

# A Study of Matthew 3

## Heralding the King—Baptism of the King

### I. Outline.

1. Heralding the King (Matthew 3.1-12).
2. Baptism of the King (Matthew 3.13-17).

### II. Summary.

There was one who had the task of preparing the way for the coming King—the prophets even told of his work. That person was John the Baptizer. When a king visited any place in those days, just as today, the people being visited would seek to make the visit as pleasant for the king as possible. John’s task was to do that for the Lord Jesus. However, the kind of preparation that **this king** desired involved a work in the hearts of the people. John’s powerful preaching was an appeal to the Jews to change their hearts and they were confronted with the important word: **REPENT**. The messenger for this urgent work was quite different in his clothing and lifestyle. He was, in many ways, like the prophets of old. Verse 5 lets us know about the success John was having as the entire area was coming out to hear him and they were responding to his message. However, early on, the religious leaders of the day had difficulty with John, just as they would later have difficulty with the King. The problem was that they saw themselves as superior and not in need of repentance—their lives demonstrated this and John could see it clearly. We have Jesus reacting to these hypocrites in a quite similar way to the way John did when John called them a BROOD OF VIPERS (cf., Matthew 23). Their lack of sincerity was their major stumbling block and they never got over it. As we read about the warnings John was giving (in his preaching), we might wonder how anyone could misunderstand that this King he was preparing the way for was coming to establish a SPIRITUAL KINGDOM.

John’s humility and understanding of his role is made quite clear in verses 11 and 14. Jesus convinced John to baptize Him by *insisting* that it was appropriate for the purpose of fulfilling all righteousness. Differing from ALL OTHERS who came to John, Jesus HAD NOT come confessing sins (He had none, Hebrews 4.15). This concept of *fulfilling all righteousness* has caused a great deal of interest and discussion. See comments under verse 15.

J.W. McGarvey points out the following as the argument of chapter 3: “In this section Matthew presents two more proofs of the claims of Jesus. He shows, **first**, that He was attested by John, himself a prophet, as the one mightier than himself, who should baptize in the Holy Spirit and in fire—which was equivalent to declaring Him the Messiah. **Second**, he shows that Jesus was declared both by the Father and by the Holy Spirit to be the Son of God—the Father uttering the words, and the Holy Spirit pointing out the person. Thus again, in a single section of his narrative, our author exhibits both the Messiahship and the Sonship of Jesus” [J.W. McGarvey, *The New Testament Commentary: Volume I: Matthew and Mark*, Gospel Light Publishing, p. 40].

### III. Chronology.

**BIBLE PERIOD:** The Period of the Christ.

If you are not familiar with the **15 Bible Periods**, please click here:

<https://maplehillchurchofchrist.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/15bibleperiods.pdf>

### IV. Words/Phrases to Study

1. Matthew 3.1... **THE WILDERNESS OF JUDAEA**—“The wilderness of Judea. An area that stretched some twenty miles from the Jerusalem-Bethlehem plateau down to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, perhaps the same region where John lived (see Luke 1:80). The people of Qumran (often associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls) lived in this area too” [Zondervan King James Version Commentary, an Olive Tree Bible Study App Module].

2. Matthew 3.1... **PREACHING IN THE WILDERNESS OF JUDEA**—“He was the Baptizer, but he was also the Preacher, heralding his message out in the barren hills at first where few people were, but soon his startling message drew crowds from far and near. Some preachers start with crowds and drive them away [Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Mt 3:1). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press].
3. Matthew 3.2... **SAYING, REPENT YE**—“Repent! The first word from God uttered in nearly 400 years brings clearly into focus all that would restore that perfect fellowship with God, which was lost since the first sin. It strikes the keynote for the entire kingdom of God. None may enter this kingdom with his baggage of personal, willful sins, nor under his own terms. Repentance is that unconditional surrender to the will of God that lays down the arms of self-righteousness and self-justification and asks, “What must I do to accept the terms of pardon?” This demand of God that men repent possesses tremendous power for the transformation of the race. It clearly demands the renunciation of any and all cherished sins, for they ruptured fellowship with God from the very beginning and have continued to do so ever since. This command to repent cannot be substituted by claims of righteousness, or refused on the grounds of lineage, nor evaded by hiding among the masses who also do not wish to change their lives. It is personal, born of convictions; God would change men by teaching them to change their convictions” [Harold Fowler, *Bible Study Textbook Series: The Gospel of Matthew*, College Press, an e-Sword Module].
4. Matthew 3.3... **PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD**—“Before Rome ruled the world public roads were rare. Thus, when kings went on trips they sent advance men to prepare a way. Sometimes this meant leveling mountains, raising valleys, filling swamps, bridging rivers or removing other obstacles. Isaiah’s prophecy didn’t mean John would literally pave roads, but that he would prepare men for the Messiah by preaching repentance and urging them to straighten out the crooked things in their life” Kenneth L. Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 55].
5. Matthew 3.4... **HIS RAIMENT OF CAMEL’S HAIR, AND A LEATHERN GIRDLE ABOUT HIS LOINS; AND HIS MEAT WAS LOCUSTS AND WILD HONEY**—“John’s clothing and food were simple and inexpensive and were the type of apparel and sustenance that only the very poor had (Matthew 3.4). The robe-like garment was made of the coarse cloth produced from camel’s hair. The robes were baggy and long. Without a girdle to hold the robe in place, mobility was very limited. The girdle was therefore a very necessary part of the dress in that day and was worn by both men and women. Leather girdles were generally worn by the poor while the rich would wear girdles made of linen which had elaborate embroidery of gold and silver thread. All of John’s clothing was simple and inexpensive, but very durable” [Raymond Hagood, *The Book of Matthew*, Edited by: Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren, p. 151].      “John ate with equal simplicity and practicality. The Old Testament describes Israel as a land ‘**flowing with milk and honey**’ (Exodus 3.8, NKJV). The sugars of honey provided John with life-sustaining energy. Protein-rich locusts were equally plentiful and were a **kosher** food dating back to the early days of Leviticus 11.22” [Dewey & Rebecca Bertolini, *The Smart Guide to the Bible Series, The Book of Matthew*, p. 37].      “In his sudden appearance, his clothes, his solitary life, his uncompromising message, and his eventual clash with a king and his wife, John was modeled after Elijah (Matthew 11.10, Matthew 17.12).” [Chumbley, footnote, p. 55].
6. Matthew 3.5... **ALL JUDEA**—“Vast numbers of people came into the wilderness to hear the great preacher (Matthew 3.5). It has been estimated that perhaps as many as a million people heard that prophet preach [TALC, 1966, p. 104]. Matthew tells us that they came from Jerusalem, Judea, and from the region round about Jordan. Though the word ALL is used, this does not mean that everyone in these areas came to hear John. The Greek idiom points out that most of the people came to hear John from these areas, but not all of the people” [Raymond Hagood, p. 152].
7. Matthew 3.6... **CONFESSING THEIR SINS**—“Whether the penitents confessed particular sins to John or their sinfulness in general is not so much the point as that they did confess sins they had kept hidden for years and had cherished as a way of life, The fear of God’s wrath and their lack of

preparation for the coming of the Messiah laid bare their sins and devastated their excuses” [Harold Fowler].

8. **Matthew 3.7...** **BUT WHEN HE SAW MANY OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES COME**—These two groups likely had mixed motives in coming. Some may have been sincere in believing John’s message. Some surely came out of curiosity. Matthew 21.25-27, 32 shows the general lack of belief of these two groups. Hagner points out that Matthew has simply stated here that they **came** to the baptism and not that they were baptized. Luke’s account points out that the multitudes were the ones who were actually being baptized (Luke 3.7). [Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 33A, Matthew 1-13*, an Olive Tree module].
9. **Matthew 3.7...** **O GENERATION OF VIPERS**—“Jesus (Matthew 12:34; Matthew 23:33) will use the same language to the Pharisees. Broods of snakes were often seen by John in the rocks and when a fire broke out they would scurry (φυγεῖν [phugein]) to their holes for safety. ‘The coming wrath’ was not just for Gentiles as the Jews supposed, but for all who were not prepared for the kingdom of heaven (1 Thess. 1:10). No doubt the Pharisees and Sadducees winced under the sting of this powerful indictment” [Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Mt 3:7). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press].
10. **Matthew 3.8...** **BRING FORTH THEREFORE FRUITS MEET FOR REPENTANCE**—“Fruit worthy of repentance refers to the deeds that indicate a change of attitude (heart) on the part of John’s hearers [Biblical Studies Press. (2006). *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (Mt 3:8). Biblical Studies Press].
11. **Matthew 3.10...** **THE AXE IS LAID TO THE ROOT OF THE TREES**—“The figure of the tree is clear: the trees represent the Jewish nation as a whole; every tree stands for each individual; the axe, God’s judgment. The trees designated for felling have already been selected on the basis of failure to produce fruit worthy of God’s continued grace. The axe lies at the root: the coming judgment will be complete and will involve the entire stand of trees. The fire is the punitive judgment of God. (Cf. Malachi 4:1; John 15:6; Matthew 13:40; Matthew 18:8-9; Titus 3:14)” [Harold Fowler, *Bible Study Textbook Series: The Gospel of Matthew*, College Press, an e-Sword Module].
12. **Matthew 3.11...** **HE SHALL BAPTIZE YOU WITH THE HOLY GHOST, AND WITH FIRE**—“The Messiah would entirely immerse the penitent ones ‘in the Holy Spirit,’ and those who were impenitent, he would overwhelm with the fire of judgment, and at last in final perdition. This prophecy of John was literally fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1-4) and at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10.44; 11.15-18) with respect to the baptism ‘in the Holy Spirit.’ John does not here state that every subject of the coming kingdom would be immersed in the Holy Spirit. **His prediction should be understood in the light of its fulfillment**; we have only two records of the fulfillment of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. ... ‘Fire’ is so frequently connected with the final destruction of the wicked. John could only bid people to repent, and could symbolize their purification by his baptism in water, but Jesus would really purify them by forgiveness of sin, and he would finally destroy the impenitent wicked. ... We conclude that the fulfillment of the prediction of the baptism in fire would be realized by the wicked when they are cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20.15). ” [H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary on The Gospel According to Matthew*, Gospel Advocate, 1952, pp., 84-85 ]. **DRL Note:** *In my personal opinion, it is a mistake to refer to the incident of Cornelius’ baptism as an example of baptism in the Holy Spirit. I think Graham Cain has done an excellent job in explaining why here: <http://tinyurl.com/q8shvkev>*
13. **Matthew 3.12...** **WHOSE FAN IS IN HIS HAND**—“The fan was the great wooden winnowing shovel. With it the grain was lifted from the threshing floor and tossed into the air. When that was done the heavy grain fell to the ground, but the light chaff was blown away by the wind. The grain was then collected and stored in the barns, while any chaff which remained was used as fuel for the fire” [William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible*, an e-Sword Module].
14. **Matthew 3.15...** **IT BECOMETH US TO FILFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS**--“He had not come to confess sin but to ‘fulfill all righteousness.’ This phrase occurs nowhere else in the NT. ‘Fulfil’ is frequently used of the fulfillment of Scripture and in the NT ‘righteousness’ typically refers to the means by

which God justifies sinners (Romans 1.17). Jesus' baptism was part of the plan whereby God would justify the ungodly (Romans 4.5) and John's cooperation was needed ('it becomes us'). Why Christ had to undergo something meant for sinners isn't stated, but it all likelihood it was required to emphasize His identity with sinners (see Leviticus 16.21-22). He would save people from their sins by 'being numbered with the transgressors' (Isaiah 53.12)" [Kenneth Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 62]. |||| We know that Isaiah prophesied of Jesus that He would bear the iniquities of the people (Isaiah 53.11), and Leon Morris suggests this is the sense in which this act was fulfilling it. "**Jesus might well have been up there in front standing with John and calling on sinners to repent. Instead He was down there with the sinners, affirming His solidarity with them, making Himself one with them in the process of the salvation that He would in due course accomplish**" [Leon Morris, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 65].

15. Matthew 3.16... **THE HEAVENS WERE OPENED UNTO HIM**—This expression is found several times: Ezekiel 1.1; Isaiah 64.1; Acts 7.56; Acts 10.11; John 1.51. [Donald A. Hagner].
16. Matthew 3.16... **DESCENDING LIKE A DOVE**—"The statement that he saw the Spirit descending which is also the language of Mark 1.10, has been taken by some as implying that the Spirit was invisible to the multitude. But we know from John's narrative that it was also seen by John the Baptist (John 1.33-34); and if it was visible to him and to Jesus, and if it descended, as Luke affirms, in a bodily shape like a dove (Luke 3.22), it would have required a miracle to hide it from the multitude. Moreover, the object of the Spirit's visible appearance was to point Jesus out, not to Himself, but to others; and to point Him out as the person concerning whom the voice from heaven was uttered. No doubt, then, the Spirit was visible and the voice audible to all who were present" [J.W. McGarvey, *New Testament Commentary*, p. 40].
17. Matthew 3.17... **IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED**—"The idea of 'I am well pleased' is not that the Father was well pleased with what Jesus had done. It was not an evaluation of Jesus' past performance. Similarly, it was not an evaluation of what the Father knew Jesus would do. Instead, it is a statement of God's eternal pleasure in the Son. He is at all times pleased with the Son simply because He is the Son" [*Zondervan KJV Commentary*].

## V. Lessons & Applications.

1. Matthew 3.2... **REPENT YE: FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND**—"The call to repentance was the dominant message of John. He had come to prepare a people for the reception of Christ; and a change in their attitude and lives was essential to that preparation. The basic meaning of the word REPENT is to change one's mind, to have another mind, to think differently or afterwards. Repentance is not forsaking sin; that is the fruit of repentance. It is, rather to have another mind regarding sin, to think differently about it, to reconsider. It implies a true knowledge of sin, a conviction of sin, with its guilt, condemnation, and terrible consequences. It means that the sinner changes his thoughts regarding sin and his attitude toward it. Repentance is produced by godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7.10), and results in a reformation of life (Matthew 3.8)" [Leslie G. Thomas, *Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary*, 1965, p. 250].
2. Matthew 3.10... **THE AXE IS LAID UNTO THE ROOT OF THE TREES**—"Judgment is fast approaching! But, some would ask, **is fear a proper religious motive?** Yes, for God addresses His message to every sentiment of the human heart that 'by all means He might save some.' If love and grace do not reach the heart, the threat and terror of judgment must be given opportunity to try to stir the conscience. Even the threat of judgment on God's part demonstrates His long-suffering love and mercy. The conscience is one of God's gifts, and he who destroys it must answer for it" [Harold Fowler]. |||| "Because of the sinfulness of the Jewish nation as a whole and of its leaders in particular, John describe it as a forest about to be cut down—the axe lying at the root of the trees, ready for use. And within forty years their nation had been destroyed, with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But Jesus had instructed His disciples how to escape (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), and it is said that not a Christian lost his life. But the 'trees' that brought not forth good fruit were

‘hewn down.’ John also said they would be ‘cast into the fire’ which was an allusion to hell, the lake of fire and brimstone, in the world to come” [Rex Turner, Sr., *Teacher’s Annual Lesson Commentary*, 1979-1980, p. 118].

3. Matthew 3.11... **HE SHALL BAPTIZE YOU WITH THE HOLY GHOST AND WITH POWER**—“The baptism of the Holy Spirit was for a special purpose, and its purpose was fulfilled. By the time Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, there was only one baptism—Ephesians 4.4-6 **There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.** On the day of Pentecost, there were two baptisms. There was Holy Spirit baptism and water baptism. Today, there is just one baptism—water baptism. This baptism is for the remission of sins and will be in effect unto the end of the age (Matthew 28.18-20)” [Billy Bland, in *Forever Settled in Heaven*, Edited by Gary Colley, p. 111-112].
4. Matthew 3.13... **THEN COMETH JESUS FROM GALILEE TO JORDAN**—“All should know something about the Jordan River since Jesus was baptized in it. ‘Jordan’ means ‘the descender.’ The river begins up in the mountains of Lebanon and flows southward. It rises from several sources and passes through the Lakes of Merom and Galilee and continues its course south to empty into the Dead Sea. The two principal features in its course are its rapid descent and its winding. From the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea is about 65 miles, but if all the windings of the river are counted, it reaches a total of 200 miles. From its fountainheads to the Dead Sea it rushes down one continuous inclined plane, only broken by a series of rapid falls. Between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, there are about 27 rapids, apart from whirlpools. The depression of the Sea of Galilee below the sea level of the Mediterranean is 682 feet, and that of the Dead Sea is 1,292 feet. The whole descent from its source to the Dead Sea is 2,492 feet. The width and depth of the river vary exceedingly not only with the portion under consideration where John was baptizing but also with the season of the year. For this reason, we find all varieties of estimates in different authorities; one authority will measure the depth at one season of the year and another at another season of the year” [H. Leo Boles, *Companion Annual Lesson Commentary*, 1996-97, p. 78].
5. Matthew 11.11... **HE THAT IS LEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS GREATER THAN HE**—“John stood between the Jewish and Christian dispensations; he had much which connected him with both, but he did not belong to either. He had more knowledge of the nature of the person and work of the Christ than any of his predecessors among the prophets, and yet ‘**he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he**’ (Matthew 11.11). In fact, according to the Lord’s evaluation of him, no one had arisen among them that are born of women who was greater than John the Baptist, but the fact that this greatness would be surpassed by those in the kingdom when it came **shows how important that kingdom is**” [Leslie G. Thomas, *Teacher’s Annual Lesson Commentary*, 1959, p. 91].

## VI. Questions.

### True or False

01. \_\_\_\_\_ John spoke in a very complimentary way to the Pharisees and Sadducees when they came to his baptism.
02. \_\_\_\_\_ There was a response from heaven when Jesus was baptized.
03. \_\_\_\_\_ Isaiah wrote about John and the work he would do.
04. \_\_\_\_\_ Bearing fruit is spoken of in this chapter.
05. \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

**WHO said it? Who did it?**

- 06. \_\_\_\_\_ “ I am well pleased.”
- 07. \_\_\_\_\_ Came preaching.
- 08. \_\_\_\_\_ Needed to show “fruits” of repentance.
- 09. \_\_\_\_\_ Called religious leaders a BROOD/GENERATION of vipers.
- 10. \_\_\_\_\_ Would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

**Fill in the Blanks**

- 11. John did his preaching in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.
- 12. \_\_\_\_\_ was coming according to one of John’s warnings.
- 13. In John’s analogy, wheat would be \_\_\_\_\_, but the chaff would be \_\_\_\_\_.
- 14. The unproductive tree would be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ into the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 15. Jesus was baptized in order to \_\_\_\_\_ all \_\_\_\_\_.

*Each Question is worth 7 Points*

**My Score is:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Answers will be found on next week’s handout*

**ANSWERS to Matthew 2 Questions...** **01**—False (13); **02**—False (1); **03**—False (5-6); **04**—False (17); **05**—True (22-23); **06**—c (16); **07**—c (4); **08**—a (22); **09**—b (7); **10**—b (12); **11**—death, Herod (15); **12**—young, child (20); **13**—three (11); **14**—rejoice, exceedingly (10); **15**—It, is, written, prophet (5).

**VII. Seek-A-Word Puzzle.** The words may be backwards, diagonal, upside down, etc. See if you can find them all. The more you use the words of the Bible, the greater blessed you will be! You might be surprised at how much this little exercise will help you retain important truths. THANK YOU for the good effort you are putting forth in Bible study. -DRL

J W T O K K T D S C O M E  
 W H E N R P J A C E F C T  
 J O H N F V S P O K E N W  
 A D B C O H F R U I T W T  
 M D J O R D A N Y N R I V  
 A D U M T T R E E G F L O  
 B A D E H H S A I D I D I  
 R Y A T H E R E F O R E C  
 A S E H A N D C A M E R E  
 H U A E P R E A C H I N G  
 A F P A W B A P T I Z E E  
 M F Y V E I B A P T I S T  
 R E P E N T M J E S U S D  
 D R S N T A D K W A T E R

ABRAHAM	BAPTIST	BAPTIZE	CAME	COME
COMETH	DAYS	FIRE	FORTH	FRUIT
HAND	HEAVEN	JESUS	JOHN	JORDAN
JUDAEA	KINGDOM	PREACHING	REPENT	SAID
SPOKEN	SUFFER	THEN	THEREFORE	TREE
VOICE	WATER	WENT	WHEN	WILDERNESS





**IX. EXTRA CREDIT FOR “SUPER” Bible Students...**

*Will you please consider answering these three SIMPLE questions based on the Bible text of this chapter? I will try to make use of your answers. Bring them with you next week. Tear out this last sheet from the Study Guide and be prepared to put it in a basket. I think it will be a great help to all of those in the class if you will do so. Thank you in advance for your marvelous cooperation!*

**W O R D: What word would you like to know more about in this chapter?**

**W O N D E R: I wonder what this phrase, verse, or series of verses means...**

**W I S H: I wish myself—or others whom I know or even don’t know—would understand this fact, principle, or concept from this chapter...**