

- ⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness
and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him
and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan,
confessing their sins.
- ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair
and wore a leather belt around his waist
and ate locusts and wild honey.
- ⁷ And he preached, saying,
"After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to
stoop down and untie.
- ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In Mark's Gospel, there is no biography of John given (like in Luke's Gospel, for instance (Luke 1:5-24; 57-80)). In John's Gospel, John appears as a witness sent from God. Mark's Gospel is quite similar to Matthew's account. John simply appears on the scene proclaiming a message of repentance in the wilderness. This is pretty fitting if we consider the narrative perspective is Peter. He may not have known much about John before hearing him calling people to come be baptized and so that's where the Gospel begins.

The beginning of Jesus' public ministry is marked by three events (1) John's ministry (preaching, baptizing, repentance), (2) Jesus baptized by John, and (3) Jesus' temptation. All of the Gospels include all three events in some way, with one exception: John's Gospel does not include an account of Jesus' temptation. It moves immediately from John's identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God to Jesus calling His first disciples.

The wilderness. None of the Gospels are concerned with specifying exactly where John was active in his ministry, but all of them connect John with the wilderness/desert (the Greek can be translated either way). Wilderness obviously makes a bit more sense in this context because the thing John is doing in this place is baptizing, something which requires water, something deserts often lack.

- (1) Wilderness is the place of fulfillment of the prophecy of Isa 40
- (2) Wilderness is a place devoid of life (Gen. 1:2)
- (3) However, the wilderness is also a place of hope and new beginnings, reminiscent of the Exodus (Hos. 2:14-15; Jer. 2:2-3)
 - a. A place where God creates life (Isa. 41:18-19)
 - b. A place where God sustains life (Deut. 8:3ff.)
 - c. A place where trust in God is grown / tested (Deut. 8:2-3)
- (4) Wilderness is the place of all of our lives following the sin of Adam and Eve who were then removed from the Garden of Eden
- (5) Wilderness is a temporary place. God ultimately leads His people and all creation to new creation, Paradise once more. (Isa. 43:19-21; Isa. 44:3-4 (and note the gift of the Spirit)).

>> History outside the Bible (Josephus) record several messianic, revolutionary figures who were also associated with the wilderness (*Jewish Wars* 2.13.4–5 §§259–263; 6.6.3 §351; cf. Matt 24:26; Acts 21:38). The Qumran community (the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls) also justified their desert community's existence from Isa. 40:3.

So where else but the wilderness would you expect to see God's end-time salvation begin?

Twice in His ministry Jesus specifically seeks out a "wilderness" as a place to be alone to pray (Mark 1:35 and 6:35)

Preaching. John wasn't merely speaking, he was preaching/proclaiming. He is not speaking of his own accord, but proclaiming a message given to him by God.

Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This phrase is somewhat loaded in its construction in Greek and leaves itself open to several different translations, usually read according to one's theological presuppositions.

Isa. 46:8, 12-13 ESV "Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind [in the Septuagint it reads "repent"], you transgressors, ..."Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: ¹³ I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory."

Joel 2:1 ESV ¶ Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, ... "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

>> Washing with water is associated with making people new (esp. purging them from guilt

Ezek. 36:25 ESV I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

Ps. 51:2 ESV Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

Ps. 51:4 ESV Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

Ps. 51:7 ESV Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

>> This action of cleansing is closely associated with a change in a person's attitude/heart/mind

Ezek. 36:26 ESV And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Ps. 51:10 ESV Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Baptism and repentance are closely linked together

- Cleansing first, THEN change within (note the order of the verses above)
- Baptism first, repentance follows
- John baptizes people with the purpose or result of repentance (see Matt. 3:11)

God is the author of both the cleansing from guilt and the change within the person

- In Baptism, God changes His mind about the person, no longer seeing their sin, but seeing them as forgiven.

River Jordan. The River Jordan has a very important connection to the life of God's people. When they first entered the Promised Land, that entry was marked by crossing the Jordan River.

In the biblical stories several miracles occur in or near the Jordan. Like the Red Sea, as the Israelites came to claim their land, the waters of the Jordan dried up (Josh. 3:15–16). It was also near the Jordan and the holy place of Gilgal that Elijah was taken to heaven (2 Kgs. 2:6). By dipping in the river seven times, following the instructions of Elisha, the doubting Syrian general Naaman was cleansed of leprosy (2 Kgs. 5:14). Elisha also threw a wooden stick on the Jordan, which made a lost metal ax head float on its waters (2 Kgs. 6:4–6).¹

Clothed with camel's hair...

2 Ki. 1:8 ESV They answered him, "He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

Ate locusts

Lev. 11:21-22 ESV Yet among the winged insects that go on all fours you may eat those that have jointed legs above their feet, with which to hop on the ground.²² Of

¹ Merling, D. (2000). [Jordan, River](#). In D. N. Freedman, A. C. Myers, & A. B. Beck (Eds.), *Eerdmans dictionary of the Bible* (pp. 733–734). W.B. Eerdmans.

them you may eat: the locust of any kind, the bald locust of any kind, the cricket of any kind, and the grasshopper of any kind.

Wild honey

Deut. 32:13 ESV He made him ride on the high places of the land, and he ate the produce of the field, and he suckled him with honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.

Ps. 81:16 ESV But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

Exod. 3:8 ESV and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Mightier than I...

2 Ki. 2:9 ESV ¶ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me."

Isa. 40:10 ESV Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

Isa. 59:15b-19 ESV The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. ¹⁶ He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. ¹⁷ He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. ¹⁸ According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment. ¹⁹ So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives.

Psalms 2 and Psalm 110 also come into play

He will baptize with the Holy Spirit

Joel 2:28 ESV "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. [Quoted in Acts 2:17]