

# **“The Preparatory Ministry Of John The Baptist”**

## **Matthew 3:1-12**

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December 13, 2020

**Teaching Aim:** To examine the role of John the Baptist in preparing the way for Jesus. To realize John was the last and greatest of the prophets under the Old Covenant. To understand each person will either be baptized with the Holy Spirit by grace through faith in Christ or baptized (immersed) by fire in judgment. To realize the baptism of Jesus was a national baptism that identified Him with the sin of Israel while the Holy Spirit’s baptism in the form of a dove anointed Jesus for His Messianic ministry as Savior.

### **DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD’S WORD (BIBLE STUDY)**

#### **Part I: The ministry of John in the wilderness of Judea (Matt. 3:1-6)**

1. According to Jesus, who was the greatest prophet under the Old Covenant? (See **Matt. 11:11**) How do born-again Christians today compare with John according to **Matt. 11:11**? Is this something to be proud of or humbled by? What biblical character was referred to in the last two verses of the Old Testament? (See **Mal. 4:5-6**) After 400 years of prophetic silence, who did the angel Gabriel announce would come in “*the spirit and power of Elijah*”? (See **Luke 1:16-17**) Did Jesus agree with Gabriel? (See **Matt. 11:14-15**)
  
2. According to **verse 1**, where did John the Baptist conduct his public ministry? What was so unusual about this region of Israel? (Hint: Google it) What was the essence of John’s message to Israel (**vs. 2**)? What is the meaning of the word “*repent*”? How should repentance apply to our lives today?
  
3. Matthew used the phrase “*the kingdom of heaven*” some 33x in his gospel (**vs. 2**)? What is the meaning of this phrase? (See Commentaries) Is there any difference between the phrases “*the kingdom of heaven*” (used by Matthew) and “*the kingdom of God*” (used by Mark and Luke)? What did John mean when he said, “*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (**vs. 2**)? What message did Jesus bring? (See **Mark 1:14-15**)
  
4. All three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) quote **Isa. 40:3 (vs. 3)**. What is the significance of this passage of Scripture and how does it relate to John the Baptist and the ministry of Christ? What kind of a highway was John preparing?

5. What kind of clothes did John the Baptist wear (**vs. 4**)? What Old Testament character dressed in a similar way? (See **2 Kin. 1:7-8; Zech. 13:4**) What can we learn about John the Baptist from the kind of clothes that he wore? (See **Matt. 11:7-10**) What can we learn about John from the food that he ate? (See **Lev. 11:21-22**)
6. According to **verse 5**, where did the people come from who came to hear John? Does the Bible ever speak of John preaching to the religious establishment while in the city of Jerusalem? What happened in large numbers as the people came out to the Judean wilderness and heard John's message to repent from their sins (**vs. 6**)? Why do you think more preachers don't preach "*repentance from sin*" today? Why do so many people find this message offensive? (See **John 3:3, 5**) Were you offended by this message the first time you heard it?
7. John's baptism was a baptism that called the Jewish people to both individual and national repentance; it was an outward sign that they were renewing their broken covenant with God. In visual form they were taking a bath and cleaning up before both God and man. Christian baptism is different; it is an outward manifestation of an inward reality as people who have received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord identify themselves dramatically with His death, burial and resurrection. It was the Lord who commissioned that His followers be baptized. (See **Matt. 28:18-20**) Have you followed the Lord in believer's baptism? If not, why not? What is the difference between "*believer's baptism*" and "*Spirit baptism*"? (See **1 Cor. 12:12-13**)

## **Part II: John's confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 3:7-12)**

1. According to your Bible commentaries, what are some ways that the Pharisees and Sadducees differed from each other in their religious beliefs (**vs. 7**)? What brought these opposing groups together? Why do you think they hated John and Jesus so much?

2. What are “*vipers*”? Why did John call the Pharisees and Sadducees a “*brood of vipers*”? In what way were these religious leaders actually more deadly than literal vipers? (See **Matt. 23:15**) What “*wrath*” was John referring to in **verse 7**?
  
3. What did John mean when he told the Jews to, “*bear fruits worthy of repentance*” (**vs. 8**)? Should we be doing the same today? If so how?
  
4. In whose name did the Jews consider themselves to be saved (**vs. 9**)? Are some “*Christians*” guilty of doing the same today; thinking they are saved because of their Christian heritage? How does God “*raise up children to Abraham*” from stone today? (See **Ezek. 36:25-27; Rom. 2:28-29**)
  
5. Who is represented by the “*trees*” in **verse 10**? (See Commentaries) What warning was John the Baptist giving to the Pharisees and Sadducees? What test would illustrate the worthiness or unworthiness of the tree?
  
6. What are some ways that the baptism of John and the baptism Jesus differed (**vs. 11**)? In what way is baptism by immersion similar to a bath? Who does Jesus baptize with “*the Holy Spirit*”? Who will Jesus baptize with “*fire*” (**vs. 12**)?
  
7. What is a “*winnowing fan*” (**vs. 12**)? (Hint: Google it) What is the purpose of this tool? How does this imagery symbolize the coming end time judgment? According to **verse 12b**, how severe will this judgment be for those who reject Christ?

**MINER'S CORNER ~ *Manna to live by!***

- The people of Israel had to come out of the corrupt religious establishment (symbolized by leaving Jerusalem) in order to hear John's message of repentance and to be baptized by him.
- Religion without Christ saves nobody.
- The mission of John the Baptist was to prepare Israel spiritually for the coming Messiah.
- Every believer should bear fruit worthy of repentance; this fruit should demonstrate the believer's faith in Jesus Christ.
- If there is no spiritual fruit and no love for Christ, there is no salvation.
- The end time judgment will separate the wheat from the chaff (true believers from the false professors).
- An unquenchable fire awaits those who ultimately reject Christ.