that they appear no better or no different than others—or appear even worse, from a human standpoint—causes many to take offense, as with Naaman in 2 Kings 5. The same certainly was true of Christ himself; the “foolishness” and “weakness” of his cross was an offense to Jew and Gentile alike, but to the eyes of faith he is seen as the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:18–25). The same can be said of the means of grace God uses today; they appear ordinary, even mundane, but the eyes of faith recognize them as God’s tools of salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

Then – Tote – When John the Baptist was at the height of his ministry. For Jesus the quiet life he had lead was about to come to an end.

Jesus came – παραγίνεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς—The historical present verb *παραγίνεται* is repeated from 3:1, and so it links Jesus’ appearance closely to John’s ministry. For the translation of the historical present tense as “*did* appear,” see the first textual note on 2:13. The Savior’s personal name, “Jesus,” has not appeared in the narrative since 2:1. Here it reappears and recalls the reason for this name: “He himself will save his people from their sins” (1:21). (CC)

Jesus traveled at least 15 miles, perhaps much farther, to receive John’s Baptism. The two were cousins (Lk. 1:36-45) and likely knew each other. (TLSB)

First, Matthew writes: “Jesus did appear from Galilee” (3:13). The use of the Christ’s personal name is noteworthy. The angel revealed the name “Jesus” and its meaning to Joseph (1:21), who so named him (1:25), and Matthew called him by name as he turned his narrative to the account of the Magi (2:1), but since then the personal name “Jesus” has been absent from the Gospel. In the rest of chapter 2, Jesus was called “the child” (2:8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20–21). Then in the preaching of the Baptizer in chapter 3, he was called the mightier “one who is coming” (3:11), the eschatological Judge. Now “*Jesus did appear*” (3:13), the one who is “God is with us” (1:23), who has come to “save his people from their sins” (1:21). (CC)

Jordon – Near the Sea of Galilee and about twenty miles from Nazareth.

To be baptized – τοῦ βαπτισθῆναι—The articular infinitive expresses purpose, Christ’s reason why he appears at the Jordan: “to be baptized.” This also is precisely the reason why John objects and tries to hinder Jesus. (CC)

Jesus arrives at the very place where the people have been confessing that from which he has come to save them: “their sins” (1:21; 3:6). As they confessed their sins, the people were being baptized by John in response to John’s message: “Repent!” (3:2). Now Jesus has come to the same place, to the same person, and, as Matthew explicitly declares, for the same purpose: “in order to be baptized” by John, who tries to thwart Jesus’ purpose (3:13–14). (CC)

3:14 *would have prevented him* – ιεκόλυεν—This is a textbook instance of the conative force of the imperfect indicative. The context indicates that John “*tried* to prevent” what Jesus intended to do, but failed to do so. (CC)

John the Baptist at first tried to prevent him (that is the force of the conative imperfect *diekōluen* in v 14), Jesus underwent the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins—of which he had none! That apparently offended John the Baptist at first, in much the same way that Peter took offense when Jesus tried to wash his feet (Jn 13:6–10). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

John refused to baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees because they failed to repent (v. 8). Because Jesus was without sin, John also wanted to refuse Baptism to this One who was mightier than he (cf. v. 11). (TLSB)

I need to be baptized by you – ἐγὼ χρείαν ἔχω ... καὶ σὺ ἔρχῃ—The two pronouns, ἐγὼ and σὺ, are emphatic because they are unnecessary. They underscore John’s stunned response to Jesus. (CC)

In Jesus’ presence, John felt unclean (cf. Is. 6:1-5). He recognized that Jesus could do for him what no one else could. (TLSB)

The Baptizer’s incredulous words should not surprise careful readers/hearers of this Gospel in any age: “I myself have need to be baptized by you, and you yourself are coming to me?” (3:14). John well knew the dramatic contrast that also Matthew’s readers/hearers inevitably sense and that has characterized the church’s interaction with this text for centuries: the contrast between what John’s preaching has revealed about Jesus and the intention of Jesus to be baptized by John. We also do well to ponder the contrast! (CC)

John proclaimed that Jesus would baptize all Israel with the Holy Spirit and fire on the Last Day (3:11). But now Jesus has come—not as the One who baptizes with the Spirit and fire, but as the passive recipient of John’s own baptism. John’s baptism is “for repentance” (3:11), that is, for conversion from unbelief to faith, and for entrance into the people of God. The people who received John’s baptism had done so because they responded to John’s preaching to “Repent!” (3:2) with true penitence. So Jesus’ request to be baptized by John raises many questions: Does Jesus need to repent? Does Jesus need to be converted from unbelief to faith? Is Jesus among the lost sheep who were no longer members of the true Israel and who needed readmission into the people of God? John knows that the answer to these questions must be “No!” (CC)

Most striking of all is this contrast: John is the voice of OT prophecy and so therefore is completely reliable. He has proclaimed that Jesus comes in power, bringing end-time salvation and judgment—a Jesus so superior to and mightier than John himself that the Baptizer is not worthy to perform the most menial service for this Jesus (3:11). Yet now Jesus has come to John, not displaying his power or his incomparably higher status, but in lowliness, to be baptized by John. In light of John’s own preaching, his incredulous words to this lowly kind of Christ are reasonable in every sense of that term: “I myself have need to be baptized by you, and you yourself are coming to me?” (3:14). (CC)

This clearly shows that John recognized Jesus for who he was. He knew that Jesus did not need repentance. He also knew that the Kingdom of Heaven was near. He recognized this in Jesus. The need for Jesus’ baptism was incomprehensible to John as it is to us.

3:15 *Jesus answered.* First recorded words of Jesus in Mt. (TLSB)

This occasion marked the beginning of Christ’s Messianic ministry. There were several reasons for his baptism: 1. The first, mentioned here, was “to fulfill all righteousness.” The baptism indicated that he was consecrated to God and officially approved by him, as especially shown in the descent of the Holy Spirit (v. 16) and the words of the Father (v. 17; cf. Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1). All God’s righteous requirements for the Messiah were fully met in Jesus. 2. At Jesus’ baptism John publicly announced the arrival of the Messiah and the inception of his ministry (Jn 1:31–34). 3. By his baptism Jesus completely identified himself with man’s sin and failure (though he himself needed no repentance or cleansing from sin), becoming our substitute (2Co 5:21). 4. His baptism was an example to his followers. (CSB)

Let it be so now – Jesus is assuming his office and so it is to be without delay. Jesus is agreeing with John, but though he is sinless, he is the sin-bearer, and therefore needs to do this so he can be our substitute.

In the present context of Jesus’ mission to save sinners (1:21). (TLSB)

Now we arrive at Christ’s crucially significant words in reply to John, at the center of the chiasm formed by 3:13–16a. Jesus replied: “Allow [it] at this time, for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (3:15). (CC)

The interpretation of virtually every word in Jesus’ response to John is important. The first word in Jesus’ reply, ἄφεες, “Allow [it],” indicates that Jesus’ Baptism is a concession, an allowance due to his state of humiliation: the sinless Son of God receives the baptism meant for sinners because he shall be the sin-bearer. The adverb “at this time, now” (ἄρτι) validates John’s earlier eschatological preaching about the reign of heaven and the Coming One. John had spoken of what the Coming One would do on the Last Day (3:11–12), and Jesus’ submission to John’s baptism is a public affirmation that John’s preaching was true. Moreover, Jesus’ Baptism “at this time, now” is necessary preparation for what Jesus will do on the Last Day. Yet the fact that Jesus needs to say, “Allow [it] at this time,” to persuade John to baptize him now indicates that John does not yet understand how the Coming One will manifest the reign of heaven “now,” in the present time, as the humble sin-bearer. (CC)

Fitting for us – The dative pronoun “for us” (ἡμῖν) prevents Matthew’s readers/hearers from thinking too exclusively in terms of *Jesus*. The Christ did not say, “It is fitting for *me* to fulfill all righteousness.” John also is participating in what it means “to fulfill all righteousness.” The participle “fitting, proper, right” (πρέπον) invites a sort of comparison and so a question: “Fitting in relation to what? Why is this action, Jesus being baptized by John, *fitting*?” Then there is the adjective “*all* [πᾶσαν] righteous.” In some sense, this deed of Jesus’ Baptism has a comprehensive, all-embracing character and meaning. (CC)

To fulfill all righteousness – Jesus submitted to John’s Baptism, the same that sinners were undergoing, in order to affirm His identity with sinners and to provide them with perfect righteousness (2Co 5:21). Hippolytus: “I am the Fulfiller of the law; I seek to leave nothing wanting to its whole fulfillment. . . . Baptize Me, John, in order that no one may despise baptism” (*ANF* 5:236). Jesus’ Baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry and anticipated His death on the cross (cf Mk 10:38; Rm 6:3). The fact that all four Gospels report the Baptism of Jesus points to its importance. Luther captured the primary meaning for His Baptism: “[Christ] accepted it from John for the reason that he was entering into our stead, indeed, our person, that is, becoming a sinner for us, taking upon himself the sins which he had not committed, and wiping them out and drowning them in his holy baptism” (*AE* 51:315). (TLSB)

πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην—The infinitive πληρῶσαι is the proper grammatical subject of the verb ἐστὶν (“to fulfill is . . .”). The present participle neuter singular nominative πρέπον (from πρέπω, “be fitting, proper, right”) forms a periphrastic construction with the linking verb ἐστὶν, literally, “To fulfill all righteousness is fitting for us.” The plural pronoun ἡμῖν, “for *us*,” shows that both

John and Jesus participate in carrying out God's historical actions of salvation. John, as the one who baptizes Jesus, acts together with him to "fulfill all righteousness," that is, to enact God's deeds of salvation. (CC)

A substitute has to go into the game to replace someone and get into the action and not mail it in, so Jesus needed to completely do all the things that is required of humans. A quote from Luther, "If that shall be performed that the poor sinners may come to righteousness and be saved, you must baptize me. Because for the sake of sinners I have become a sinner, must therefore do what God has charged sinners to do, in order that they may become just through me. (CC)

The key phrase is "to fulfill all righteousness" (πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην), an activity that is being carried out by both John and Jesus in the action of John baptizing Jesus. The likely meaning of "to fulfill" is clear enough in this Gospel that focuses so much attention on Jesus' deeds (and events related to them) as the fulfillment of OT Scripture. Matthew often uses passive forms of the same verb for Scripture being "fulfilled." Thus "to fulfill" virtually carries in itself the meaning "to enact or participate in the divine scriptural plan of salvation." (CC)

What does it mean "to fulfill, to enact the scriptural plan, of *all righteousness*"? Presumably this would be the righteousness of which the OT speaks, since it is being "fulfilled." But *whose* righteousness was spoken of in the OT? Again, the infinitive "to fulfill" can lead the way. On the one hand, the noun "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη) at times in Matthew's Gospel certainly does refer to righteous human conduct on the part of Jesus' disciples, especially when it is specifically referred to as "your righteousness" (5:20; 6:1). John, however, has announced that "the reign of *heaven* stands near" (3:2), that *God's* royal ruling deeds are beginning in history. *Jesus* is the one who will both repeat John's message ("The reign of heaven stands near!" 4:17) and begin to make it come true by bringing that reign himself! *God* is beginning to act. *God's* righteousness will be fulfilled when John baptizes Jesus, and then all people may in faith seek *God's* reign and *his righteousness* in Jesus (6:33). (CC)

Now we come to the key point. In what sense does Jesus refer to *God's* righteousness? Here the prominent OT way of speaking of God's righteousness comes to our aid. In the OT, especially in the Psalms and Isaiah (e.g., 51:5–8), and in later Jewish literature as well, God's "righteousness" (רַחֲמֵי or הַקְּדוּשָׁה in the MT; δικαιοσύνη in the LXX) refers readily to the saving deeds that Yahweh performs on behalf of his people, and in that sense it often stands in parallel to "salvation." A parade example is Psalm 71, where the expression "your righteousness" occurs repeatedly, referring to God's righteous and saving acts: "My mouth will tell of your righteousness [רַחֲמֵי; LXX: τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου], of your salvation [הַקְּדוּשָׁה; LXX: τὴν σωτηρίαν σου] all the day" (Ps 71:15 [LXX 70:15]; see also Ps 71:2, 16, 19, 24). The eschatological context of John's preaching and ministry makes it all the more likely that this dominant OT sense of God's "righteousness" as his "saving deeds" is present here in Jesus' reply to the Baptizer. The end time brings the fulfillment of God's promise to act in history on behalf of his people to save them. (CC)

To put the pieces together, then, Jesus' reply to John can be fleshed out as follows: Jesus has come to be baptized by John, to submit to the baptism that sinful Israel is undergoing. John objects, because he knows that Jesus is the One who will be Mighty Savior and Judge of all on the Last Day. But Jesus explains that in the present time ("now"), this shockingly unexpected action is comprehensively fitting ("*all* righteousness") as the way for John and Jesus together to perform the savings deeds of God, now that the reign of heaven has broken into history in Jesus. For Jesus to submit to John's baptism is fitting. (CC)

Why? Because it shows perfectly *how* this Jesus "will save his people from their sins" (1:21). It shows *how* the reign of heaven will come now, in an unexpected way. With John's participation, Jesus will

perform “all righteousness,” that is, he will enact God’s saving deeds for the people by (literally) standing with sinners, taking the place of sinners, receiving from John the baptism that sinners receive. Ultimately, *all* of Jesus’ ministry will come to its head as the Scriptures are fulfilled (26:54, 56) in the arrest that leads to his trial and condemnation and crucifixion. There the sinless one will offer up his own life as the ransom payment *in the place of the many*. That’s why it is “fitting” for Jesus to come and stand in the Jordan and be baptized, to stand (literally) *in the place of the many*. Later Jesus will perform the judgment, the separation, the baptism with Holy Spirit and fire of which John spoke (3:11); but not “at this time” (3:15). Jesus’ willing Baptism in the Jordan is a sign that points forward. It is a cruciform harbinger, pointing forward to the hidden and unexpected, shockingly weak and vulnerable in-breaking reign of God, to the paradoxical enthronement of the King of the Jews on the cross. (CC)

In this way Christ was “to fulfill all righteousness” (v 15). He was baptized as if he were a sinner in order to begin his public ministry as the sin-bearer, the one who takes away the sin of the world, “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21; cf. Is 53:11, “my righteous servant will justify many”). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

The importance of Christ’s baptism can scarcely be overestimated. Later in his ministry Christ described his passion as Baptism (Mk 10:38; Lk 12:50), implying that his Baptism committed him to fulfill the purpose for which he came—to suffer and die for the sins of all. It is significant that Jesus applies the term Baptism also to the martyrdom of his apostles (Mk 10:38–39). The implication is that our own Baptism into Christ’s death (Rom 6:3) commits us to follow our Lord, even into death as a martyr, should that be necessary. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

3:16–17 All three persons of the Trinity are clearly seen here. (CSB)

What happened after the Baptism of Jesus was startling and completely unexpected. The entire Trinity was revealed when the Father’s voice declared Jesus to be His beloved Son and the Spirit descended on Him. Melancthon: “In the NT the persons are most clearly revealed in the baptism of Christ, where the Father says, ‘This is My beloved Son,’ and the Son is seen standing publicly in the river, and the Holy Spirit sits in visible form upon the Son.” (Chem. LTh 1:51). (TLSB)

3:16 *heavens were opened* – καὶ ἰδοὺ ἠνεώχθησαν [αὐτῷ] οἱ οὐρανοί—The translation above, “and, look, the heavens were opened *to him*,” reflects the dative pronoun αὐτῷ. The inclusion of “to him” in this verse has significant manuscript support. Its originality would also explain the rise of the other (shorter) reading: Metzger notes that “it is possible that copyists, not understanding the force of αὐτῷ, omitted the word as unnecessary.” Therefore, its inclusion is the preferred reading. (CC)

Actually rent asunder. Luther, “Heaven opens itself, which hitherto was closed, and now becomes at Christ’s baptism a door and a window, so that one can see into it; and henceforth there is no difference any more between God and us; for God the father himself is present and says, ‘This is my beloved Son.’”

First, Matthew declares, “Look, the heavens were opened to” Jesus, and “he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him” (3:16b–c). The opening of the heavens to Jesus signals an end-time event. Perhaps it recalls the prayer in Is 64:1–2 (MT 63:19c–64:1) for God to “rend the heavens and come down.” (CC)

He saw – καὶ εἶδεν [τὸ] πνεῦμα [τοῦ] θεοῦ καταβαῖνον ὡσεὶ περιστερὰν [καὶ] ἐρχόμενον ἐπαύ—In context, the emphasis of the two participles, καταβαῖνον and ἐρχόμενον (“descending ... coming upon”), does *not* seem to be on *perceiving* the fact that these actions occurred (indirect discourse: “He *saw that* the Spirit of God was descending ... and was coming upon him”). Rather, the emphasis is on physically

seeing the Spirit's descent: "He saw the Spirit of God descending ... and coming upon him." Although in predicate position, these participles function adjectivally, describing the Spirit. (CC)

Matthew emphasizes that the Spirit's descent was for Jesus' benefit. (TLSB)

Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus not to overcome sin (for he was sinless), but to equip him for his work as the divine-human Messiah. (CSB)

Chemnitz says: "The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, not as though he were without the Spirit, the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him; but because it was prophesied that the Messiah, when He became our Mediator, should be anointed, not with oil, but with the Holy Ghost (Ps. 45:8; Is. 61:1), in order that all might rest assured that He was the Prophet whom they should hear. We must also remember likewise that Jesus had the Spirit as the spirit of life, not only as God, but also as man; now He received the Spirit as the Spirit of His office and as the Spirit of power, without measure. Because Jesus was true man, with the weakness and frailty of human nature, albeit without sin, therefore He was, as a man, in need of the equipment and preparation by the Spirit for the duties of His great work." (CC)

Jesus then saw the Spirit descending and coming upon himself "like a dove." Interpreters have not been able to reach firm conclusions regarding the significance of "like a dove." (CC)

More certain, however, are the OT connections behind the Spirit's descent upon Jesus. By highlighting the Spirit's descent and coming upon Jesus, Matthew is proclaiming that Jesus is the One promised in the Servant Songs of Isaiah, especially in Is 42:1–4 and Is 61:1–9. It is as if Matthew anticipates the question "Who is this one who comes to be baptized by John?" and the evangelist is not content with only one facet of the answer. Mt 3:16 proclaims Jesus' identity as the Lord's Servant who, having received the Spirit of God, will perform the work of bringing justification to the nations, gently ministering to the "smoldering wick" and bringing hope to the peoples who trust in his name (Is 42:1–4, quoted in Mt 12:18–21). Jesus, with the Spirit upon him, will preach the Good News to the poor and will comfort those who are mourning (Is 61:1–3; Mt 5:1–12; 11:2–6). Significantly, this humble, Spirit-endowed eschatological Messiah of Israel is the one in whose name the *Gentiles* will hope (Is 42:4, quoted Mt 12:21). Matthew, evangelist of messianic Good News to Israel, never goes long in his narrative without reminding his readers/hearers that the Gentiles too will find shelter and nurture in Israel's Messiah. (CC)

3:17 An allusion to Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1. (CSB)

A voice – The Father's voice, so often heard in the OT, was heard anew. (TLSB)

καὶ ἰδοὺ φωνή—A linking verb is implied and must be supplied in translation: "And look, *there was a voice ...*" (CC)

this is my beloved son – The Father's declaration is for all to hear, including us today. Even John was not fully aware of Jesus' divine origin till now (Jn 1:31–34). (TLSB)

Nor is the evangelist finished, even after proclaiming this much of Jesus' identity and purpose. With a second "look" (3:17), he declares that God the Father's voice is heard. Matthew does not explain or even emphasize who hears the voice, though he wants his readers/hearers to know that the voice is intended especially for them. (CC)

What is the significance of the words "This one is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased?" (3:17). I have argued elsewhere that both the near and farther Matthean contexts direct us to a particular understanding of Jesus as God's "Son." The Father's words from heaven do not identify Jesus as the

Davidic king of Ps 2:7, as is so often proposed. Rather, Jesus, who is God's Son by right from conception and birth (Mt 1:18–25) is also God's Son because he is the summation of God's entire people Israel, God's "son." Jesus, the Son, embodies the nation and has come in the place of its people, as the typology that underlies the use of Hos 11:1 in Mt 2:15 has already so strikingly established, and as the immediately following narrative in 4:1–11 will so compellingly describe. At the first exodus, God constituted the nation as his "son" (Ex 4:22). In Jer 31:20 (LXX 38:20; this is a chapter to which Matthew has already made explicit reference in Mt 2:17–18), God, through the prophet, speaks of his love for Ephraim, "my beloved son." (CC)

With whom I am well pleased – As the Father's beloved Son, Jesus fulfilled all righteousness (v 15), something that Israel, God's OT son, failed to do. (TLSB)

ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα—The aorist indicative form of the verb, εὐδόκησα, is unexpected here because it normally indicates simple completed past action (thus it would be rendered, "in whom I *was* well-pleased"). The explanations of this form in the grammars are attempts to explain an anomalous usage which, though very uncommon, is not unknown elsewhere in the NT (e.g., see εὐδόκησα again in Mt 17:5; cf. Rom 8:30). In context, it seems clear that the Father's pleasure *continues* to rest upon Jesus, and thus the aorist must be translated as if it were a Greek perfect: "in whom I am in a resulting condition of being pleased," or "in whom *I am* well-pleased." (CC)

My favor rests on him. Reminds one of the blessing in Divine Service II, "The Lord bless you and keep. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and + give you peace." Because the Father looked on the Jesus with favor and accepted his sacrifice, He now looks upon us with favor because of the faith that has been worked within us. (CC)

In this new, end-time exodus of salvation that God is now inaugurating as his reign is breaking into history, Jesus has come as God's Son, the representative of the nation, to be in the people's place. The One who has come to be baptized in the place of sinners does so as God's sinless Son by right, to save God's "son," lost in sin. Jesus is *truly* the Son of God, both in his person and in his purpose. "*This one*" (3:17), and neither John nor the nation, is the one to watch as he perfectly carries out the Father's will, as only a perfect Son can do. All may become members of God's people, God's "son," through Baptism and faith in him. For the Father is well-pleased with his Son's humble Baptism in the place of sinners. And the Father will also be well-pleased with his Son's lowly suffering and death in the place of sinners. The Father will reveal his pleasure in his Son by raising him from the dead. (CC)

The words spoken by the Father highlight the significance of Christ's Baptism: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (v 17). These words quote from two key Scripture passages. In Psalm 2:7, Yahweh, the Lord, says to the Messiah/Anointed One, "You are my Son." This is one of the royal psalms, which focus on Jesus, the Son of David, as the King ruling on Mt. Zion. Christ's Baptism anointed him to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Yet the Father also quotes from Is 42:1, the OT Lesson for today. Though the linguistic relationship between the Hebrew and Greek words is complex, "chosen one" is roughly equivalent to "whom I love," and "in whom I delight" is reflected in "with him I am well pleased." The OT Lesson is the first of the four great Suffering Servant Songs in Isaiah (the others are 49:1–7; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12; cf. also 61:1–3). Christ therefore was baptized into this role, expressed so vividly in the words of the fourth song: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Is 53:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

The contrast between God's anointed King and the suffering of the Lord's Servant is stark and dramatic, but it is only after adopting the role of a servant that the Christ would be glorified (Phil 2:6–11). The

Epistle Lesson for today ties these two roles together by referring to Christ's Baptism and anointing, his healing ministry (as the Servant), and his exaltation as Lord over all. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

3:13–17 Because Jesus is our substitute, we need not fear God's wrath and punishment for our sins. We are washed clean by the blood of the Lamb (Rv 7:14), who prepared the waters of Baptism for us. • Lord Jesus, You stood next to sinners in the waters of the Jordan. Stand with me now, and wash away my sins. Amen. (TLSB)