

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

JESUS IS KING



John the Baptizer

Text: Matthew 3:1-12

1. The Message of John the Baptist - Matthew 3:1-2

Matthew introduces us to one of the fascinating characters of the New Testament. This was the John born to Zacharias and Elisabeth, whose miraculous birth to this “beyond child bearing years” couple was announced, along with his call to be the forerunner of the Messiah, in Luke 1.

Preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent: John’s message was a call to repentance. Some people think that repentance is mostly about *feelings*, especially feeling sorry for your sin. It is wonderful to feel sorry about your sin, but **repent** isn’t a “feelings” word.

It is an *action* word. John told his listeners to make a change of the mind, not merely to feel sorry for what they had done.

John wanted people to know that **the kingdom of heaven** was *near* – as close as your **hand**.

**Now, I want to pause here.* Based on Matthew's exclusive use of the phrase and the Jewish nature of his Gospel, some interpreters have concluded that Matthew was writing concerning the millennial kingdom while the other New Testament authors were referring to a spiritual kingdom. However, a closer study of the use of the phrase reveals that this interpretation is in error.

A much better explanation is that Matthew simply used the term **kingdom of heaven** instead of *kingdom of God* so as to avoid offense to Jewish readers, who often rejected direct references to God and would refer to His dwelling place instead of Him directly.

Follow Link for more details: <https://www.gotquestions.org/kingdom-heaven-God.html>

2. The Identity of John the Baptist. - Matthew 3:3-4

Prepare the way of the LORD: Matthew used this passage from Isaiah 40:3 to identify John the Baptist as the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah.

See Isaiah 40:3

In this role, John's purpose was to **prepare** hearts for the Messiah, and to bring an awareness of sin among Israel so they could receive the salvation from sin offered by the Messiah.

3. The Success of John's ministry. - Matthew 3:5-6

John's ministry met with wonderful response. There were many people who recognized their sinfulness, their need to get ready for the Messiah, and were willing to *do* something about it.

4. John Confronts the Pharisees and Sadducees. - Matthew 3:7-12

This is our introduction to these two important groups in first-century Judaism. These two groups were very different and often in conflict. Together they represented the leadership of Judaism.

We have Abraham to our father: John warns them to stop trusting in their Jewish heritage because they must truly repent, not simply trust in Abraham's merits.

It was widely taught in that day that Abraham's merits were plenty for any Jew's salvation and that a Jewish person *couldn't* go to hell. John points out that these Pharisees and Sadducees are of a different family; they are **vipers** – meaning a family associated with serpents!

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees:

The illustration is obvious and pointed, that there is a woodman, who, having marked a tree for destruction, lays his axe at its root, and prepares to swing away.

Therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire: They had sin in their hearts; but they were not moved with a sense of urgency

about their situation. They didn't realize the desperate situation that they were in. They didn't prepare their heart!

This passage is very similar to John chapter 15 where Jesus challenges His followers to Abide in Him!

See John 15:4-6

John the Baptist was laying the ground work for the Jews to come to Christ! They would not bear fruit on their own! They could not bear fruit simply because they were a descendant of Abraham! They needed Jesus!

Baptize you with the Holy Spirit: This is the promised out-pouring of the Spirit promised with the New Covenant.

And fire: To baptize with **fire** means to bring the fires of judgment, which will purify the pure, but destroy the wicked like **chaff**.

Conclusion: The Jewish leaders thought that the Messiah would come with judgment, but only against Israel's enemies. They were blind in their self-righteous confidence that only others needed to get right with God.

Many today have the same idea. Much of what we call Christianity is but christianized heathenism...we need people who were dedicated like John the Baptist to give the message that Christ is the answer!

Make something of your life for God! Repent of your sin!
Repent of your pride and get right with God!

1. Who was John the Baptist?
2. Why do you think Jesus required a “forerunner”?
3. Would you consider John the Baptist’s ministry successful? Why?
4. What does it mean that the “axe is laid unto the root of the trees”?
5. Does Matthew 3:10 remind you of John 15? What does it mean to “Abide in Christ”?
6. Why is abiding in Christ necessary for fruit bearing and not being a child of Abraham or having outward conformity?
7. Why is the heart such an important part of life?
8. Explain the danger of having an outward appearance of godliness but having a wayward heart?
9. How do you keep your heart right with God? What role does the Word of God play in this process?