

The Gospel According to

SAINT MATTHEW

SAINT MARK

SAINT LUKE

SAINT JOHN

CHAPTER 3, VERSES 7-10	NOTHING RECORDED	CHAPTER 3, VERSES 7-9	CHAPTER 1, VERSES 19-22, (23), 24-25
<p>3:7 - But when he saw¹ many² of the Pharisees³ and Sadducees⁴ come⁵ to his baptism⁶, he said unto them, O generation⁷ of vipers⁸, who hath warned⁹ you to flee¹⁰ from the wrath¹¹ to come?</p> <p>3:8 - Bring forth¹² therefore fruits¹³ meet¹⁴ for repentance¹⁵:</p> <p>3:9 - And think not¹⁶ to say within yourselves¹⁷, We have Abraham¹⁸ to our father¹⁹: for I say unto you, that God²⁰ is able²¹ of these stones²² to raise up²³ children²⁴ unto Abraham¹⁸.</p> <p>3:10 - And now also the axe²⁵ is laid²⁶ unto the root²⁷ of the trees²⁸: therefore every tree²⁸ which bringeth²⁹ not forth³⁰ good³¹ fruit¹³ is hewn down³², and cast³³ into the fire³⁴.</p>		<p>3:7 - Then said he to the multitude² that came⁵ forth to be baptized⁶ of him, O generation⁷ of vipers⁸, who hath warned⁹ you to flee¹⁰ from the wrath¹¹ to come?</p> <p>3:8 - Bring forth¹² therefore fruits¹³ worthy¹⁴ of repentance¹⁵, and begin not¹⁶ to say within yourselves¹⁷, We have Abraham¹⁸ to our father¹⁹: for I say unto you, That God²⁰ is able²¹ of these stones²² to raise up²³ children²⁴ unto Abraham¹⁸.</p> <p>3:9 - And now also the axe²⁵ is laid²⁶ unto the root²⁷ of the trees²⁸: every tree²⁸ therefore which bringeth²⁹ not forth³⁰ good³¹ fruit¹³ is hewn down³², and cast³³ into the fire³⁴.</p>	<p>1:19 - And this is the record³⁵ of John³⁶, when the Jews³⁷ sent priests³⁸ and Levites³⁹ from Jerusalem⁴⁰ to ask him, Who art thou⁴¹?</p> <p>1:20 - And he confessed⁴², and denied not⁴³; but confessed⁴², I am not the Christ⁴⁴.</p> <p>1:21 - And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias⁴⁵? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet⁴⁶? And he answered, No.</p> <p>1:22 - Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them³⁷ that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?</p> <p>1:23⁴⁷ - He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.</p> <p>1:24 - And they which were sent were of the Pharisees³.</p> <p>1:25 - And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest⁶ thou then, if thou be not that Christ⁴⁴, nor Elias⁴⁵, neither that prophet⁴⁶?</p>

CHRONOLOGY: Between 23 October 26CE and 27 November 26CE

LOCATION: The Wilderness of Judea (More specifically the southern region of the Jordon River; Bethabara)

COMMENTARY: The Prophet John, also known as John the Baptist, was preaching repentance and baptizing in the wilderness of Judea at the Jordon River. News had spread regarding his work and ministry. His words were compelling and carried with them a powerful confirming spirit. Masses flocked to him. Israel had not had a prophet amongst then in centuries. Not only had one been called, but the people recognized him as a Prophet. This caught the attention of the establishment. The ruling Jews sent Priests to question him and evaluate his work. They also sent soldiers to protect the Priests in the form of Levitical guards. John was not apprehensive in proclaiming the truth to the Priests. He called them Vipers and explained that just because they came from a chosen class, they needed to repent and be baptized. The Jews believed themselves to be save on the grounds that they were the children of Abraham. John refuted this belief and warned that their destruction was emanate unless they repented. He uses a metaphor of a tree that has stopped bringing forth good fruit. The axe had been laid at the roots. In other words, John was telling them that they were the tree. Their works were no longer good, and therefore, they were going to be judged. The fact that the axe was just laid at the root and not immediately used conveys the idea that God is merciful and grants unto man a probationary period. This period is a time for us to prepare to meet God.

FOOTNOTES:

- 1 - **saw** – The word "saw" is translated from the Greek word "εἶδω" or "eidō". It means to see, pay attention to, or discover.
- 2 - **many or multitude** – The word "many" is translated from the Greek word "πολύς" or "polys". It means many, much or large. Luke uses the word multitude in the place of many. The word "multitude" is translated from the Greek word "ὄχλος" or "ochlos". It means a crowd, a throng, a multitude of common people, populace, or a gathering without order. My personal belief is that a multitude is relative to the event. A multitude gathering in a synagogue might be different than a multitude gathering in the wilderness. When I picture a multitude, I picture lots of people. Since a synagogue would fill up quickly, a multitude might be a small number, compared to an open field. As a general rule of thumb, words that relate to numbers in the Jewish culture of the time are as follows;

multitude = over 2,000	gross = 144	lots = up to 100	a bunch = 3 to 10
several = 7	many = 5	few = 3	couple = 2

Regardless of your definition of many or multitude, it is safe to say that John attracted no small gathering. There were obviously more than 5 gathered, as we know that there were Pharisees, Sadducees, Priests, Levites, and common people gathered. There were safely hundreds that came to hear him, and most probably thousands.

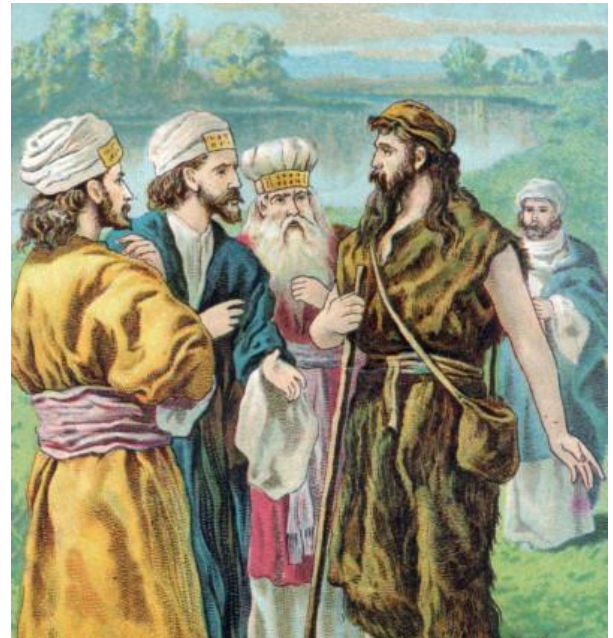
3- **Pharisees** – The word "Pharisees" is translated from the Greek word "Φαρισαῖος" or "Pharisaios". It comes from the Hebrew word "פָּרָשׁ" or "parash". The Hebrew word means to make distinct, declare, distinguish, or separate. It can also mean scatter, sting, pierce, and shew. Scholars agree that the best translation for the "Pharisees" is "Separatists". The Pharisees were a Jewish sect that started sometime after the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity. Their original tenant was to remain "separate" from the ways of the Gentiles. This made perfect sense since they just spent decades in exile among people that have become the symbol for wickedness and worldliness; Babylon the Great. Unfortunately, their beliefs changed over time, mainly for political popularity. Defining a Pharisee is somewhat difficult in that they were at times a political party, and other times a social movement, while also being a school of thought. By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees believed the "oral" traditions as viable, doctrinal standards. Since they contributed to the oral law, that left them great influence. They also believed in the outward observance of rites and rituals. **"The Pharisees were a zealous, devoted sect who accepted both the law of Moses and the traditions of the elders. They were pious and puritanical in conduct, glorying in frequent fasts and public prayers. Intensely patriotic and nationalistic, they believed in spirits, angels, revelation, immortality, eternal judgment, the resurrection from the dead, and rewards and punishments in the life to come."** (The Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 119). The Pharisees train of thought is believed to be more closely aligned with the common people at the time of Christ verses any other sect or group; however, they at no time established themselves as the majority group of the Jews. The other well known sect in Judea at the time of Jesus was the Sadducees who were mostly rich, elite, and families of prestige. The Pharisees, in contrast, associated with the middle class and poor of the society. That being said, **"The Pharisees were far more powerful and influential in Jewish political and religious life than were the Sadducees."** (The Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 119).



Most scholars agree that there were four major sects, or schools of thought, during the time of Jesus and prior to Christians forming a fifth sect. The four sects are;

1. Pharisees - Believed in Written and Oral Law
2. Sadducees - Believed only in the Written Law
3. Essenes - Believed that the Jews were largely apostate and needed a return to ways of purity
4. Zealots - Believed that rebellion and force were needed to overthrow Rome and the Gentiles

4- **Sadducees** – The word "Sadducees" is translated from the Greek word "Σαδδουκαῖος" or "Saddoukaios". Unlike the word "Pharisees", "Sadducees" has no Hebrew origin. It is a Greek word meaning "The Righteous". They denied the oral tradition or law. They denied any doctrine that was not contained in the accepted scriptures of the time. Therefore, they denied the doctrine of resurrection, immortality of the soul, the existence of spirit, and divine will. Elder McConkie describes them as follows; **"The Sadducees, on the other hand, categorically rejected and believed in none of these things. They were a sect composed of skeptical, worldly, wealthy people - a selfish group finding their most powerful adherents among the chief priests. Though the Sadducees professed belief in the law, they rejected the traditions of the elders., and made no pretensions of piety or devout worship."** (The Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 119).



Many priests belonged to the Sadducees, according to Josephus, but not all priests were Sadducees. The Sadducees held more of the leadership positions, but most frequently had to submit to the demands of the Pharisees. The descriptions from ancient literature describe the Sadducees as nasty and arrogant because they had power and competed with others for it; they were called boorish, rude to their peers often treating them as aliens, Judgmental and quick to dispute with the teachers opposed to the path they follow. Talmage wrote, **"The Sadducees prided themselves on strict compliance with the law, as they construed it, irrespective of all scribes or rabbis. The Sadducees stood for the temple and its prescribed ordinances, the Pharisees for the synagogue and its rabbinical teachings. It is difficult to decide which were the more technical if we judge each party by the standard of its own profession. By way of illustration: the Sadducees held to the literal and full exaction of the Mosaic penalty—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth—while the Pharisees contended on the authority of rabbinical dictum, that the wording was figurative, and that therefore the penalty could be met by a fine in money or goods."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 82). Unfortunately, the Sadducees left few records of their own describing themselves. The information we have on the Sadducees is mostly from writings of those that were not favorable to them. We must then acknowledge that we have only one side of the story.

5- **come** – The word "come" is translated from the Greek word "ἔρχομαι" or "erchomai". It means to come from one place to another. The people came **"to be baptized before him". This would suggest that John did not do all the baptizing himself.** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., page 467). This makes perfect sense since we learn that John had disciples. Though there is nothing that proves this theory; it would make sense that John's disciples would assist him in the work he had been called to perform. It is not a stretch to see them preaching and baptizing under his direction.

6- **baptism or baptized** – The word "baptism" is translated from the Greek word "βάπτισμα" or "baptisma". It means immersion or submersion. **"The overall drift of the passage is that the people accept baptism as a result of his exhortation."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., page 467). Later on in Luke, it is recorded, **"And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him."** (Luke 7:29-30). It is clear that the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John's baptisms with different objectives than being baptized themselves. They were seeking something that was centered on worldly power.

If there ever was a question as to whether or not the ancient Jews practiced baptism, the Joseph Smith Translations gives us absolute clarity. It also helps us understand that baptism is valid not only through proper authority, but with an offering of the fruits of repentance. It is by a change of heart, leading to obedience to the laws and principles of Gospel that the Baptism of Heaven becomes effectual. We read, **"Then said the Pharisees unto him, Why will ye not receive us with our baptism, seeing we keep the whole law? But Jesus said unto them, Ye keep not the law. If ye had kept the law, ye would have received me, for I am he who gave the law. I receive not you with your baptism, because it profiteth you nothing. For when that which is new is come, the old is ready to be put away."** (JST Matthew 9:18-21). John baptized those who were willing to accept and take upon them the name of Jehovah or Jesus Christ. **"What made the matter still more strange was this. Baptism at the hands of men was not for Israelites at all. It was proselytes, incomers from other faiths, who were baptized. An Israelite was never baptized; he was God's already and did not need to be washed. But Gentiles had to be washed in baptism. John was making Israelites do what only Gentiles had to do. He was suggesting that the chosen people had to be cleansed."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 79).

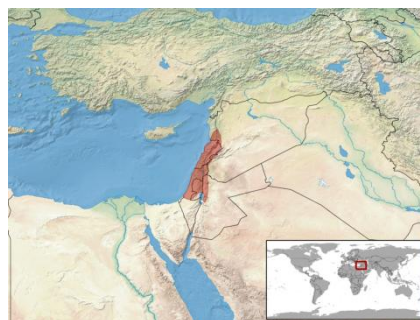
- 7- **generation** – The word "generation" is translated from the Greek word "γέννημα" or "gennēma". It means that which has been born or begotten. Some translators prefer the word "brood" to "generation". **"Literally, 'brood of vipers'. This phrase occurs only here in Luke, but besides the parallel in Matt. 3:7, it occurs again in Matt. 12:34 and 23:33; in the latter context it is associated with 'serpents' (ophis). The image is otherwise unknown in the OT, Josephus, or rabbinical writings."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., page 467). The word "brood" refers to a family of young animals. It is most often used of birds, but also of animal that are held for the purpose of breeding. The group of people John spoke of were wicked men, breeding sin and transgression. Elder McConkie described them as **"An evil and wicked group, who by their poisonous opinions and corrupt influence, were destroying the religious health of the nation. Our Lord simily castigated the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:33), and the Prophet applied the same condemnation to the persecutors of the saints in this dispensation. (D. & C. 121:23)."** (The Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 119).

The term "viper" is apparently a word commonly used in the culture of John's time. **"Viper's brood. Jesus uses the same expression in xii 34 and xxiii 33. This is evidently an expression in common use, indicating malice."** (Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor/Yale Bible, W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, page 26). It was not a flattering term. The viper symbolized not only wicked men, but those that preyed upon men with deadly consequence. Righteous men pray for their fellow men, wicked men prey upon them. Jesus later used the same term, **"O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."** (Matthew 12:34). In another passage Jesus stated, **"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"** (Matthew 23:33). More on the symbolism of "vipers" is given in footnote #8 in this chapter.

Here we desire to speak of the term "generation". It is used metaphorically to speak of the "men" of "the time". It conveys the idea of social norms and beliefs. There was a generation of wickedness. Wickedness is what was being taught to men, by men. As Enoch saw John's days, he recorded, **"And the Lord said: It shall be in the meridian of time, in the days of wickedness and vengeance."** (Moses 7:46). So wicked was the generations of men on this earth that the Lord also taught Enoch, **"Wherefore, I can stretch forth mine hands and hold all the creations which I have made; and mine eye can pierce them also, and among all the workmanship of mine hands there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren."** (Moses 7:36).

Similarly, Book of Mormon prophets were concerned about a "generation" of wickedness. **"Behold, O ye wicked and perverse generation, how have ye forgotten the tradition of your fathers; yea, how soon ye have forgotten the commandments of God."** (Alma 9:8). Another passage records, **"Now they knew not that Amulek could know of their designs. But it came to pass as they began to question him, he perceived their thoughts, and he said unto them: O ye wicked and perverse generation, ye lawyers and hypocrites, for ye are laying the foundations of the devil; for ye are laying traps and snares to catch the holy ones of God."** (Alma 10:17).

- 8- **Vipers** – The word "Viper" is translated from the Greek word "ἔχιδνα" or "echidna". The word literally means a "viper". It is used metaphorically for cunning, malignant and wicked men. The Palestine Viper is referred to by its scientific name, "Vipera palaestinae". It is a venomous viper found throughout the Roman Province of Judea. It is found as far north as Syria, and into the desert regions west of the Jordan River. It is the leading cause of snake bites in the region. It is also the most dangerous snake in Palestine. The Palestine Viper grows to an average length of 28 to 35 inches. They grow to a maximum length of 51 inches. The Viper has a triangular head structure due to its large venom glands located on either side of the head. The Viper is characterized by zig-zag shaped patches covering its back from head to tail. The Palestine Viper has a relatively wide body, ending with short tail. To ensure that it deters its enemies the viper announces its presence by lifting its head and makes hissing sounds. The Palestine viper feeds mainly on rodents, amphibians and other small animals. It uses its venom to kill prey. The venom affects the blood vessels and lymphatic system. It acts to kill the prey but also causes the breakdown of the internal tissues as part of digestion, making all the soft tissues of the body to turn into a "soup". The Viper then swallows the victim dead and can digest it slowly and thoroughly. The Viper is a nocturnal snake. During the day it will choose to stay cool hiding in various niches: under bushes or rocks. It may penetrate the vicinity of the humans and even enter homes to find a cool place to hide during the day. When threatened or molested, it will tighten its coils, hiss loudly, and strike quickly.



PALESTINE SAW SCALED VIPER



PALESTINE VIPER

"The echidna was regarded in antiquity as a poisonous snake, and the expression is intended to convey the repulsive, even destructive, character of those so described. So characterized, they are being warned against a smugness of certain salvation - which will be their own undoing." (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., page 467). Men who prey upon men will surely be smitten. The symbolism is strong. What father would not take his shovel and venture out into the yard to sever the head of viper that threatened the safety of his children. The danger inherent with such animals makes it necessary for their destruction. Similarly, there are those who would choose to play with deadly vipers. Their pride allows them to believe that they are faster and smarter than the deadly viper. They believe that they can taunt and aggravate the vipers of life and walk away safely. Unfortunately, once bitten the venom is life threatening and painful.

- 9- **warned** – The word "warned" is translated from the Greek word "ὑποδείκνυμι" or "hypodeiknymi". It means to teach, to show or make known future things, or to reveal. **"Because the Lord is kind, He calls servants to warn people of danger. That call to warn is made harder and more important by the fact that the warnings of most worth are about dangers that people don't yet think are real."** (General Conference, "A Voice of Warning", October 1998, Henry B. Eyring). Nevertheless, a warning is always issued. Once given, it is our duty to not only listen and do, but to share the warning. The Lord taught, **"Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor."** (Doctrine & Covenants 88:81).
- 10- **flee** – The word "flee" is translated from the Greek word "φεύγω" or "pheugō". It means to flee away, or to seek safety by flight. It can be used metaphorically to flee something abhorrent, such as sin or vices. It also might convey the attitude of the doers of wickedness, when they realize that the time of probation is coming to an end. One scholar wrote, **"John calls the Pharisees and the Sadducees a brood of vipers, and asks them who has suggested to them to flee from the coming wrath. There may be one of two pictures there. John knew the desert. The desert had in places thin, short, dried-up grass, and stunted thorn bushes, brittle for want of moisture. Sometimes a desert**

fire would break out. When that happened the fire swept like a river of flame across the grass and the bushes, for they were as dry as tinder. And in front of the fire there would come scurrying and hurrying the snakes and the scorpions, and the living creatures who found their shelter in the grass and in the bushes. They were driven from their lairs by this river of flame, and they ran for their lives before it. But it may be that there is another picture here. There are many little creatures in a standing field of corn - the mice, the rats, the rabbits, the birds. But when the reaper comes they are driven from their nests and their shelters, and as the field is laid bare they have to flee for their lives. It is in terms of these pictures that John is thinking. If the Pharisees and Sadducees are really coming for baptism, they are like the animals scurrying for life before a desert fire or in front of the sickle of the harvester." (The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, William Barclay, pages 38-39).

- 11 - **wrath** – The word "wrath" is translated from the Greek word "ὀργή" or "orgē". It means to anger, to bring to wrath, or indignation. **"Luke speaks of 'wrath' (orge) only here and in 21:23; in both instances it refers to a future manifestation of God's wrath. He makes use of an OT expression for God's judgment by which evil is to be wiped out"** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., page 468). We often have a hard time equating human anger with deity. That is because God does not experience human anger. His wrath is one of a higher law, and not based on human emotions such as; revenge, hate, or retaliation. His wrath is difficult to understand in our mortal state, because it is perfect and motivated by His desire for our progression. Elder Oaks taught, **"We read again and again in the Bible and in modern scriptures of God's anger with the wicked and of His acting in His wrath against those who violate His laws. How are anger and wrath evidence of His love? Joseph Smith taught that God 'institute[d] laws whereby [the spirits that He would send into the world] could have a privilege to advance like himself.' God's love is so perfect that He lovingly requires us to obey His commandments because He knows that only through obedience to His laws can we become perfect, as He is. For this reason, God's anger and His wrath are not a contradiction of His love but an evidence of His love. Every parent knows that you can love a child totally and completely while still being creatively angry and disappointed at that child's self-defeating behavior."** (General Conference, "Love and Law", October 2009, Dallin H. Oaks). Albright wrote, **"It is important not to equate the wrath of God with the emotion of anger. God's wrath in the Bible denotes the ineluctable condemnation by the all-holy and all-loving God of any sin which defiles his creation and which destroys the dignity of man as part of that creation. The wrath of God therefore always brings judgment in its train, and this is the sense here."** (Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor/Yale Bible, W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, page 26).
- 12 - **forth** – The word "forth" in the phrase "bring forth" is translated from the Greek word "ποιέω" or "poieō". It means to make, produce, prepare, construct, form or fashion. In Luke 3:7, the word "forth" in the phrase "came forth" is translated from the Greek word "ἐκπορεύομαι" or "ekporeuomai", meaning to go forth, proceed, or to go out. Throughout the history of the world, when the truths of the Gospel were among men, receivers were commanded to go "forth" and share the doctrines of salvation. This proclamation is an invitation to come unto Christ and for the recipients of the Gospel message to "bring forth" the fruits of repentance. **"The gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to change. 'Repent' is its most frequent message, and repenting means giving up all of our practices—personal, family, ethnic, and national—that are contrary to the commandments of God. The purpose of the gospel is to transform common creatures into celestial citizens, and that requires change. John the Baptist preached repentance. His listeners came from different groups, and he declared the changes each must make to 'bring forth ... fruits worthy of repentance' (Luke 3:8). Publicans, soldiers, and ordinary people—each had traditions that had to yield to the process of repentance."** (General Conference, "Repentance and Change", October 2003, Dallin H. Oaks).

It is important to recognize that repentance is indeed a process that requires action on our part. Simply asking for forgiveness, or proclaiming our belief, is not enough to draw upon the blessing of forgiveness. Repentance must not only include a change in heart, but a change in behavior. We change both inside and out. Our works become works of light rather than darkness. These are the fruits of repentance. A repentant person looks for ways to behave like the Savior. A repentant person not only ceases to commit the sin that they are repenting of, but they perform work of charity that include things like proclaiming the good news of the Gospel, helping those that are down trodden, or a variety of other tasks that bless the lives of Father's children. The Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 3 gives some insight in this matter. It reads, **"Why is it that ye receive not the preaching of him whom God hath sent? If ye receive not this in your hearts, ye receive not me; and if ye receive not me, ye receive not him of whom I am sent to bear record; and for your sins ye have no cloak. Repent, therefore, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance; And think not to say within yourselves, We are the children of Abraham, and we only have power to bring seed unto our father Abraham; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children into Abraham."** (JST Matthew 3:34-36).

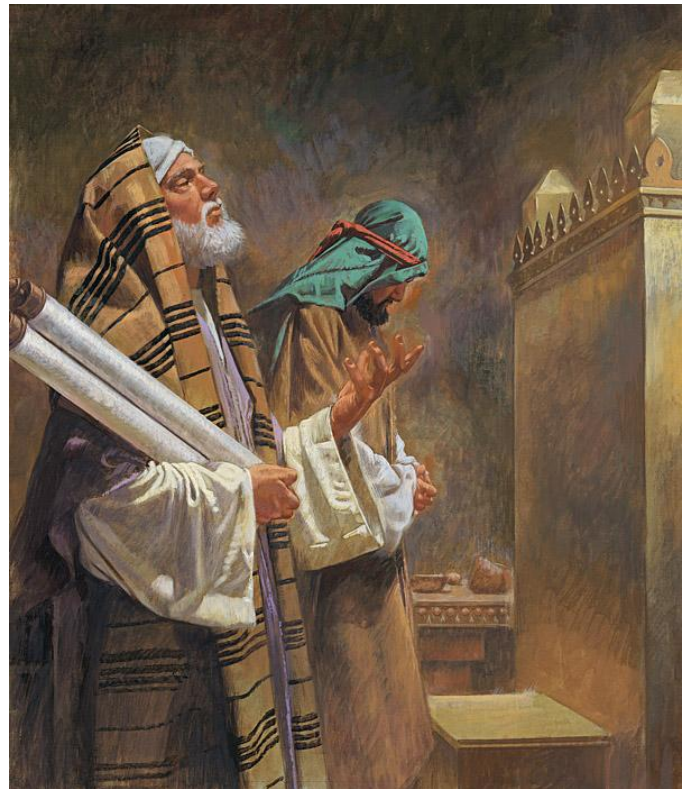
- 13 - **fruit** – The word "fruit" is translated from the Greek word "καρπός" or "karpos". It means a fruit of the tree, vine or ground. **"Literally, 'produce fruits worthy of repentance', i.e. in keeping with your repentance; show by your actions and conduct that an inner revitalization has taken place."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., page 468). Metaphorically, it is used to mean an act, deed, work, consequence, profit or advantage. Trees typically symbolize mortal man. Trees produce fruit according to their type. Pear trees bring for pears, and apple trees bring for apples. Trees that have become diseased, or lack the proper nutrients cease to produce fruit, or produce fruit that is inferior or diseased itself. The symbolism is significant. If men are symbolically trees, then when we become sinful or cease to take in spiritual nourishment our fruit will cease to be produced or will be corrupt. In other words, our actions will be sinful. As we tend to our tree, the fruit becomes acceptable even desirable. This process is called repentance. The Book of Alma teaches, **"And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest."** (Alma 13:13).



If I were a farmer and struggled with trees that did not produce fruit, or whose fruit was bad, I would pay special attention to those trees. I would prune, fertilize, water, spray for bugs and disease, and seek help in getting those trees to produce properly. I suppose that after much effort, I would have to judge whether the tree was going to be a producer. If I came to the conclusion that the tree was not going to produce for me, I would need to remove the tree and plant a new tree that could produce good fruit. So it is with you and I. We are trees in the Lord's farm. The Lord taught, **"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."** (John 15:2). And then He taught, **"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."** (Matthew 7:19-20). All the trees of God's farm are required to bring forth good fruit. This is how we can tell that the tree is of God's farm. God's trees are required to be producers. They produce works of righteousness.

- 14 - **meet or worthy** – The word "meet" found in Matthew and the word "worthy" found in Luke are translated from the same Greek word "ἄξιος" or "axios". Scribal preferences resulted in two different translations of the same word. "Axios" means to have been weighed, to be worth as much, or befitting. Worthiness means that one has produced an effort deserving of the reward, consequence, or even punishment. In terms of the Gospel, worthiness is the degree by which we have applied ourselves to the process of becoming like God. Elder Ashton taught, **"It occurs to me that there are probably hundreds or even thousands who do not understand what worthiness is. Worthiness is a process, and perfection is an eternal trek. We can be worthy to enjoy certain privileges without being perfect."** (General Conference, "On Being Worthy", April 1989, Marvin J. Ashton). The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus' atonement compensates for our inadequacies after we have done all that we are capable of doing. It is this effort that brings about our individual worthiness.

The Gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, both confirm that John admonished the Pharisees and Sadducees to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. What was John asking? Moroni taught, **"And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins;"** (Moroni 8:25). John was asking that they commit to following the commandments, exhibit the faith necessary to change their heart, and covenant with the Lord through baptism. He was asking them to give up their old ways and be reborn as a follower of Christ. Followers of Christ seek to be worthy of His great atonement. Elder Ashton further taught, **"It is my hope and prayer that we will learn individually and collectively the importance of the process of becoming worthy. We are entitled to the help of others not only in assessing our worthiness but also in making the classification of "worthy" available to each of us. As we measure our worthiness, let us no longer put limitations upon ourselves. Rather, let us use those strengths and powers that are available to make us worthy to gain great heights in personal development. Thus we will reap the joy that comes to those who desire to improve and move forward with determination and effectiveness as they practice self-discipline and refuse to judge themselves as unworthy."** (General Conference, "On Being Worthy", April 1989, Marvin J. Ashton). Abraham Lincoln wisely said, **"It is difficult to make a man miserable while he feels worthy of himself and claims kindred to the great God who made him."** (In The International Thesaurus of Quotations, comp. Rhoda Thomas Tripp, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1970, page 575). Unfortunately, the proud Pharisees and Sadducees refused to humble themselves to the process. They could not, or rather would not, look at their wayward behaviors. They lacked the ability to see their own faults, and surely had no remorse. **"Real remorse quickly brings forth positive indicators, "fruits meet for repentance."** (Matt. 3:8; see also Acts 26:20; Alma 5:54.) **"In process of time," these fruits bud, blossom, and ripen.**" (General Conference, "Repentance", October 1991, Neal A. Maxwell).



- 15- repentance** – The word "repentance" is translated from the Greek word "μετάνοια" or "metanoia". It means to change one's mind, as it appears to one who repents, of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done. Repentance is much more than saying you are sorry, or feeling guilty. Repentance may include these elements, but true repentance, as a whole, is much more. It is a total change of thought and desire. A repentant person not only stops the sinful behavior, but changes all the lifestyle associated with it. There is full change from inside and out. **"To repent from sin is not easy. But the prize is worth the price. Repentance needs to be done one step at a time. Humble prayer will facilitate each essential step."** (General Conference, "Repentance and Conversion", April 2007, Russell M. Nelson).

Repentance produces "fruit". In other words, those that repent will produce specific behavior. You can tell when a man has repented because of these behaviors. **"The fruits of repentance are sweet. Repentant converts find that the truths of the restored gospel govern their thoughts and deeds, shape their habits, and forge their character. They are more resilient and able to deny themselves of all ungodliness. Moreover, uncontrolled appetite, addiction to pornography or harmful drugs, unbridled passion, carnal desire, and unrighteous pride are diminished with complete conversion to the Lord and a determination to serve Him and to emulate His example. Virtue garnishes their thoughts, and self-confidence grows. Tithing is seen as a joyful and protective blessing, not as a duty or a sacrifice. Truth becomes more attractive, and things praiseworthy become more engaging. Repentance is the Lord's regimen for spiritual growth."** (General Conference, "Repentance and Conversion", April 2007, Russell M. Nelson).

Repentance is a very personal process. Though one can seek outside help, and in certain cases that is necessary, the real work of change can only be done through personal effort. **"Repentance is individual, and so is forgiveness. The Lord requires only that one turn from their sin, and [He] will forgive their iniquity, and ... remember their sin no more."** (General Conference, "The Key to Spiritual Protection", October 2013, Boyd K. Packer). Many of the people that came to see John came with a change of heart. They came with a desire to covenant with the Lord through the ordinance of Baptism. This was not the case with the Pharisees and Sadducees. They came to John with no change in behavior. They embraced their sins, with no intention of change. In them, there were no fruits of repentance.

- 16- think not or begin not to say** – Matthew says "think not", while Luke uses the phrase "begin not to say". The word "think" is translated from the Greek word "δοκέω" or "dokeō". It means to be of opinion, think, or suppose. **"Luke has here substituted 'arxesthe' for the more original 'doxete', retained in Matt. 3:9. This is the first appearance of the verb 'archein' in the Lucan writing, and it has to be understood as an instance of a Lucan favorite expression."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., page 468). Luke uses the word "begin" which is translated from the Greek word "ἀρχομαι" or "archomai" meaning to begin. He also uses the word "say", which is translated from the Greek word "λέγω" or "legō" meaning to mention, express, say or make known. Whether the Pharisees and Sadducees thought of their own superiority, or actually verbalized it, is debatable. In either case, John was on to them. He knew their thoughts.

What is in a thought? **"In Proverbs we read, 'For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he' (Prov. 23:7). And Jude has written, 'Filthy dreamers defile the flesh' (Jude 1:8). Inescapably our thoughts shape our lives."** (General Conference, "Discipleship", October 2000, L. Tom Perry). So was the case with the Pharisees and Sadducees that came to John. Their thoughts dictated their actions. They believed that they were of superior lineage, and therefore they acted as though they were above the need for change. Their thoughts were their greatest hindrance to change. They were their own worst enemy.

Once we humble ourselves, we open the door to change. Humility opens the mind to new thought and possibilities. **"Let a man radically alter his thoughts, and he will be astonished at the rapid transformation it will effect in the material conditions of his life. Men imagine that thought can be kept secret, but it cannot; it rapidly crystallizes into habit, and habit solidifies into circumstance"** (As a Man Thinketh, James Allen, pages 33–34). The Pharisees and Sadducees that visited John were stuck in thought and circumstance. They were full of pride and sin. John simply calls them out.



17 - within yourselves – The word "yourself" is translated from the Greek word "ἑαυτοῦ" or "heautou". It means himself, herself, itself or themselves. The term "within" yourself is an indication that the Pharisees and Sadducees had inner thoughts and beliefs that hindered their ability to repent. Our inner vessel is core to much of our successes and failures. When our inner vessel is proud and sinful, our actions follow suit. **"The proud do not change to improve, but defend their position by rationalizing. Repentance means change, and it takes a humble person to change."** (General Conference, "Cleansing the Inner Vessel", Ezra Taft Benson, April 1986). Similarly, when our opinion of ourselves is greater than reality, we lose sight of the Lord. President Uchtdorf taught, **"when we start believing that our contributions at home, at work, and at church are greater than they actually are, we blind ourselves to blessings and opportunities to improve ourselves in significant and profound ways."** (General Conference, "Lord, is it I?", Dieter F. Uchtdorf, October 2014).

The fact is, our inner thoughts and beliefs are the bases for all that we do. All action is preceded by a thought, desire, or idea. The Gospel writer Mark records that after reproving the Pharisees, Jesus taught, **"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."** (Mark 7:21-23). Obviously, the Pharisees and Sadducees of John's time were of the same character set, if not the same men, that Jesus reproved. They had elevated themselves in their own mind, far above their merit. They were evil men with wicked intentions, yet they viewed themselves as righteous men divinely called.

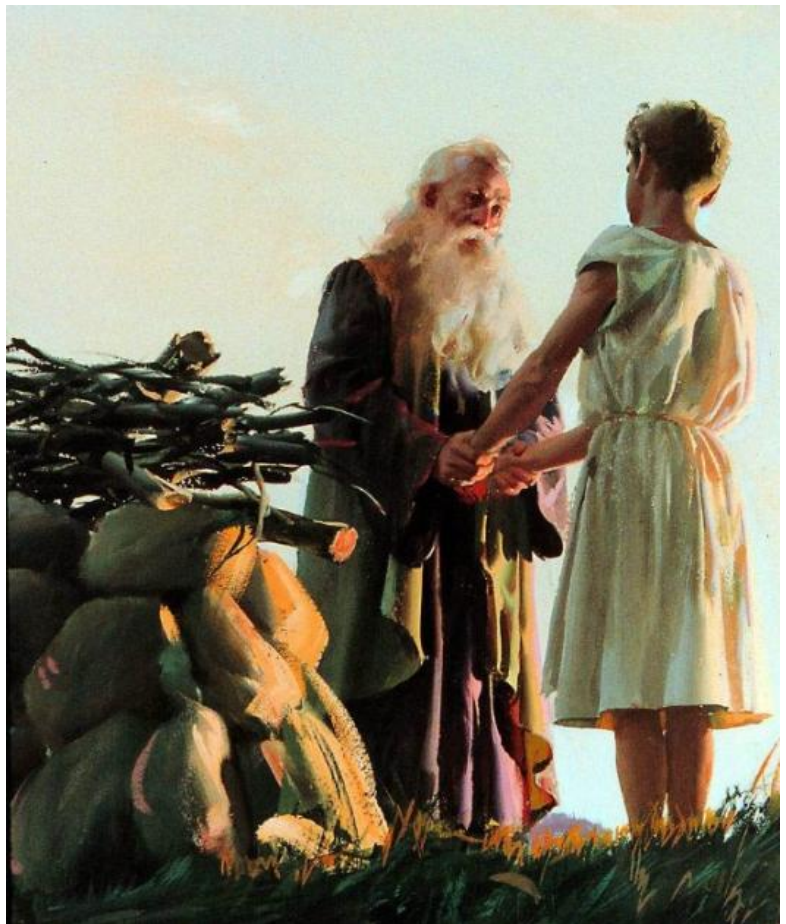
President Uchtdorf warned you and I of such behavior. He said, **"Brethren, none of us likes to admit when we are drifting off the right course. Often we try to avoid looking deeply into our souls and confronting our weaknesses, limitations, and fears. Consequently, when we do examine our lives, we look through the filter of biases, excuses, and stories we tell ourselves in order to justify unworthy thoughts and actions. But being able to see ourselves clearly is essential to our spiritual growth and well-being. If our weaknesses and shortcomings remain obscured in the shadows, then the redeeming power of the Savior cannot heal them and make them strengths. Ironically, our blindness toward our human weaknesses will also make us blind to the divine potential that our Father yearns to nurture within each of us."** (General Conference, "Lord, is it I?", Dieter F. Uchtdorf, October 2014).

18 - Abraham – The name "Abraham" is translated from the Greek word "Ἀβραάμ" or "Abraam". The Greek is translated from the Hebrew word "אַבְרָהָם" or "Abraham". The Hebrew word means "father of a multitude". The Jews saw Abraham as the Father of their religion and their race. Because of Abraham's righteousness, he laid claim to the richest blessings of heaven. Mistakenly, a main stream Jewish belief at the time of John the Baptist was that all Jews were entitled to those blessings by virtue of their Abrahamic bloodline. **"In various ways rabbinical literature later played on Israel's physical descent from Abraham as protection against God's wrath; much of it was explained in terms of Abraham's merit. Salvation tied to 'Father Abraham' as a Jewish belief is echoed elsewhere in the NT. This reliance on an ethnic privilege, however, is precisely what the Baptist repudiates."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., page 468).

There is a half truth contained in the belief that Abraham brought salvation to the Jews. The fact is, Abraham entered into a covenant to promised him and all those who entered the same covenant salvation. But, only those that entered into the covenant and subsequently live up to the terms of the covenant can lay claim to the associated blessings. The Lord taught, **"I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise."** (Doctrine & Covenants 82:10). Unfortunately, the Jews lost sight of the ways things work. **"The Jews had not the slightest doubt that in God's economy there was a favoured nation clause. They held that God would judge other nations with one standard but the Jews with another. They, in fact, held that a man was safe from judgment simply in virtue of the fact that he was a Jew. A son of Abraham was exempt from judgment. John told them that racial privilege meant nothing; that life not lineage was God's standard of judgment."** (The Gospel of Luke, William Barclay, page 33).

John's reply to the Pharisees and Sadducees might seem harsh; however, there was a critical warning in his message that if followed might have led them to salvation. The message is that none of us can stand on someone else's shoulders. In other words, no matter how great ancestors lived, we cannot be saved on their merits. Even if that father is Abraham. **"He warns them that it will avail them nothing to plead that Abraham is their father. To the orthodox Jew that was an incredible statement. To the Jew Abraham was unique. So unique was he in his goodness and in his favour with God, that his merits sufficed not only for himself but for all his descendants also. He had built up a treasury of merit which not all the claims and needs of his descendants could exhaust. So the Jews believed that a Jew simply because he was a Jew, and not for any merits of his own, was safe in the life to come. They said, 'All Israelites have a portion in the world to come.' They talked about 'the delivering merits of their fathers'. They said that Abraham sat at the gates of Gehenna to turn back any Israelite who might by chance have been consigned to its terrors. They said that it was the merits of Abraham which enabled the ships to sail safely on the seas; that it was the merits of Abraham that the rain descended on the earth; that it was the merits of Abraham which enabled Moses to enter into heaven and to receive the Law; that it was because of the merits of Abraham that David was heard. Even for the wicked these merits sufficed. 'If thy children,' they said of Abraham, 'were mere dead bodies, without blood vessels or bones, thy merits would avail for them!' It is that spirit which John is rebuking. Maybe the Jews carried it to an unparalleled distance, but there is always need of a warning that we cannot live on the spiritual capital of the past. A degenerate age cannot hope to claim salvation for the sake of an heroic past; and an evil son cannot hope to plead the merits of a saintly father."** (The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 39).

Joseph Smith provides some clarity to the verbiage of this verse in his inspired translation, **" ... Abraham is our father; we have kept the commandments of God, and none can inherit the promises but the children of Abraham; for I say ..."** (JST Luke 3:13).



- 19 - **father** – The word "father" is translated from the Greek word "πατήρ" or "patēr", meaning father. It should be remembered that the Jews were a patriarchal society in respects to priesthood and property. The priesthood was handed down bloodlines, while the sons shared inheritance. The oldest son received a double portion. Daughters generally received no inheritance.
- 20 - **God** – The word "God" is translated from the Greek word "θεός" or "theos". It is a generic name for deity. It is used most often as a name for the one and only living god, verses an idol or a God made from the earth.
- 21 - **able** – The word "able" is translated from the Greek word "δύναμις" or "dynami". It means to be able to do something, to be capable, strong and powerful. Men are able to do that which they have qualified themselves for spiritually. Moses wrote, **"Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee."** (Deuteronomy 16:17). Beyond that we deem as impossible. Contrary, Jesus taught, **"With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible."** (Mark 10:27). This simple statement from John, that God could raise up children from these rocks, not only seemed impossible to the Jews, but it was insulting. They considered themselves chosen, elite, and above all other men. The fact that John could make a statement that casts them aside and replaces them was offensive. Even so, John spoke the truth. God is able in all things, and we are only chosen if we honor our covenants.

- 22 - **stones** – The word "stones" is translated from the Greek word "λίθος" or "lithos". It means a stone, small stones or building stones. It is often used as a metaphor for Jesus Christ. Stones are symbolism for that which is immovable, steadfast, and reliable. **"John's hearers believed that they and their kindred only could provide seed for Abraham and that none could be saved except the literal seed of that ancient Patriarch. But John's stinging rebuke was that 'Of these stony Gentiles, these dogs,' these lowest of all creatures (in the Jewish mind), God is able 'to raise up children unto Abraham.'** (Teachings, p. 319). Our Lord's forerunner is teaching the principle of adoption: that Abraham is 'the father of all them that believe' (Rom. 4:11) both Jew and Gentile; that through belief in Christ all men become 'Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise' (Gal. 3:28-29); that all who believe the gospel shall be accounted as Abraham's seed and rise up and bless him 'as their father' (Abra. 2:10)." (The Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 120).



There may be something else going on here. **"Some commentators think that there might be a pun in these words or John, if the speech were originally delivered in Aramaic; bēnayyā, 'sons', would be raised up from 'abnayyā, 'stones' "** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., pages 468-469). Albright is more assertive in his commentary saying, **"In Hebrew the words for children (bānim) and stones (abānim) are similar and they are here used in a play on words."** (Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor/Yale Bible, W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, page 26). It doesn't change the doctrine whether a pun is used or not, but it is very typical in ancient Jewish culture to play on words.

- 23 - **raise up** – The phrase "raise up" is translated from the Greek word "ἐγείρω" or "egeirō". It means to arouse, cause to rise, to awake, or to stir up. The Jews considered themselves Abraham's children, regardless of their worthiness. They were born into the covenant, and therefore they believed themselves to be saved. **"Judaism held that the posterity of Abraham had an assured place in the kingdom of the expected Messiah, and that no proselyte from among the Gentiles could possibly attain the rank and distinction of which the "children" were sure. John's forceful assertion that God could raise up, from the stones on the river bank, children to Abraham, meant to those who heard that even the lowest of the human family might be preferred before themselves unless they repented and reformed. Their time of wordy profession had passed; fruits were demanded, not barren though leafy profusion; the ax was ready, aye, at the very root of the tree; and every tree that produced not good fruit was to be hewn down and cast into the fire."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 115).

This concept takes us to the doctrine of adoption. **"To have 'children of Abraham' God does not depend on Jews physically descended from the patriarch. In thus addressing his fellow Jews, John implies that God can even create Israel anew. Implicit in his thinking is the idea that God thereby would not be unfaithful to the promises made to Abraham, but only that he has other ways of extending them to human beings."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., page 468). How does God do this? The answer lies in a "spiritual" adoption. All who have been born into mortality, whether through the house of Abraham or the Gentiles, can choose to be "spiritually" reborn. The processes of spiritual rebirth, is an adoption process into the House of Abraham. Symbolically, covenant makers are reborn in the waters of baptism. They become sons and daughters of Jehovah. Adoption creates equal children regardless of bloodlines. John made this point clearly, and then offered the opportunity, under the proper authority, to those that came forth humble and worthy. Paul taught the Romans, **"That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."** (Romans 9:8). It is the covenant or promise that binds us to our God as His children.



- 24 - **children** – The word "children" is translated from the Greek word "τέκνον" or "teknon". It means offspring, or children. Paul had much to say regarding children, specifically those classified as the children of God. To the Galatians he taught, **"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."** (Galatians 3:26). Paul is making reference to the faith necessary to enter into the covenant of baptism. Baptism is a re-birth as sons and daughters of Jehovah. The fruits of which are repentance, and brings with it the remission of sin. Such remission is made possible by the Savior Himself. Paul adds that the Savior provided an atonement for sin **"to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."** (Galatians 4:5). Hence, we become his sons and daughters. We are therefore adopted as his children. Paul taught the Romans, **"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."** (Romans 8:17).

25 - **axe** – The word "axe" is translated from the Greek word "ἄξιν" or "axinē". It means literally an axe. The axe can be used to symbolize the word of God, especially in reference to divine judgment.



A similar passage was given by the Lord in the latter days. The Doctrine and Covenants reads, "**The ax is laid at the root of the trees; and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire. I, the Lord, have spoken it.**" (Doctrine & Covenants 97:7). The verse makes reference to the fact that individuals who choose not to bring forth righteous works must face divine judgment. Many feel that the words of John were actually a reference to an Old Testament passage from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah wrote, "**Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.**" (Isaiah 10:33-34). Fitzmyer wrote, "**Perhaps there is an allusion to Isaiah 10:33-34, where Yahweh is depicted as a forester lopping off the boughs of mighty Assyria. The image, then, would be that of Yahweh's historic deliverance of Israel, now transferred to an eschatological reckoning.**" (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., page 469).

Regardless of whether or not John the Baptist was quoting Isaiah, the imagery is was common to the Jews. The Nephites, who were descendants of the Israel, carried the same imagery to the Americas. Alma taught, "**And again I say unto you, the Spirit saith: Behold, the ax is laid at the root of the tree; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire, yea, a fire which cannot be consumed, even an unquenchable fire. Behold, and remember, the Holy One hath spoken it.**" (Alma 5:52).

26 - **laid** – The word "laid" was translated from the Greek word "κείμεν" or "keimai". It means to lie as in to rest, or as one buries a body. The word gives reference to the fact that men are given a probationary period, or a time to repent. The axe was laid down, judgment has been delayed for a time. "**And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. For he gave commandment that all men must repent; for he showed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents.**" (2nd Nephi 2:21).

27 - **root** – The word "root" is translated from the Greek word "ρίζα" or "rhiza". The word means a root. It is used metaphorically for one's offspring or progeny. The word root is often used as a symbol for a righteous person or someone that is steadfast in righteousness. "**A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.**" (Proverbs 12:3). A root can also be the cause of something. If the root has fruit it symbolizes a good person. If the root is dry or brings forth bad fruit, it symbolizes evil. This is evident in the words of the prophet Hosea, "**Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb.**" (Hosea 9:16). A root is also symbolic of being firmly planted, whether in righteousness or evil. Jeremiah records, "**Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.**" (Jeremiah 12:2).

28 - **tree or trees** – The word "tree" is translated from the Greek word "δένδρον" or "dendron". It means a tree. It is used metaphorically of men or mankind. Trees are used to symbolize people or nations. The kingdom of God is also depicted as a tree. The book of Daniel records, "**The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; Whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.**" (Daniel 4:20-22). A green tree is symbolic of a person who is favored and blessed of God. The Psalmist wrote, "**But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.**" (Psalms 52:8). An up-rooted tree symbolizes a false teacher or a false prophet, someone who is spiritually dead. "**These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;"** (Jude 1:12).

29 - **bringeth** – The word "bringeth" is translated from the Greek word "ποιέω" or "poieō". It means to make, produce, prepare, construct, form or fashion. See also footnote #12 of this chapter. The word is an action word, and therefore represents more than wishful desires or intention. It represents that true faith results in outward performance, just like a good tree will produce good fruit. Alma taught, "**For behold, the time is at hand that whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit, or whosoever doeth not the works of righteousness, the same have cause to wail and mourn.**" (Alma 5:36).

If a trees purpose is to bring forth fruit, then what happens to a cankered tree that does not produce. I suppose that the farmer will first try every method known to him to cure the tree and get it to produce good fruit. After this has occurred, the farmer has little recourse. The tree must go. In fact, some diseases spread to other trees and require that the diseased tree be promptly destroyed. The metaphor is striking. We are trees, symbolically. Our purpose is to do good works. In fact, the Doctrine and Covenants teaches, "**Behold, this is your work, to keep my commandments, yea, with all your might, mind and strength.**" (Doctrine & Covenants 11:20). The Farmer is clearly our Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ. They tend to their trees. As we become diseased, or disobedient, the come to the rescue. They prune, dig, fertilize, and treat. These are symbolic terms for chastise, correct, humble, and teach. Unlike a tree, at some point, we make a choose to follow or not. "**And again, he that is overcome and bringeth not forth fruits, even according to this pattern, is not of me.**" (Doctrine & Covenants 52:18). It is a choice to follow God or not. Even so, mercy is extended in great measure. We are not just hewn down. The axe is laid at the root. In other words, we are warned. The Lord calls us to repentance, and warns us of the consequences of disobedience. This was John role. He was preparing mankind for the choice. "**The ax is laid at the root of the trees; and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire. I, the Lord, have spoken it.**" (Doctrine & Covenants 97:7).



- 30 - **forth** – The word "forth" is translated from the Greek word "ποιέω" or "poieō". It translates as forth or bring forth. See footnote #12 and #29.
- 31 - **good** – The word "good" is translated from the Greek word "καλός" or "kalos". It means beautiful, handsome, excellent, eminent, choice, surpassing, precious, useful, suitable, commendable, or admirable. **"Plato once said that the wise man will always choose to suffer wrong rather than to do wrong."** (The Gospel of Luke, William Barclay, page 36). The good fruit is a symbol for righteous actions as they pertain to the word of God. Good fruit is clearly obedience.
- 32 - **hewn down** – The word "hewn down" is translated from the Greek word "ἐκκόπτω" or "ekkoptō". It means to cut off or cut out, typically in reference to a tree. A tree is hewn down when it is diseased and cannot be saved. In Jacob's famous allegory, we learn, **"Behold, I knew that all the fruit of the vineyard, save it were these, had become corrupted. And now these which have once brought forth good fruit have also become corrupted; and now all the trees of my vineyard are good for nothing save it be to be hewn down and cast into the fire."** (Jacob 5:42). In symbolic terms, being hewn down is to be removed from the Lord's people and cast out of His kingdom. It is spiritual death, and often referred to as a state of Hell. In the parable of the fig tree the Savior Himself taught, **"Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"** (Luke 13:7).
- 33 - **cast** – The word "cast" is translated from the Greek word "βάλλω" or "ballō". It means to throw or let go of a thing without caring where it lands. It can also mean to scatter, throw, or cast into. There are scriptural examples of this word throughout history. Adam and Eve transgressed and were therefore cast out of God's presence and into the lone and dreary world. Cain committed a grievous sin, murder, and was cast out into the land of Nod. The people of Israel had several examples of being cast out. They were cast out into Assyria and then later into Babylon. The list could go on. The Lord is repeatedly teaching the doctrine of choice and accountability. He is repetitious in the message that disobedience results in being cut off from His presence and blessings.

- 34 - **into the fire** – The word "fire" is translated from the Greek word "πῦρ" or "pyr". It means fire. Fire is often symbolic of the word of God, the Holy Ghost, and cleansing influence thereof. It can also be used to represent damnation and eternal punishment. The Psalmist recorded, **"The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire."** (Psalms 29:7). Similarly, fire represents a great power for which mortal man cannot control or dictate. **"Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"** (Jeremiah 23:29). Fire can also symbolize raging problems in someone's life. Fire, brimstone, and scorching winds are all judgments against the wicked; **"Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup."** (Psalms 11:6). Hence, a house on fire is symbolic of judgment against all who live there or descend from it. Ezekiel recorded, **"And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou also shalt give no hire any more."** (Ezekiel 16:41).



Elder McConkie gives some clarity to what John was saying when he told the Pharisees and Sadducees that they would be cast into the fire. He said that it meant to **"Go to hell, to sheol, the spirit prison where the wicked suffer the burning fires of remorse of conscience as they await the day of the resurrection of damnation."** (The Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 120). It should be clearly noted that fire is a complex symbol. To the wicked it represents judgment, damnation, hell and torment. To the righteous it represents purification, cleansing, God's word and God's power. **"John's preaching in this passage will again refer to a fire. These references serve to depict him as a fiery reformer and fill out details of his role as one sent in the 'spirit and power of Elijah' (1:17)."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, The Anchor/Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., page 469).

- 35 - **record** – The word "record" is translated from the Greek word "μαρτυρία" or "martyria". It means a testifying, testimony, or that which a prophet does in testifying of future events. John was indeed a Prophet, Seer and Revelator.

- 36 - **John** – The name "John" is translated from the Greek word "Ἰωάννης" or "Iōannēs". It literally means "Jehovah is a gracious giver". John was an interesting character to come onto the scene. **"The whole thing shows how suspicious orthodoxy was of anything unusual. John did not conform to the normal idea of a priest; and he did not conform to the normal idea of a preacher; therefore the ecclesiastical authorities of the day looked upon him askance."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 77). Most feel that the Pharisees and Sadducees sent emissaries to determine if John was a false prophet, a threat to them, or something else. The general population **"recognized John as a prophet, even after years when no prophetic voice had spoken, because he was a light to light up evil things, a voice to summon men to righteousness, a signpost to point men to God, and because he had on him that unanswerable authority which clings to the man who comes into the presence of men out of the presence of God."** (The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 37).



Regardless of what the Pharisees or Sadducees thought, **"John was what every true preacher and teacher ought to be - only a voice, a pointer to the king. The last thing that he wanted men to do was to look at him; he wanted them to forget him and see only the king."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 79). He was humble and obedient. He was given an assignment, and he magnified his call, not to glorify himself, but to glorify God.

- 37 - **Jews** – The word "Jews" is translated from the Greek word "Ἰουδαῖος" or "Ioudaios". It means Jewish, as in belonging to the Jewish nation, by birth, origin, and/or religion. **"It is emissaries of the Jews who come to cross-question John. The word Jews (Ioudaioi) occurs in this gospel no fewer than seventy times; and always the Jews are the opposition. They are the people who have set themselves against Jesus."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 76). These men came to John, not to seek God, but to satisfy their own selfish desires. They had no intention of changing their hearts, in fact, they did not even see a need for change.
- 38 - **priests** – The word "priests" is translated from the Greek word "ἱερεῖς" or "hiereis". It has several meanings; however, in conjunction with the Jewish people a priest officiated in the religious rites of the Temple. The priests were responsible for offering sacrifices, and performing all of the duties associated with the outward ordinances of the temple. They were holders of the Priesthood of Aaron. As John was preaching, he had priests and levites attend with the multitudes. They **"...were emissaries of the Pharisees. It may well be that behind them was the Sanhedrin. One of the functions of the Sanhedrin was to deal with any man who was suspect of being a false prophet. John was a preacher to whom the people were flocking in hordes. The Sanhedrin may well have felt it their duty to check up on this man in case he was a false prophet."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 77). To better understand John's special visitors, we need to understand their separate roles and oddly enough their attire. We will start with the High Priest. The High Priest was originally the presiding Priesthood leader. At John's time, the High Priest was the Highest Political position and head of the Jewish religion. The Priesthood office; however, was in a state of apostasy.

The High Priests garments were called “Cahanoeoe Rabbae”. They consisted of the following elements.

1. **The Breeches** - After purification, the High Priest put on a kind of undergarment, which is called “Machanase”. It means something that is tied fast. It is a form of breeches or underwear, composed of fine twined linen, and is put about the privates. The feet being inserted into them in the nature of pants or shorts, but extending to the end of the thighs. It is tied fast above the knees and at the waist. They were white in color symbolizing purity, sanctification, and righteousness. The fact that the breeches were tied indicates that the wearer was bond by covenant to a life of righteous living.



2. **The Linen Undergarment** - Over the Priest's breeches was placed a long linen shirt or garment called “Massabazanes”. This was also considered a form of underwear. Appearing in public with this attire would be considered nudity. The High Priest's linen undergarment comprised of a linen vestment, made of fine flax doubled. Many scholars feel that the material was woven so that it resulted in a white on white-checked pattern. It is called “Chethone”, and denotes linen. It reaches down to the feet, and sits close to the body. It has sleeves that are tied fast at the end of the arms. The garments itself is thought to be seamless. It has an opening for the hands, the feet, and the neck. A ribbon is passed through the hem of the neck both in front and behind the Priests head. It is then pulled fast and tied over each shoulder. Like the breeches, it is white and tied fast to the body. It carries similar symbolic meaning. It also represents modesty and a life of chastity. Since it was seamless, it carries the idea that one's course should be unbroken, or undeviating in the pursuit of righteous living. It should be noted that when the Savior was crucified, the soldiers removed a seamless linen undergarment from his body. The bottom of the linen undergarment was without a hem; a symbol of humility and lack of authority.



3. **The Inner Girdle** - The garment is then girded about the breast, a little above the elbows, by a girdle often going round, four (4) fingers broad, but so loosely woven, that you would think it were the skin of a serpent. It is embroidered with flowers of scarlet, purple, and blue, and fine twined linen, but the initial material was nothing but fine linen. The beginning of the wrap is at the breast; and after it is wrapped several times, it is tied, and the ends hang loosely down to the ankles. This girdle or belt is called “Albaneth”. The colors of the girdle are significant within themselves. Blue is the color of the sky; hence it represents heaven, and the abode of God. The color scarlet is a deep red, often considered the color of blood. Symbolically, it has reference to the Savior's atonement. It symbolizes forgiveness, being clean from the blood and sins of this generation, and spiritual purity. Purple was a rare and precious color in the old world. It was made from the excretions of a Mediterranean Sea snail called a “rock murex”. The dye was so difficult to obtain that it was more precious than gold. Because of this, purple was considered the color of royalty. It was the color of Kings and Queens, Priests and Priestesses. Flowers are symbols of life and creation. They are often symbolic for the Garden of Eden. Combining these symbols on the girdle creates an interesting message. The girdle is “bound” to the under garments, indicating a covenant. A covenant of purity and righteousness that will result in the blessings of the atonement, exaltation, and a celestial inheritance. It is the blessings of eternal life in the presence of the Father.

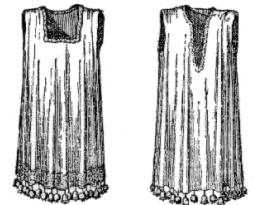


4. **The Bonnet or Cap** - Upon the head of the High Priest was a cap. It was designed so that it was not brought to a conic form or the form of a turban. It was called “Masnaemphthes”. It is constructed such that it seems to be a crown, being made of thick swathes, but the texture is of linen; and it is doubled round many times, and sewed together; besides which, a piece of fine linen covers the whole cap from the upper part, and reaches down to the forehead, and hides the seams of the swathes, which would otherwise appear indecently: this adheres closely upon the solid part of the head, and is thereto so firmly fixed, that it may not fall off during the sacred service about the sacrifices. The bonnet represented a holy crown. Since it was white, it was a crown of purity and righteousness. It indicates royalty after the order of the God of Righteousness.



Mitre
Diadem
Blue Lace
Gold Plate

5. **The Blue Robe** - Over the linen undergarment, the high priest wore a robe of fine linen dyed blue in color. It was a long robe, reaching to his feet. It was called “Meeir”. The robe, like the undergarment, was a seamless garment woven so as to have an opening for the neck; not an oblique one, but parted all along the breast and the back. A border also was sewed to it, lest the opening should look indecent, in fact tradition says that it had broad and prevalent hems. It was also parted where the hands were to come out. To the bottom of the garment are hung fringes, in different colors, shaped like pomegranates, with golden bells of a curious and beautiful design; so that between two bells hangs a pomegranate, and between two pomegranates a bell. The pomegranates were made from yard and alternated between dark blue, dark red, purple and crimson. According to Jewish traditions, the robe symbolized the majesty and power of God. The blue color represented the heavens, while the bells represented thunder and the pomegranates represented lightning. The hem of a robe represented one's power and authority. That is why David cut off King Saul's hem when he found him asleep, indicating the loss of authority. For this reason, the blue robe is often referred to as the Robe of the Priesthood, since the priesthood is the power to act in God's name. A robe symbolizes sovereignty. It symbolizes the power of Heaven entrusted to mortal man. The bells served an additional purpose. On the “Day of Atonement”, the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies. If he was unworthy, he would be struck dead and his bells would cease to chime. The lack of noise from the bells would give the priests in the courtyard an indication that he was dead. The pomegranates can also symbolize faithfulness, while the bells can also serve as a symbol of the connection between earth and heaven. Bells can symbolize the prayers of the saints and the voice of God.



6. **The Outer Girdle** – The outer girdle is similar to the inner girdle. It is embroidered with the same colors and flowers as the former, with a mixture of gold interwoven. Additionally, this girdle is wrapped around the waist rather than the chest. It also has two gold rings sewn into it that line up with the front of the right and left hip for the attachment of the breastplate. This girdle, unlike the inner girdle, only wrapped around the body once. It was tied in a full bow and the ends hung down to about the ankles. The color gold represents the sun, eternity, exaltation, and royalty. It is often used to represent God himself. His glory and power are often compared to the luster of Gold. The chest symbolizes that which is close to the heart (i.e. our desires, appetites, and emotions). The waist or loins represents our posterity or seed. This girdle carries the idea that there is a binding obligation to God's children and our own. The dictionary defines a girdle as a belt or sash worn around the waist. It was made from the same material as the ephod. It is a symbol of strength, consecration, and readiness. The girdle can symbolize one's power. **"And the curious girdle of the ephod, which is upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; even of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen"** (Exodus 28:8). The girdle was the binding element of the cloths. Symbolically, it represents the binding powers of the covenants that the wearer has taken upon himself.



7. **The Ephod** - The High Priest placed a third garment over the linen undergarment and the blue robe. It was called the Ephod. Most feel that the Ephod was an apron-like garment; however, others feel that it was a side to waist-coat. This article of clothing is probably the most vague of the High Priest's clothes. We do know that it was woven to the depth of a cubit according to Josephus (1 cubit = 17.5 inches). It was fine linen of several colors, with gold intermixed, and embroidered. It left the middle of the breast area uncovered, exposing the blue robe. In some accounts, it is said to have had sleeves, however, this is unfounded. The ephod apparently came together at the Priests shoulders. The material was joined at the shoulders by golden ouches or settings that served as clasps. In each setting was an onyx stone with six of the twelve tribes engraved on each shoulder stone. Symbolically, the High Priest was to bare up the burdens of the children of Israel.

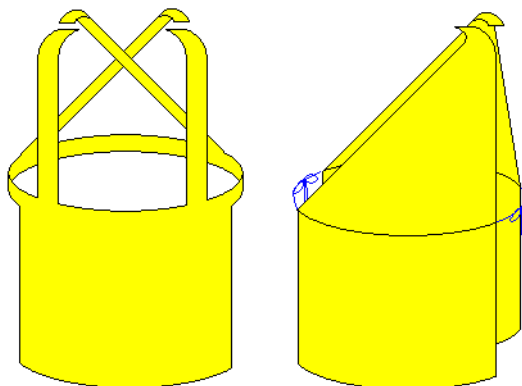
"And they shall take gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen. And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work. It shall have the two shoulder pieces thereof joined at the two edges thereof; and so it shall be joined together. And the curious girdle of the ephod, which is upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; even of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen. And thou shalt take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel: Six of their names on one stone, and the other six names of the rest on the other stone, according to their birth. With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, shalt thou engrave the two stones with the names of the children of Israel: thou shalt make them to be set in ouches of gold. And thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the ephod for stones of memorial unto the children of Israel: and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD upon his two shoulders for a memorial. And thou shalt make ouches of gold; And two chains of pure gold at the ends; of wreathen work shalt thou make them, and fasten the wreathen chains to the ouches." (Exodus 28:5-14).



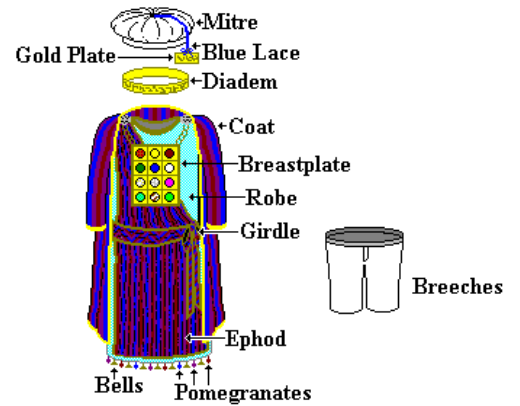
"And he made the ephod of gold, blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen. And they did beat the gold into thin plates, and cut it into wires, to work it in the blue, and in the purple, and in the scarlet, and in the fine linen, with cunning work. They made shoulder pieces for it, to couple it together: by the two edges was it coupled together. And the curious girdle of his ephod, that was upon it, was of the same according to the work thereof; of gold, blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen; as the LORD commanded Moses. And they wrought onyx stones enclosed in ouches of gold, graven, as signets are graven, with the names of the children of Israel. And he put them on the shoulders of the ephod, that they should be stones for a memorial to the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses." (Exodus 39:2-7).

Josephus said that the ephod represents the four elements of the universe compounded into one. This might have reference to the fact that the ephod had 4 distinct corners, making it square in nature. The number four and the square make reference to perfection, exactness, completeness and totality.

Two possible illustrations for the Ephod



8. **The Breastplate** – Covering the exposed blue robe on the High Priest's chest, a square linen mat called the breastplate hung. It was embroidered with gold, and the other colors of the ephod. To the Hebrews it was called an "Essen", which in the Greek language signifies the Oracle or enlightening. A breastplate typically represents protection; however, the breastplate of the High Priests represented the power to judge. "And thou shalt make the breastplate of judgement with cunning work; after the work of the ephod thou shalt make it; of gold, of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine twined linen, shalt thou make it" (Exodus 28:15). The breastplate was made from the same fabric as the ephod (see explanation of the ephod). The fabric was doubled up and sown together like a large pocket. It was 6.5 inches by 9 inches in size after folding, though some accounts say that it was square and had the dimensions of the span of a hand. The breastplate was actually twice the size as long as it appeared to be when it hung on the Priest. It was folded in two, forming a square, and united by golden rings at every corner. Once folded, the two right rings were united and fastened to a golden chain and likewise the two left rings were joined to a golden chain. The chains were then fastened to the onyx stones of the Ephod. After the breastplate was folded, the bottom corners revealed two blue ribbons on each side. The sides of the breastplate apparently had smaller gold rings in which one ribbon on each side was intertwined and tied, sealing the breastplate up. The other ribbon on each side tied to the outer girdle. The front of the folded breastplate had twelve stones. They were extraordinary large and beautiful. They were an ornament not to be purchased by men, because of their immense value. These stones, however, stood in three columns, by four rows. They were inserted into the breastplate itself, and they were set in ouches of gold. The stones are as follows;



Agate - A fine-grained fibrous variety of chalcedony with colored bands or irregular clouding. The agate symbolizes different things depending on the color of the agate. The two most common colors are red and black. The red agate symbolizes health, wealth, longevity, and peace. The black agate represents courage, boldness, vigor, and prosperity.

Amethyst - A purple or violet form of transparent quartz used as a gemstone. It can also be a purple variety of corundum used as a gem. The amethyst typically symbolizes humility, piece of mind, piety, sobriety, and resignation.

Beryl - A transparent to translucent glassy mineral, essentially aluminum beryllium silicate, $Be_3Al_2Si_6O_{18}$, occurring in hexagonal prisms and constituting the chief source of beryllium. Transparent varieties in white, green, blue, yellow, or pink are valued as gems. Beryl symbolizes happiness, eternal youth, and married love.

Carbuncle - A deep red garnet, imfaceted and convex. The Carbuncle stone represents determination, assurance, success, and energy.

Diamond - An extremely hard, highly refractive crystalline form of carbon that is usually colorless and is used as a gemstone. The diamond is probably one of the most common symbols of the gemstones in modern society. It represents hardness, durability, incorruptibility, invincibility, consistency, sincerity, light, life, the sun, purity, righteousness, and innocence.

Emerald - A brilliant green to grass green transparent variety of beryl used as a gemstone. The emerald represents the giving of life. It also symbolizes immortality, hope, spring, youth, and faithfulness.

Jasper - An opaque cryptocrystalline variety of quartz that may be red, yellow or brown. This stone is used to symbolize joy and happiness.

Figure - A precious stone of ancient Israel. It was clear in color. The symbolism behind this stone is somewhat vague. The fact that it is clear possibly means that it was associated with purity, righteousness, and celestial glory.

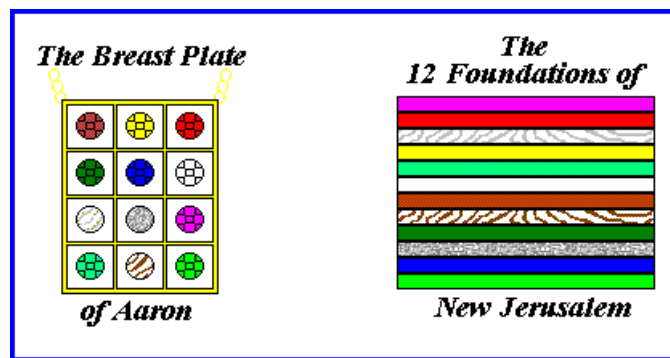
Onyx - A chalcedony that occurs in bands of different colors and is used as a gemstone, especially in cameos and intaglios. The onyx symbolizes sincerity, spiritual strength, and happiness.

Opal - A translucent milky mineral of hydrated silica, often used as a gem. The opal symbolizes fidelity, religious favor, prayer, and assurance.

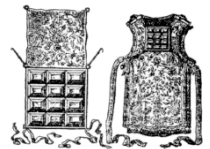
Sapphire - A clear, hard variety of corundum used as a gemstone that is usually blue but may be any color except red. The sapphire represents truth, heavenly virtue, and chastity.

Sardius or Sard - A clear or translucent, deep orange-red to brownish red variety of chalcedony. The sard stone symbolizes one's inner self.

Topaz - A colorless, blue, yellow, brown, or pink aluminum silicate mineral, often found in association with granitic rocks often valued as a gemstone, especially in the brown and pink varieties. Topaz can also be considered any variety of yellow gemstone, especially a yellow variety of Sapphire or corundum. The topaz symbolizes divine goodness, faithfulness, friendship, love, and the sun.



The names of all the sons of Jacob were engraved in the stones. When the breastplate was folded in double it formed a pocket. Inside the pocket, the Urim and Thummin was kept. Urim means 'lights' and Thummin means 'perfections'. They were probably two jewels. As the light reflected from the Urim and the Thummin onto the stones of the Breastplate, this flash of light provided up to 24 combinations (2 x 12). Since there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the flashes of light could produce strings of letters.

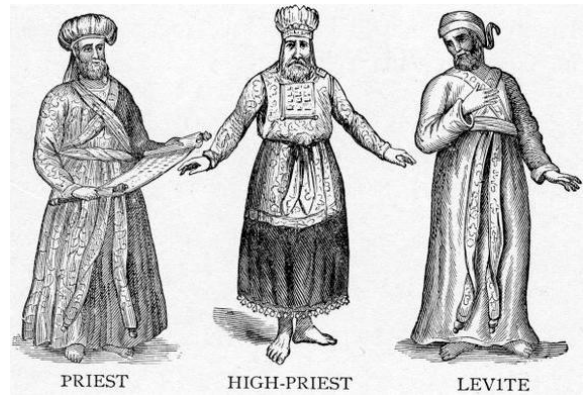


9. **The Mitre** - It was a polished golden crown, with three rows of engravings, one above another; out of which arose a cup of gold, which resembled the herb which we call "Saccharus"; but those Greeks that are skillful in botany call it "Hyoscyamus". Now, lest anyone that has seen this herb, but has not been taught its name, and is unacquainted with its nature, or, having known its name, knows not the herb when he sees it, I shall give such, as these are a description of it. This herb above three spans in height, and its roots are like that of a turnip (for he that should compare it thereto would not be mistaken); but its leaves are like the leaves of mint. Out of its branches it sends out a calyx, cleaving to the branch; and a coat encompasses it, which it naturally puts off when it is changing, in order to produce its fruit. This calyx is of the bigness of the bone of the little finger, but in the compass of its canopy is like a cup. The herb is very difficult to describe in words, but I will attempt to clarify. Suppose a sphere be divided into two parts, round at the bottom, but having another segment that grows up to a circumference from that bottom; suppose it become narrower by degrees, and that the cavity of that part grow decently smaller, and then gradually grow wider again at the brim, such as we see in the navel of a pomegranate, with its notches. And indeed such a coat grows over this plant as renders it a hemisphere, and that, as one may say, turned accurately in a lathe, and having its notches extant above it, which, as I said, grow like a pomegranate, only that they are sharp, and end in nothing but prickles. Now the fruit is preserved by this coat of the calyx, which fruit is like the seed of the herb Sideritis: it sends out a flower that may seem to resemble that of poppy. Of this was a crown made, as far from the hinder part of the head to each of the temples; but this Ephielis, for so this calyx may be called, did not cover the forehead, but it was covered with a golden plate, which had inscribed upon it the name of God in sacred characters. The mitre symbolizes the crown of purity and exaltation. It also represents purity of thought. The Hyoscyamus plant was used symbolically by the ancient Hebrews to mean obedience.
10. **The Gold Plate** - The Mitre attached to the Bonnet and upon the forehead of the High Priest. Many suspect that the Gold Plate mentioned in the Old Testament is one and the same as the Mitre, which is also called the Diadem. Whatever the case may be, from either the bonnet or the mitre came a blue ribbon, which attached to a gold plate on which "HOLY TO THE LORD" was engraved. Ribbons symbolize sovereign or judicial power. It designates the power to bind and to loose. It also symbolizes covenants voluntarily accepted and entered into. The Lord commanded, "And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be. And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD" (Exodus 28:36-37).
11. **The Coat** - Over the temple clothes, the priest wore a full-length coat that covered the arms and body fully. "And thou shalt embroider the coat of fine line...." (Exodus 28:39). Coats symbolized protections and security. It also represents the Mantel of the presiding authority.



The position of Priest was also a priesthood office. He officiated in the ordinances of the temple. The priest operated under the direction of the High Priest. The LDS Bible Dictionary states, "The essential idea of a Hebrew priest was that of a mediator between his people and God by representing them officially in worship and sacrifice. By virtue of his office he was able to draw nigh to God, while they, because of their sins and infirmities, must needs stand afar off. The priest exercised his office mainly at the altar by offering the sacrifices and above all the incense (Numbers 16:40; 18:2-3, 5, 7; Deuteronomy 33:10) but also by teaching the people the law (Leviticus 10:10, 11; Deuteronomy 33:10; Malachi 2:7), by communicating to them the divine will (Numbers 27:21), and by blessing them in the name of the Lord (Numbers 6:22-27)." The priests were the nuts and bolts of Jewish Temple worship. They dressed in temple robes similar to the High Priest; however, they did not wear pieces of the Temple robes associated with the call of the High Priest. They did not wear the Breast Plate or the outer Robe. It is also questionable that they wore the ephod.

The Priest was respected by the people and often sat in the ruling councils. They helped assure the sanctity and purity of the people. The fact that the Pharisees and Sadducees sent priests would be an indication that there was a desire to pass judgment on John's work.



The high PRIEST



The LEVITE



The PRIEST

The Levites are discussed in the next footnote.

39 - **Levites** – The word "Levites" is translated from the Greek word "Λευίτης" or "Leuitēs". The Levites were a class of temple workers, not of the family of Aaron, that served as assistants to the Priests. They did not hold the priesthood that the Priests held and therefore could not perform the sacred rites; however, they kept the sacred utensils and temple grounds clean. They provided the shew bread, open and shut the temple gates, sang the sacred hymns of the temple and performed all manner of service that did not directly involve a priesthood rite. "A great responsibility lay on the Levites who stood at the main entrances to the temple area, primarily the more easterly of the two sets of gates in the southern wall. We can only guess about rules for entry, but we can probably make some good guesses. The Levites at the outer gates...probably did, however, stop people from carrying anything in....Nearby were armed guards, either Levites or additional temple servants, partly to protect the temple's great wealth, partly to prevent disturbances. Since large numbers of people gathered in the temple, the outer court was an ideal place for rousing the rabble.....the Romans left the policing of the temple and Jerusalem to the high priest, who had armed guards." (Judaism: Practice & Belief 63BCE - 66CE, E.P. Sanders, pages 81-82).

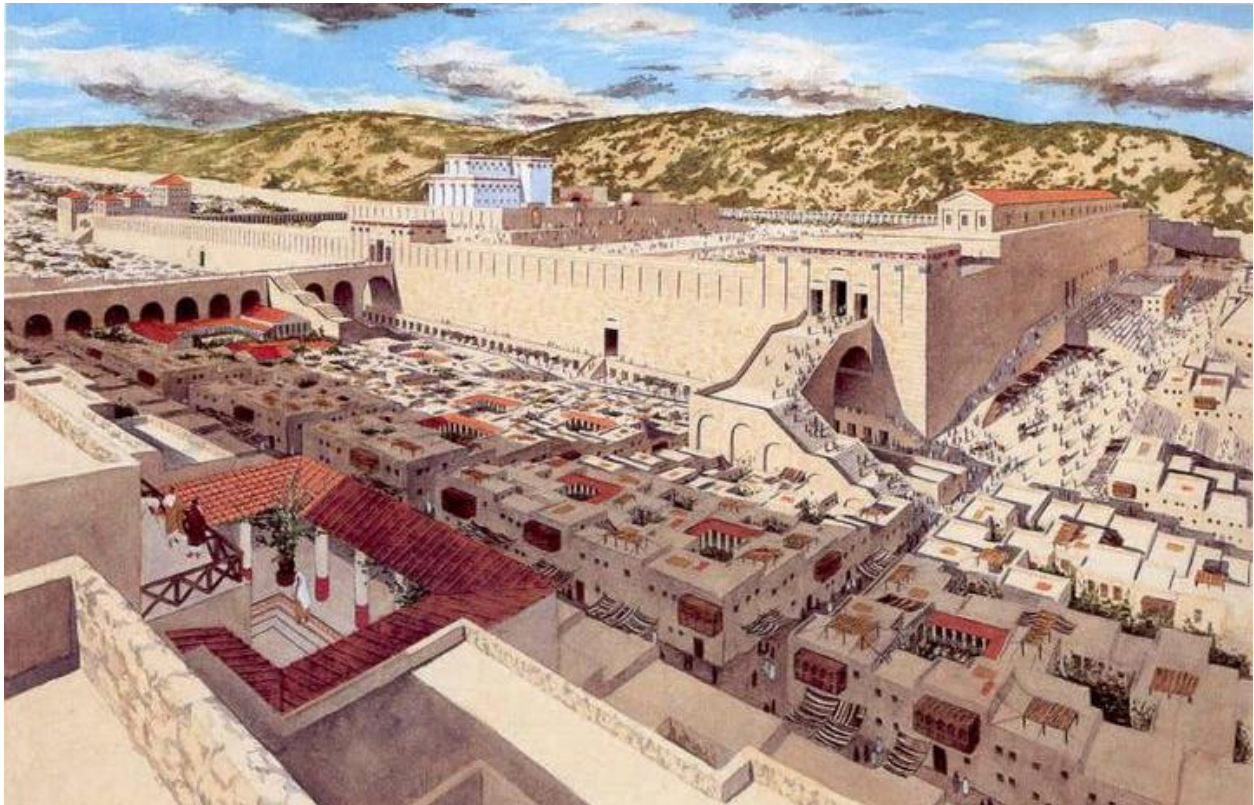
It is probable that the Priests took Levite guards with them as they were sent to investigate what was happening with John the Baptist. It should be understood that not all the Jewish sects were favorable to the Pharisees or Sadducees, and the way the Temple was being run. The Essenes were opposed the behavior of the leaders in Jerusalem. Since John was preaching in the wilderness, there may have been a concern that he was oppositional. Brown states, "To ask about his baptizing they send the specialists in ritual purification. Such a confrontation of John the Baptist and the priests is interesting in view of the Lucan tradition that John the Baptist was a priest's son (Luke 1:5). Normally, "Levites" refers to an inferior priestly class but sometimes in the rabbinic documents to temple police." (The Gospel According to John I-XII, the Anchor/Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 43).



One might imagine the priest coming to the shore of the Jordan River with armed guards. Levites armed with swords hanging from their girdles. While serving in the temple the Levites wore white. While serving as temple police they may have a different attire. It would have been interesting to see such high ranking officials with armed guards come upon John's simple gathering. They found a simple man, dressed in poor attire. They found a man preaching repentance. He was not giving political speeches, but answered their questions with the directness of heaven. He did not create an uprising, but he put them firmly in their places. They were apostate and John let them know how wrong they were.

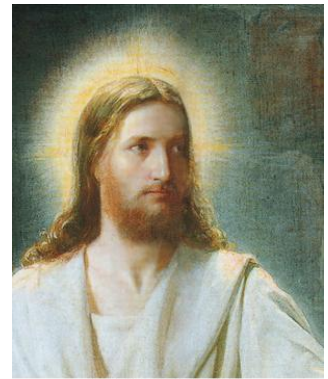
- 40 - **Jerusalem** – The word "Jerusalem" is translated from the Greek word "Ἱεροσόλυμα" or "Hierosolyma". It translates literally as "set ye double peace". Brown states, "Jerusalem. In John's Greek this is always the Hellenized Hierosolyma; in Revelation, always the more primitive Hierousalem - certainly an indication of different scribes." (The Gospel According to John I-XII, the Anchor/Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 43). Regardless of the spelling, Jerusalem was the seat of the Jewish Religion. It was considered a holy city. Even those who opposed the establishment, generally recognized Jerusalem as the city of God. The temple was located on Mount Moriah. It was the House of God. Mount Moriah was also the place where Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed. It was a symbol of the salvation that the Messiah was to provide.

THE CITY OF JERUSALEM



- 41 - **Who art thou?** – "The emissaries of the orthodox could think of three things that John might claim to be; (i) they asked him if he was the Messiah. The Jews were waiting, and are waiting to this day, for the Messiah... (ii) They asked him if he was Elijah. It was the Jewish belief that, before the Messiah came, Elijah would return to herald his coming and to prepare the world to receive him.... (iii) They asked him if he was the expected and promised prophet. It was sometimes believed that Isaiah and, especially, Jeremiah would return at the coming of the Messiah." (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, pages 77-78). The leaders of the Jews were so void of spirit and understanding that they could not recognize the hand of God working around them. John was the frontrunner. He was sent to prepare the way. His was the call of Elias.
- 42 - **confessed** – The word "confessed" is translated from the Greek word "ὁμολογέω" or "homologeō". It means to declare openly, to confess, to deny not, to concede, to agree with, or to admit one's self guilt. Claiming to be the Messiah was not John's objective. He clearly confessed that he was NOT the Messiah. John had a following. Had he wanted to make such a claim, I imagine that many would have followed. This was not John's character. He was a humble man, content to be the servant of the Lord. A lesser man might have allowed them to believe what they wanted.
- 43 - **denied not** – The word "denied" is translated from the Greek word "ἀρνέομαι" or "arneomai". It means to deny, abnegate, abjure, to not accept or to reject.

- 44 - **Christ** – The word "Christ" is translated from the Greek word "Χριστός" or "Christos". It literally means "anointed". It is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew word "Messiah"; which means "anointed one". The Jews had many prophecies regarding a promised Messiah. They also had different views as to how those prophecies would be fulfilled. By the time of John, the Jews firmly looked for a warrior type Messiah, defeating their enemies. They had difficulty separating the first coming of the Messiah from the second. Zondervan gives a good summary of how the Jews would have viewed the Messiah. **"He is to destroy the world powers in an act of judgment, deliver Israel from her enemies, and restore her as a nation. The Messiah is the King of His future kingdom to whose political and religious domination the other nations will yield. His mission is the redemption of Israel and His dominion is universal. This is the clear picture of the Messiah in practically all of the OT passages which refer to Him. The Messiah will put an end to war, for He is the Prince of Peace, and He will rule righteously over His people."** (The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, Edited by Merrill C. Tenney, page 528)



Jesus (detail) by Carl Bloch

Based on John teaching of salvation, there were many who questioned if John was indeed the promised Messiah. The emissaries of the Pharisees and Sadducees boldly asked the question. To which John concisely answered, **"I am not the Messiah. Some suggest that the 'I' is emphatic: I am not but another is."** (The Gospel According to John I-XII, the Anchor/Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 43).

- 45 - **Art thou Elias?** – The word "Elias" is translated from the Greek word "Ἠλίяс" or "Ēlias". It is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Elijah. John is an Elias. Such a title refers to a calling rather than a name. In the case of this footnote, the emissaries of the Pharisees and Sadducees were asking if John was the returning prophet Elijah. Since he clearly answered that he was not the Messiah, he must then be Elijah. It was apparent that he was a divine messenger. The question is based on the Old Testament prophecy in Malachi. It reads, **"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."** (Malachi 4:5-6).



The Jews believed that Elijah would return before the coming of the Messiah. Once again they had problems with chronology. They believed **"Elijah was to come to arrange all disputes. He would settle what things and what people were clean and unclean; he would bring together again families which were estranged. So much did the Jews believe this that the traditional law said that money and property whose owners were disputed, or anything found whose owner was unknown, must wait 'until Elijah comes.'** The belief that Elijah would come before the Messiah goes back to Malachi 4:5. It was even believed that Elijah would anoint the Messiah to his kingly office, as all kings were anointed, and that he would raise the dead to share in the new kingdom." (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 78). They failed to understand the true meaning of the prophecy. Elijah returned with a visit to the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1936. There he restored the sealing power to the prophet Joseph Smith and consequently to the whole earth. Families could now be brought together after death through the doctrine of eternal marriage. Elijah held the Priesthood key to seal in Heaven as well as Earth.

John was not Elijah. He was an Elias or came in the spirit of Elias. We know that there is a prophet named Elias; however, we do not know of him. He also appeared to Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple, along with Elijah. We know that Noah was an Elias. **"The spirit of Elias is to prepare the way for a greater revelation of God, which is the Priesthood of Elias, or the Priesthood that Aaron was ordained unto. And when God sends a man into the world to prepare for a greater work, holding the keys of the power of Elias, it was called the doctrine of Elias, even from the early ages of the world. John's mission was limited to preaching and baptizing; but what he did was legal; and when Jesus Christ came to any of John's disciples, He baptized them with fire and the Holy Ghost. We find the Apostles endowed with greater power than John; their office was more under the spirit and power of Elijah than Elias."** (Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith (TPJS), selected and arranged by Joseph Fielding Smith, pages 378-379).

We are to understand that the call of Elias is associated with a lesser priesthood. Those who are after the order of Elijah belong to a greater Priesthood. Joseph Smith taught, **"What I want to impress upon your minds is the difference of power in the different parts of the Priesthood, so that when any man comes among you saying, 'I have the spirit of Elias,' you can know whether he be true or false; for any man that comes, having the spirit and power of Elias, he will not transcend his bounds. John did not transcend his bounds, but faithfully performed that part belonging to his office; and every portion of the great building should be prepared right and assigned to its proper place; and it is necessary to know who holds the keys of power, and who does not, or we may be likely to be deceived. That person who holds the keys of Elias hath a preparatory work."** (Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith (TPJS), selected and arranged by Joseph Fielding Smith, page 379).

- 46 - **prophet** – The word "prophet" is translated from the Greek word "προφήτης" or "prophētēs". It means an oracle, or an interpreter of hidden things. It is someone who is moved upon by the Holy Ghost to speak on behalf of the heavens. Prophets preach and reveal the doctrines of salvation. They bear testimony of the atonement of Jesus Christ, and often warn of future events and occurrences. **"...this is really a reference to the assurance which Moses to the people in Deuteronomy 18:15: 'The Lord you God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from you brethren - him you shall heed' That was a promise that no Jew ever forgot. They waited and longed for the emergence of the prophet who would be the greatest of all prophets, the prophet par excellence."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 78).

- 47 - **John 1:23** – This verse is covered in detail in Chapter 2 of this work.

- 48 - **sent** – The word "sent" is translated from the Greek for "ἀποστέλλω" or "apostellō". It means to order someone to go to a place appointed. It is our word "Apostle". The word "sent" or "put" in Aramaic is "shēlach" or

שלח

- ח - wall, outside, divide, hide
- ל - shepherds staff, teach, yoke, bind, toward
- ש - two front teeth, eat, sharp, press, two

Hence, the Hebrew word "sent" means to go out, two by two and teach the covenant. Unfortunately, the Establishment did not have such pure intentions with those they sent. **"The emissaries of the Pharisees. This is a somewhat ambiguous translation to cover the possibilities offered by the two different Greek readings of this verse and the various scholarly interpretations of them: (a) 'And the ones sent were from the Pharisees' - an article before the participle. This has the weaker attestation. Presumably 'the ones sent' would be reference to the priest and Levites mentioned in vs. 19, although Bernard sees in this reading an attempt to introduce a new group. The basic difficulty is that the priests and Levites would normally belong to the Sadducee persuasion.... (b) The Greek reading without the article before the participle, translated either as, 'And some Pharisees had been sent' or as, 'And they had been sent from the Pharisees' "** (The Gospel According to John I-XII, the Anchor/Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., pages 43-44). It is apparent that the emissaries were officially "sent" by the Pharisees and Sadducees. They were there on official business. They were "sent", and therefore, were under the protection of the establishment.