




lêtheia
 CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
May 22, 2022
“He Must Increase”

SS at 9:30. Service at 10:30 with King’s Kids.

News:

Happy 75th Jerry Fredericks – **VBS** Jun 13-17 – Church **Camp** Aug 22-24
 Memorial Reception for Jerry Wabschall after the service next Sunday

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JOHN 3:22-30 ~

Verse 22 simply means that they left the environs of _____, while remaining within the Roman Province of _____.

John was in a place called “The Spring near Peace.” There are _____ locations that fit the bill.

Verses 25&26, get a bit confusing. The solution, as always, is _____, and part of _____, is to carefully recognize what is actually written and what isn’t.

To get to that issue, we have an incident with a _____ that stimulates John’s disciples enough to finally query their leader. What are we doing, master?

Why, if John was preparing the way for Jesus, and Jesus had now come, didn’t John _____?

John’s disciples got into a “discussion.” It is ζήτησις (dzā-tā-sēs). It was more of a _____.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

John's answer starts with an _____, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven."

Only _____ can reveal _____. (I Corinthians 4:7).

Humans operate with what God _____ them (Romans 12:3). Everything belongs to God _____ the breath in your lungs and your ability to perceive Truth.

People were misjudging because they were looking at it through _____ eyes with _____ understanding. It is impossible to get it right without insight from God. (Matthew 16:21-23, Mark 8:31-33, Isaiah 11:3).

The illustration of the ancient Best Man who was entirely _____ to the groom. Perhaps there would be a _____ from the groom at some future point, but the _____ of being so trusted and the _____ of doing a great job would be enough.

John was entrusted by the Lord to be His _____ and prepare His spiritual Bride for Him.

Is a minister of God's Grace a proper minister? Where's the focus? Is it on the Best Man, or on the _____?

JOHN 3:31-36 ~

Verse 31 reaffirms the point back in chapter ____, verse ____, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father (that's Jesus), He has explained Him."

"No one receives His testimony," means that no one, in their own _____, receives the Word.

Jesus the Word, λόγος (lō-gōs), spoke the words, ῥῆμα (rĕ-mă) of God. God's words are His Word. To believe His Word, is to believe God and _____ Him True. Conversely, to reject the Word is to _____ God a liar. It's that simple.

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____



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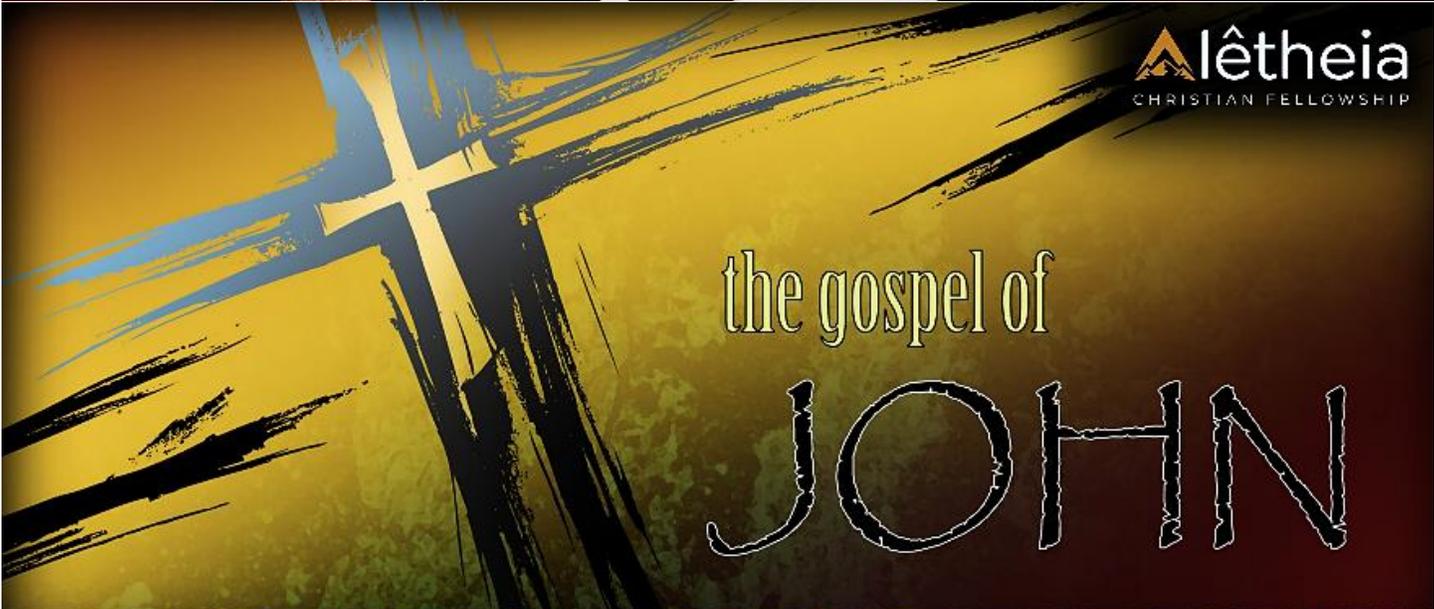
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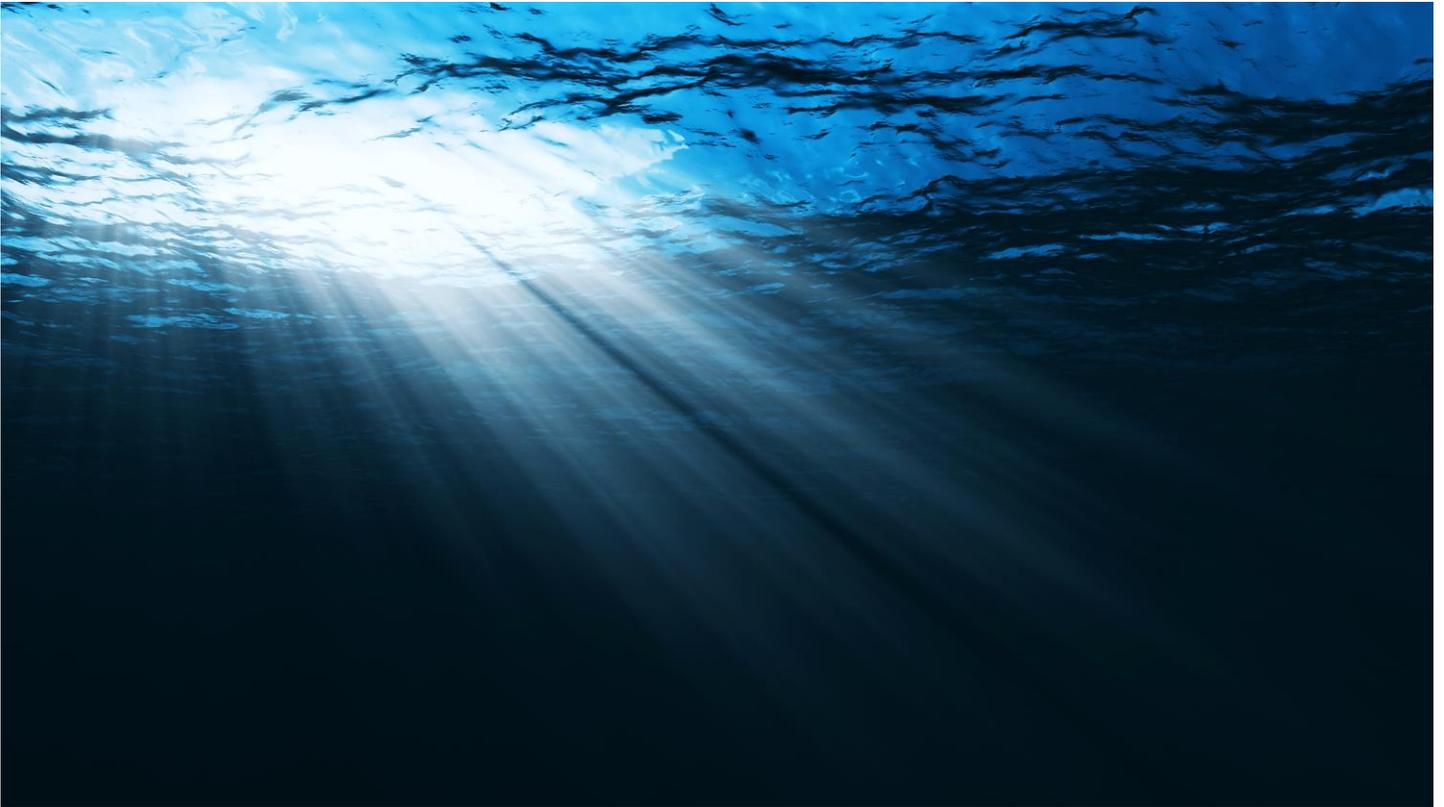


**THE MAN
THE MYTH
THE
LEGEND
IS
75
HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**





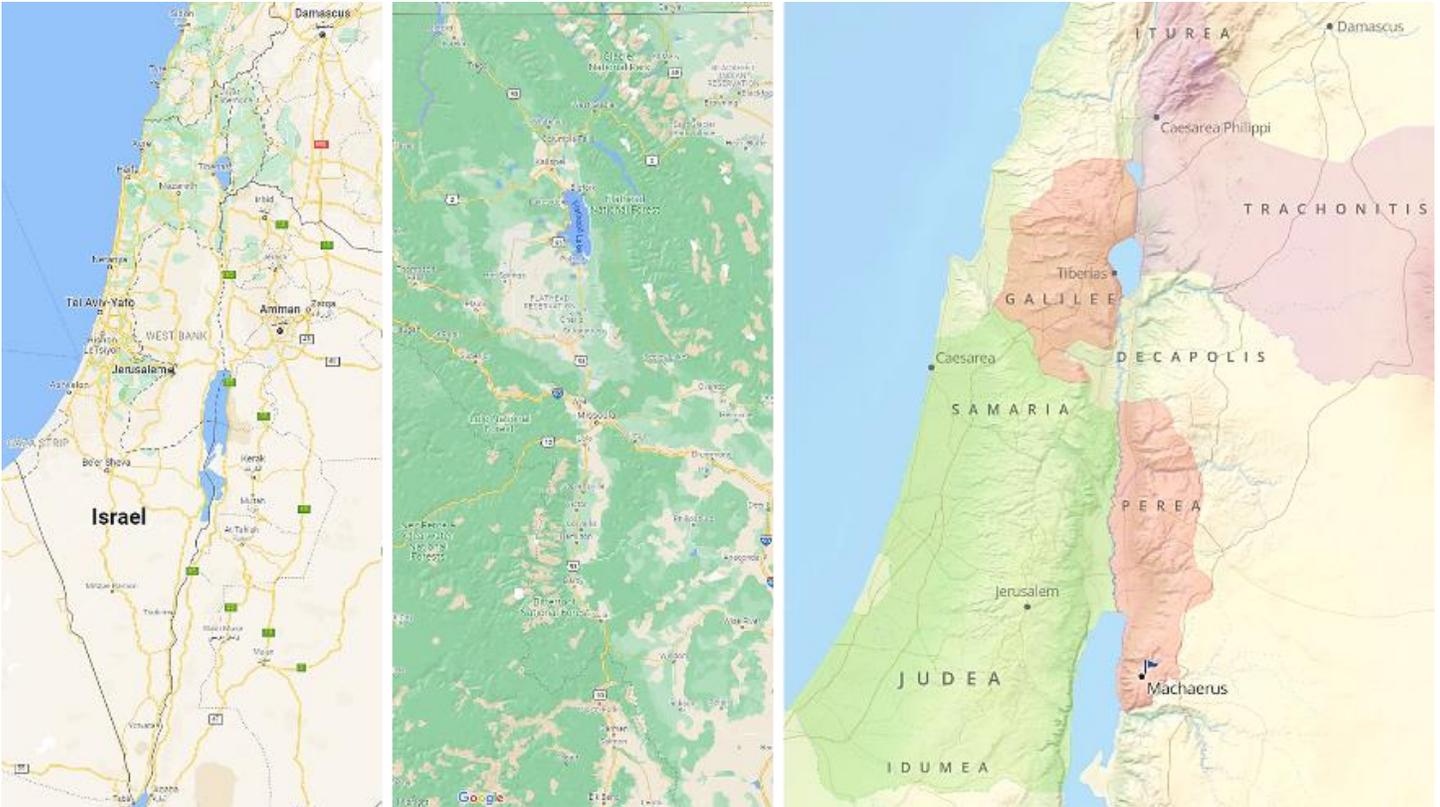
ΕΝΑΡΧΗ Η ΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΚΑΙ Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ ΕΗΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ
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John 3:22-30, ²²After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. ²³John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized— ²⁴for John had not yet been thrown into prison. ²⁵Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John’s disciples with a Jew about purification. ²⁶And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.” ²⁷John answered and said, “A man can receive

nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.
28“You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I
am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of
Him.’ 29“He who has the bride is the bridegroom;
but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and
hears him, rejoices greatly because of the
bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been
made full. 30“He must increase, but I must
decrease.





Verse 22 simply means that Jesus and His disciples left the environs of Jerusalem, while remaining within the Roman Province of Judea. At that time Judea encompassed three provinces. Judea proper, sometimes called Judea Prime, with Jerusalem and the Temple at its center.

Then Idumea to the south, which was the land of the Edomites and the ethnicity of Herod the Great's father. And then Samaria to the north. Obviously, Samaria was the home territory of the Samaritans.

You may remember that the Samaritans and the Jews were generally hostile towards each other in much the same way as the Jews and Palestinians are today. Old grievances on both sides and probably no way forward. The next chapter opens with the Samaritan woman at the well and so we'll talk about that group a bit more then.



John the Baptizer had at that time set up shop in “Αἰνῶν ἐγγὺς τοῦ Σαλείμ.” “The Spring near Peace.” There are four locations that fit the bill. 1) The first is somewhat near the Fortress Machaerus in the province of Perea, modern-day Jordan. The other three are in the province of Samaria. 2) One, 7 miles south of

Scythopolis in the northeast corner of Samaria. 3) Another is a secondary branch of the Jordan River, basically in a backwater or slough on the eastern edge of the province. 4) The most likely of the bunch, is a spot near Jacob's Well in the middle of Samaria.

Again, the description is about John's activity and while it would be logical to assume that both Jesus and John were near each other that's not certain in the text. If they were not close by each other, then the location for John in Perea makes sense. The next verse is a narrator's comment that "John had not yet been thrown into prison."

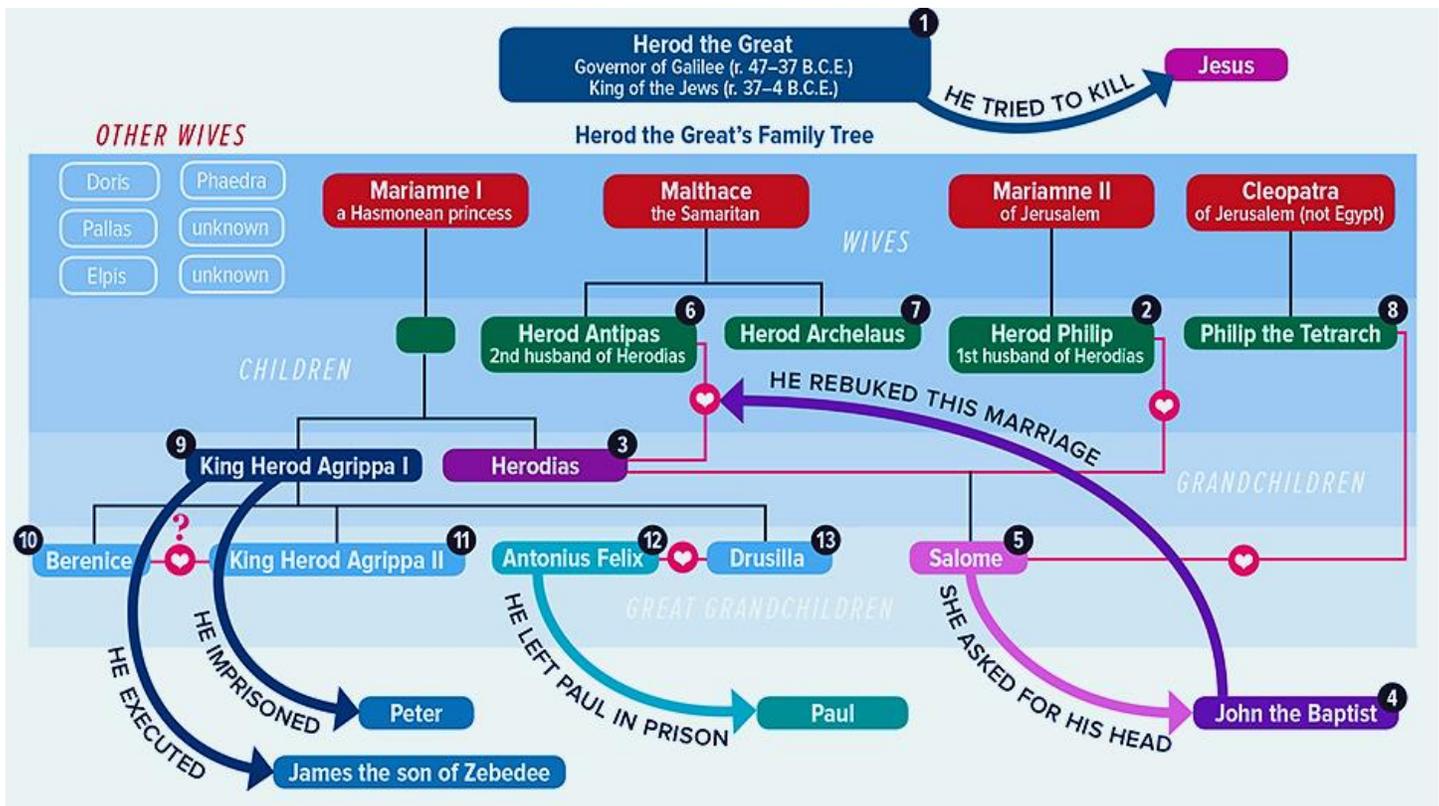
We know that He was arrested shortly after this event and taken to the Fortress Machaerus. Do you remember why was John arrested? Specifically, for calling out the ruler of Galilee and Perea, Herod the Great's son Herod Antipas. It's almost certain that John was in Perea – Antipas' territory when he was arrested. Machaerus wasn't just a Fortress, it was the ruler's palace in Perea.

Antipas loved the place and so did his wife, the Nabatean daughter of King Aretas, the Princess

Phasaelis. Her home kingdom bordered southern Perea with its capital city of Petra. You know Petra...



I mentioned that Herod the Great's father was an Idumean, well his mother was Nabatean. While raised in the Jewish Faith, Herod the Great, the father of Antipas, was 100% Arab. In case you were wondering, Antipas' mom was a Samaritan. You can understand why the Jews weren't thrilled with their kings and why those kings were paranoid.



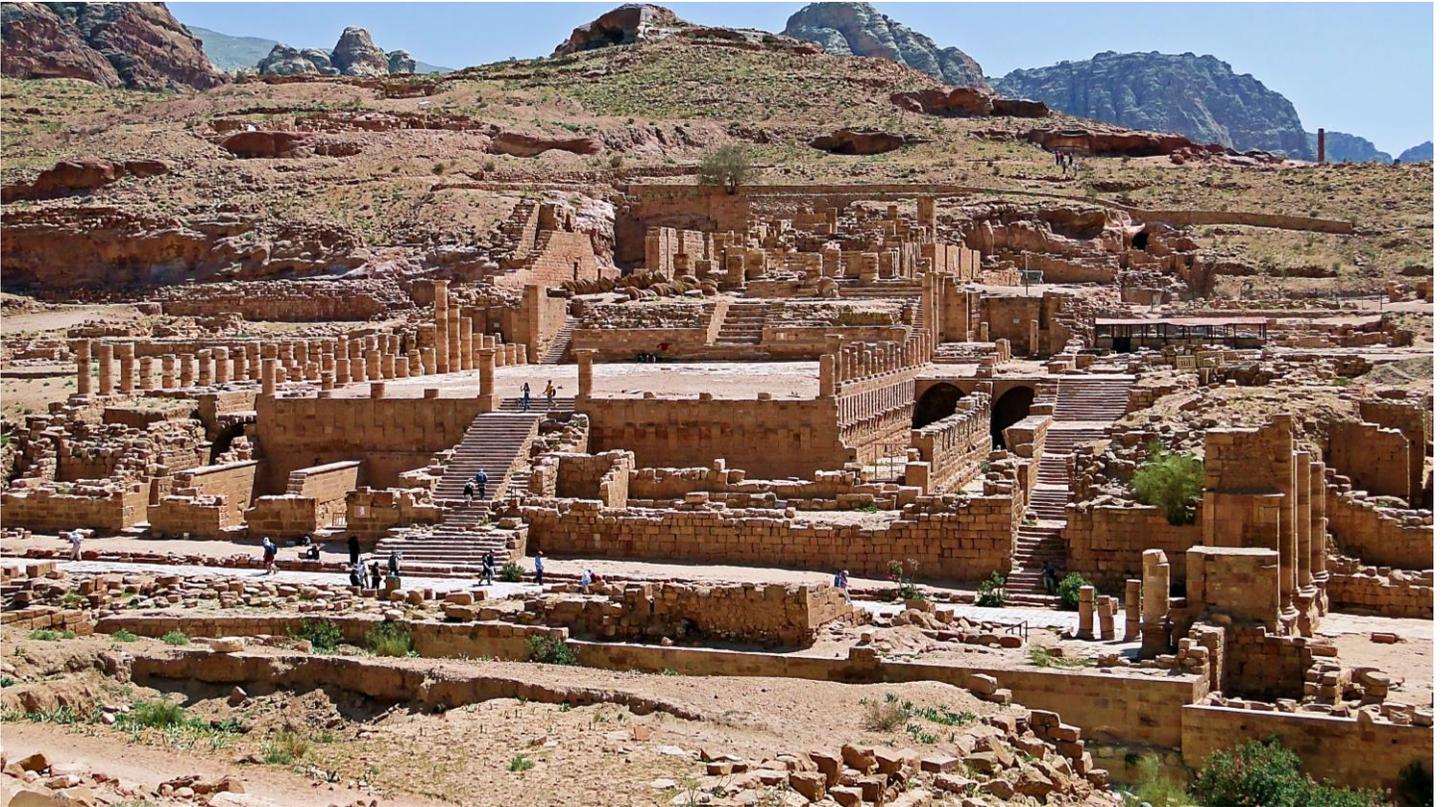
Back to Herod the Great. After he had his son, Antipas's brother, Aristobulus, executed, he took his, now orphaned granddaughter, Herodias and married her off to another of his sons, Herod II, also known as Philip. This Philip was the brother of the Philip who ruled the lands north of Galilee. Antipas could introduce them as, "this is my brother Philip and my other brother Philip." Anyway, once Herodias got a little older, she and Phil had a daughter they named Salome. Hopefully this is sounding familiar. Herod also murdered his first-born son Antipater (mom Doris), and Aristobulus' full big brother Alexander (mom Mariamne I), as well as their mom.

According to the historian Josephus, “Herodias took upon her to confound the laws of our country, and divorced herself from her husband while he was alive, and was married to Herod Antipas.” Antipas, another of Herodias’ uncles, divorced his Nabatean wife in favor of a union with her. That’s why John was publicly chastising Antipas, and to be fair, Herodias as well. That’s why Antipas had John jailed. That’s why Herodias coaxed her daughter Salome to ask for John’s head on a platter.

You might think that’s a poor reason to execute someone and first I’ll say, not for that family, but secondly there was more to it.

What John did was also treasonous if done on the border with the Nabateans. Why? You ask. King Aretas declared war on Antipas for disgracing his beloved daughter. Speaking against Antipas in the borderlands during the open conflict was stirring opposition and so was directly aiding and abetting the enemy.





In case you were wondering Aretas soundly defeated Antipas, and the former was only able to keep his throne after pleading for Roman intervention to stop the war. Rome complied because they didn't want Aretas to become too powerful. Rome intervened again some 10 years later deposing Antipas and exiling him to Gaul – modern-day France. Now you know why people in France are so rude.



That's why the Machaerus site makes sense. On the other hand, if Jesus and John were in close proximity during this time of baptisms, the site near Jacob's Well fits best because we'll see Jesus at that well in the next chapter. The site near the Jordan makes the statement, "because there was much water there," superfluous. The site in the north, would require Jesus to double-back to the south before entering Galilee.



Verses 25&26, get a bit confusing. The solution, as always, is context, and part of context, is to carefully recognize what is actually written and what isn't. As an example, how many people are certain that there were three wise men, when the Bible never states that, and it is certainly wrong?

Our little section comes in two parts. The first part gives the reason for the second part – in other words, how the second part came to happen – the why.



The second part is the elephant in the room. At issue was the fact that both John and Jesus were baptizing at the same time. We'll find out later that Jesus was not personally baptizing but was doing so through the agency of His disciples, but both were conducting seemingly identical ministries at the same time.

To get to that issue, we have an incident with a Jew, that stimulates John's disciples enough to finally query their leader. What are we doing, master?

Why, if John was preparing the way for Jesus, and Jesus had now come, didn't John go? Why had John

not merely retired, or folded his ministry in with that of Jesus, or simply followed Jesus as one of His 12 Apostles? The other three Gospels avoid the issue entirely by omitting this part of Jesus' ministry – this overlap part with Jesus and John the Baptist in the territories south of Galilee.

John's disciples got into a heated disagreement with “a Jew.” The “discussion,” is ζήτησις (dzā-tā-sēs), a Greek word that can mean a discussion, but never does in the New Testament. It is related to our word zeal and is an intense, typically emotional, argument. The nicest meaning here would be a debate, but it was really a dispute.

Beyond that, when the New Testament uses the term “Jew” in this way, it always refers to the Jewish people of legalistic Judaism. This particular Jew was not Jesus as some suppose but was a busy body taking issue with what both John and the disciples of Jesus were doing. The disagreement was over proper Jewish ceremonial cleansing. To the pious religious Jews, the type of Baptism being performed by John and Jesus was wrong. Jesus had already demonstrated His break

with the ritual cleansing rules created by men when He turned the water into wine.

For John's disciples the confrontation got them questioning what John and Jesus were doing. Most people think that John's disciples were jealous of Jesus poaching disciples from their group and having greater success at drawing new disciples.

Humans, being what we are, I'm sure that there was a bit of that, but it's an assumption and it's not the primary concern. What the text actually tells us is John's guys are respectfully pointing out to him, that Jesus – the guy John endorsed – has established Himself apart from us. His ministry is in full swing on its own, with the implication, what does that mean for us. What are we doing? If Jesus is the One, why are you still ministering and if you are to continue, then why is the Jesus camp seemingly duplicating what we've been doing with baptizing people?

Their phrase to John, "to whom you testified," proves that their issue wasn't that Jesus was drawing followers – that was expected and necessary. Their issue was why were Jesus' disciples baptizing while John

continued to baptize, but the two ministries were still separate. That's the elephant in the room and now it has been addressed. One scholar put it this way, "Up until now, John had repeatedly stated who he wasn't. He wasn't Elijah, he wasn't the Prophet, He wasn't the Messiah. Now, he needed to say who he was." That's a nice way to sum it up.



John's answer starts with an aphorism, or maxim, or proverbial saying, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven." He isn't yet talking about himself, or Jesus, so much as he's talking about every person in general and his disciples in particular. It's a truism that addresses misunderstanding in

general – you want to understand the heavenly? Well, then you need a heavenly perspective. From cover to cover the Bible informs us that to recognize the divine, a human must be divinely illuminated, inspired, anointed, or otherwise called and sent.

Only God can reveal God, would be another way of saying it. The Apostle Paul rebukingly reminds people who think highly of themselves, “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (I Corinthians 4:7). Another aphorism is “No man is an island” (John Donne). It’s what Barak Obama was on about when he said, “You didn’t build that.” And it’s what Isaac Newton meant by saying, “If I have seen further, it was only because I stood on the shoulders of giants.” It all means that a person’s accomplishments are impossible in a vacuum.

Other people have helped us in uncountable ways, supporting, encouraging, and teaching us. Fighting and dying in wars, struggling, and striving in business, working, and serving in the community to provide the opportunities we are able to take advantage of. You wouldn’t be here if not for your parents and thousands,

or millions of others. You wouldn't even exist without God.

We achieve something and puff ourselves up with pride, but as God's Word says, "What do you have that you did not receive?" The extra bonus point for this morning is, be humble. "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you" (Romans 12:3). God gives out the gifts.

Humans operate with what God gives them. Everything, and I do mean everything, belongs to God and whatever it is that you think you have is on temporary loan from Him. That includes the breath in your lungs and the blood in your veins, as well as the ability to perceive Truth.

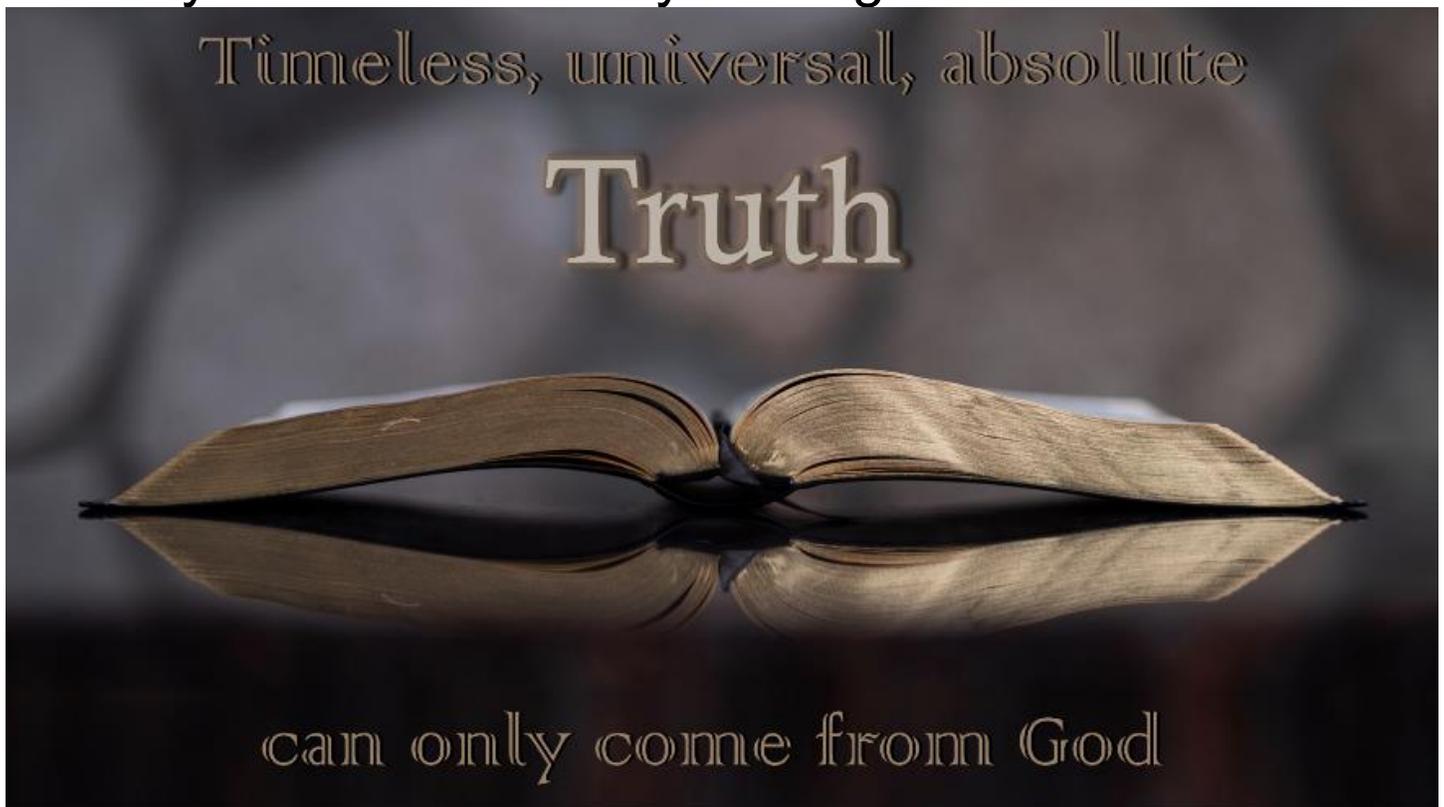
What John was saying to his disciples was people were misjudging his role, and even more, the role of Jesus because they were looking at it through human eyes with human understanding. It is impossible to get it right without insight from God.

That's as true today as it was then and so what's the implication? Seek God for the Truth. Only He can give it. The "Jew" in the passage along with John's disciples were arguing using the logic of fallen creatures rather than truly asking God for wisdom with humble faith as the Bible instructs. We still do that and still for the same reason. Pride demands that we can figure it out for ourselves – well that's certainly what Eve wanted for herself and presumably for her progeny.

Arguably the most severe rebuke in the Bible was when Jesus abruptly turned to Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan!" Can you imagine? And why? Why such a vicious reprimand of such a loyal friend? Peter had essentially told Jesus that he wouldn't allow Him to suffer. The explanation for the harsh rebuke was Jesus continuing "You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:21-23, Mark 8:31-33).

How could anyone see good in Jesus' arrest, torture, and murder, before the Resurrection... Unless they were looking at it like God looked at it? Stop judging with prideful human wisdom. Later in this Gospel Jesus will rebuke the Pharisees saying to them emphatically,

“You judge according to the flesh.” Isaiah the great Prophet speaking about the Messiah said that “He will delight in the fear of the Lord, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear” (Isaiah 11:3). What the fear of the Lord means in that context, is a recognition of the Lord as the only one who can truly know good from evil.



Jesus is the Word of God and that is the same thing as saying that Jesus is pure timeless, absolute, universal Truth, with a capital “T.”

If the Jews of Jesus’ day had disregarded everything that their pride in their own wisdom told them and

instead would have humbled themselves and genuinely sought God's wisdom, things would have turned out differently for them. Of course, God knew they wouldn't... What does God know about you in that regard?

The Truth each person knows, the gifts each person has, the role that each person plays, are determined by God. God determines that in relation to how much a person seeks Truth, how earnestly a person desires gifts and how willing a person is to fulfill a role. People seek, desire, and are willing, based upon the impetus of the Holy Spirit. A person's receptivity to that Holy Spirit impetus is... Well, around and around we go.

John then said, I don't need to remind any of you of what you yourselves could easily bear witness to or give testimony confirming. That from the start and consistently throughout I have repeatedly stated that I am the guy preparing the way for the guy. and as you yourselves just pointed out, I declared that Jesus was the guy.



Then he gives them a wonderful illustration that perfectly explains his call and his reaction. The ancient Best Man was entirely devoted to the groom. He would work tirelessly, even using his own money, to ensure that every aspect of the pre-wedding planning, the wedding event and the wedding aftermath was perfect. All rolled up into one position, he was like a modern Best Man, a wedding planner, a master of ceremonies, a personal bodyguard, and a Maid of Honor as well.

Yes, he was also responsible for the bride. He was entrusted with her protection, her preparation, and her presentation to the groom. That preparation included

her washing, and dressing, and adornment for her big day (think Baptism). The Best Man was forbidden by law from ever marrying the bride himself, so He had absolutely nothing to gain from a failed wedding.

In addition to his desire to see his friend happy and with no incentive otherwise there was also something that we think far less of today than they did back then and that's personal honor. His reputation at stake. He would rather die than fail. His honor rested upon his ability to orchestrate the perfect wedding for his friend and so his success was tied together with the groom's success. He wanted the groom to be happy more than anything because that was his desire, his job, his responsibility, and his goal.

Perhaps there would be a reward from the groom at some future point, but the reward of being so honored to be trusted with the task and the reward of doing a great job at that task would be enough.



John was entrusted by the Lord to be His Best Man and prepare His spiritual Bride for Him. How did he do? Well, the Bible tells us that the people who came to John and humbled themselves publicly repenting of their sins and being washed, Baptized, were the same people who were able to accept Jesus and be Saved. The ones constituting the Bride of Christ. At the same time the Bible tells us that those who scoffed at John and were too proud and too self-righteous and too reliant on ritual and religion were the same people who rejected Jesus and remained condemned.

If you are a proper minister of Grace in the service of the Lord, you should desire His success through your efforts no matter the cost to you. You've been selected by God for service to Him – trusted with His bride. You give it all you've got, and He is pleased with your efforts – that's reward enough. But, as a bonus, the Lord has promised to reward those efforts beyond anything imaginable. The key is that in both the illustration and in legitimate service to the Lord, it is the Lord who must increase. It is the Lord Who becomes the entire focus and that means that the Best Man must decrease – must fade into the background.



Is a minister of God's Grace a proper minister? Where's the focus? Are people focused on the personality and work of the Best Man, or on the Groom?

If John were a true Best Man his greatest joy would be in seeing the Groom overshadow him. Since he was a true minister, he put the spotlight on Jesus and his joy was full. That was his point.



John 3:31-36, 31“He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. 32“What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies;

and no one receives His testimony. 33“He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. 34“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. 35“The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. 36“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

This is not John the Baptist continuing his conversation with his disciples – this is another extended explanation by our author, the Apostle John. Just as he has done previously John clarifies the ramifications of what he’s just reported.

Verse 31 establishes a fundamental fact that neither John the Baptist, nor John the Apostle, nor Nikodemus, nor any other human being in the entire sweep of time, can possibly give a first-hand account of God, God’s plans, or God’s home. Being “of the earth and from the earth,” anything a person can say is, by definition, earthly... Pure conjecture – the ravings of their own imagination, just human speculation.

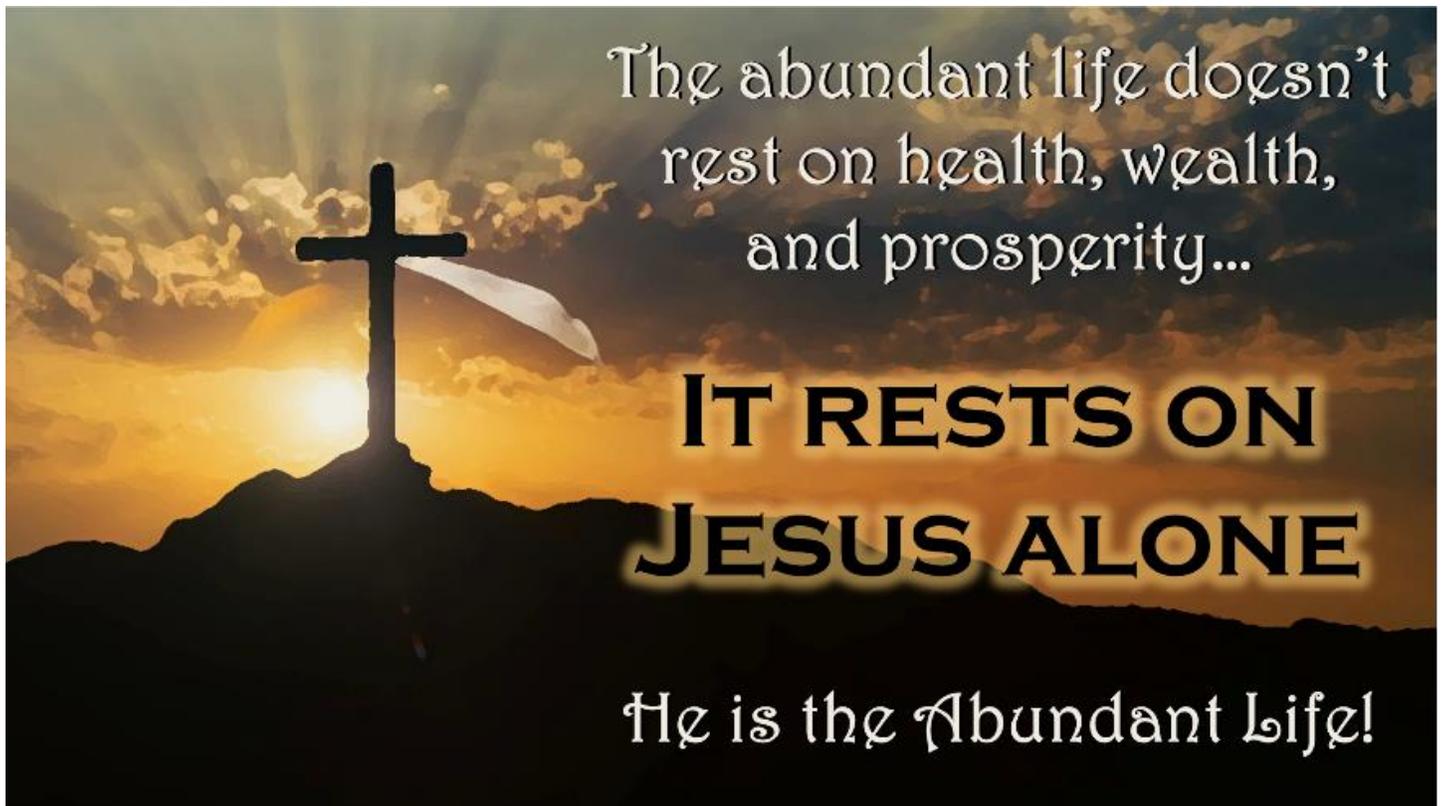
We see that in every belief system and religion ever created by man. Because all human ideas about what lies beyond are of the earth, it is easy for people to lump the one true faith in amongst them and dismiss it as well. Clearly and obviously, only someone Who has actually seen God, personally knows Him, is privy to His plans, and has dwelt with Him in Heaven, can explain Him to us.

John has already made that same point back in chapter 1, verse 18, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father (that’s Jesus), He has explained Him.” Because Jesus has testified to these things, we can now share His testimony about them. Our Christian testimony about God and Heaven is perfectly accurate so long as we repeat what God has said... When we stray from what the Bible actually says, we enter into human speculation and earthly wisdom.

Most people do not believe our testimony about the Bible – the Word of God, and that should come as no surprise. When the living Bible, the Word of God made flesh lived among people who were in the very best position to believe, for the most part, they didn’t.

The verbiage in verse 32, “No one receives His testimony,” is thought by most to be hyperbole. Obviously, some people do receive. I think it was intentional for another reason. Everywhere, including in the earlier verses today, we see the reality that fallen and depraved humans are incapable of receiving God’s testimony about Himself. Literally, no one, in their own power, receives the Word. The Holy Spirit draws and then people respond. How and why the Holy Spirit draws can be debated, but some respond and receive and to them it is eternal life.

Not future life, but eternal life beginning instantly and evolving into full flower one day in the future. John the Apostle was saying that His experience with Jesus left Him believing and that resulted in the indwelling Holy Spirit confirming that “God is True.” It is the same for every Christian. Not only does the Christian know that God is True, but their life dedicated to following God through Christ proves that God is True.



Jesus the Word, λόγος (lō-gōs), spoke the words, ῥῆμα (rā-mā) of God. God's words are His Word. To believe His Word, is to believe God and declare Him True. Conversely, to reject the Word is to call God a liar. It's that simple.

Finally, the Godhead isn't merely using His incarnated Word uncaringly as an object, to move His agenda forward – God loves His Word. God loves His word made flesh as Jesus, His one and only Son, in that sense. God the Father and God the Spirit suffered as much, or more, than God the Word, in providing you Salvation because they loved the Son. In John 14:31

Jesus said that He loves the Father. Have you considered the extra pain Jesus endured knowing that His suffering hurt God so much? To reject that sacrificial love for you is truly to retain the condemnation you have earned – it is to embrace the “Wrath of God” upon you.



No one should be surprised when God gives them what they, through a lifetime of self-centered unbelief – a lifetime of calling God a liar, have demanded for themselves. Independence from Him. When people shout, scream, screech, and shriek, with their every action, “Leave me alone, God!” Well, He will. And

existence without any trace of Him is too horrible to imagine. Without any light at all there is no hope at all.

You think life is bleak here and now? You don't have a clue just how bad life will be when you're stuck for eternity in the dark with no one but your own neuroticism, insecurities, and fears to keep you company. It truly is, as Jesus declared, the "place of outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth."



Now, it doesn't need to be that way. God made sure of that at great personal cost. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life." That is identical to obedience.

God has commanded trust in Him through the Salvation that He provided in Jesus. Obey that, and be Saved.