

John the Baptist

Matthew 3:1-6: *“¹ In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, ² And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. ³ For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁴ And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, ⁶ And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.”*

I. Verse 1—“*In those days*”

A. Chapter 3 begins a whole new phase with the words, “In those days.”

1. We start the chapter that is the beginning of the public ministry of the Lord. This is His entrance into ministry.

B. Notice how unknown Jesus was even to those in Israel that responded to the call of John the Baptist and repented of their sins.

C. We will see how even John the Baptist was not sure if He was the Messiah at first until God showed Him that He was the long awaited Messiah.

II. Verse 1—“*John the Baptist*”

A. There is suddenly a new character dropped onto this stage, and it is John the Baptist.

1. In Hebrew, his name is Yohanan.

B. In Matthew, we are told very little about John the Baptist. We don't know from Matthew who his parents are or where he was born.

C. That is very purposeful, because what we must always keep in mind about the Book of Matthew is that it is written in particular to the Jewish people.

D. The last word to the Jewish people in the Old Testament before the great 400 year silence were the words of the Book of Malachi which are as follows:

1. **Malachi 3:1**—“*Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.*”

2. **Malachi 4:5-6**—“*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:⁵ 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.⁶”*

E. Suddenly, that promised messenger comes and just like Elijah, John comes suddenly on the stage.

1. Just like Elijah who denounced the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and who denounced the evil of Jezebel and King Ahaz, so John comes, denouncing sin in Israel.

2. John will denounce the sin of King Herod because he took his brother Philip's wife for which John will later be beheaded,

F. John the Baptist is the forerunner before the Messiah comes into public ministry.

G. The Book of Luke tells us John the Baptist is about 6 months older than the Lord Jesus. This is an important detail because of the age of those who worked in the ministry of God in Israel.

1. For example, Moses gave the age for those who would go to war in **Numbers 1:3**.

a. The verse says, “*From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies.*”

b. Those who went to war were 20 years and older.

- H. But, Moses also gave the age for those who worked in the ministry in **Numbers 4:47**.
 - 1. **Numbers 4:47** says, *“From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that came to do the service of the ministry, and the service of the burden in the tabernacle of the congregation.”*
 - a. This is the age for those who went into the ministry—30 years old and upward.
 - b. This is the age that both that both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus started their ministry. They were both 30 years old.
- I. John the Baptist started his ministry about 6 months earlier than the Lord Jesus when he was 30 years old.
 - 1. This is perfect because John’s ministry was to prepare Israel for the coming of their Messiah.
- J. John’s ministry was preaching which meant that John was proclaiming or announcing in the wilderness of Judea, a rocky area in the desert towards the Dead Sea.

III. Verse 2—*“Repent ye”*

- A. In verse 2, we are told what John’s message was *“Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*
- B. John’s message was not complicated. It was a very simple message.
- C. John’s message to Israel is that they needed to repent.
- D. Repent means to have a change of mind that is so profound that it results in a change of life.
 - 1. John’s call was for people to so deeply change what they thought that it changed what they did.
- E. A person will respond to the call to repent when he believes that there is hope of being forgiven and cleansed. A healing is what God wants to do. God wants to wound so that He can heal.
- F. When John was calling on Israel to repent, that was a strong implication that John was making. He was implying that Israel was full of sin and uncleanness. This is exactly what the prophet Isaiah said about Israel in **Isaiah 1:3-4**.
 - 1. The verses say, *“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.³ Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.⁴”*
 - 2. That is a pretty rough description to say that Israel was a nation full of sin and a nation that was weighed down with sin.
 - 3. Because of that, they were provoking God to be angry with them.
 - 4. This is also how the prophet Haggai described Israel in **Haggai 2:14**.
 - a. The verse says, *“Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.”*
- G. God did not want for Israel to continue in their state of sin. God sent John the Baptist to prepare the people for the Messiah by calling on the people to turn their back on sin.
- H. The message of John the Baptist was to simply repent because repentance is the door that man opens to make himself ready to be saved.
 - 1. **Jeremiah 4:14** says, *“O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?”*

IV. Verse 2—*“The Kingdom of Heaven...at hand”*

- A. John also gave the reason for Israel to repent in verse 2.
 - 1. **Matthew 3:2** says, *“For the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

- B. This term, “The Kingdom of Heaven,” is unique to the Book of Matthew; It is used all over the Book of Matthew, and it is not used in any other part of the Bible.
1. Here again, we have to keep in mind that the Book of Matthew is written to the Jewish people.
- C. It was to the Jewish people that God revealed what Heaven was like when He told Moses about how to make the Tabernacle in **Exodus 25**.
1. **Exodus 25:8-9** says, “*And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.⁸ According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.⁹*”
- D. It was only to Israel that God revealed the Tabernacle ,and God instructed Moses for exactly how it was to be made.
- E. God did not give Moses a set of blueprints for how to construct the Tabernacle. God showed Moses an actual Tabernacle and that Tabernacle is described in **Revelation 21:3**.
1. **Revelation 21:3** says, “*And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*”
 2. What Moses saw was the Tabernacle of God that is in Heaven which will later come down to earth.
- F. Israel became familiar with the Tabernacle that is in Heaven, so the term, “The Kingdom of Heaven” had meaning for Israel.
- G. The Kingdom of Heaven was where the King of Heaven is.
- H. When John the Baptist said, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand,” he was saying that when the King of Heaven comes down to earth, the Kingdom of Heaven will come down to gather up citizens who will end up in Heaven.
- I. There was a great urgency to getting ready for the King of Heaven. John drove that urgency by saying, “At hand.”
1. This is not a matter of “Tomorrow is just as good as today.” Tomorrow may be too late.
- J. This is the same urgency of the Gospel message when the Bible says in the following verses:
1. **2 Corinthians 6:2** says, “*(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)*”
 2. **Hebrews 4:7** says, “*Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*”
 - a. The word “limiteth” means that there is a limit to the time when a person can be saved from their sins. No one knows when they are going to die, but after death, it is too late to be saved as the Bible says in **Hebrews 9:27**.
 - a) The verse says, “*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*”
 - b. Once a person dies, he is ushered right into judgment. A person cannot just say, “Wait a minute. I am ready now. I want to receive Christ now. I am ready to pray the sinner’s prayer.”
 - c. That person is told, “It is too late for that. You could have done that in the acceptable time, but that time has come and gone and now is the time for final judgment.”

- K. As believers, John the Baptist is our example of proclaiming the Gospel with a sense of urgency.
- V. Verse 3—*“This is he that was spoken of by”*
- A. Now the focus turns to John the Baptist himself and who he was.
 1. **Matthew 3:3** says, *“For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”*
 - B. John was the one that Isaiah predicted would come in **Isaiah 40:3-4**.
 1. The verse says, *“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.³ every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:⁴”*
 - C. First, we learn that John is described simply as a voice.
 1. John is not described as having an impressive presence—just a voice.
 2. John’s whole ministry was to be a voice with a clear and plain and consistent message
 3. John is described as being the voice of “one” crying the in wilderness.
 - D. John is described as being only a voice nothing more. John knew his calling in life, and John stuck to his calling in life. John did not waver from his calling.
 1. John knew he was to put the spotlight on the Messiah alone. The Lord knew that He could trust John to not steal the limelight and to just get the job done.
 2. This is the outstanding characteristic of John the Baptist. He had a very keen sense of what God wanted him to do, and he had a very keen sense of when his ministry was ending and when it was time for him to drop off the stage.
 3. John knew that he was a voice. John the Baptist was the voice referred to in **Isaiah 40:3-4**.
 - E. And then we see from verse 3 that the voice was not speaking, but the voice was “crying in the wilderness.”
 1. John’s voice was startling, and John’s voice was alarming. John was sounding the alarm.
 2. John’s voice was waking sinners up to confront their sin and be done with it.
 3. John’s voice was in every direction, and it was nonstop.
 4. John’s voice was for every person to hear.
- VI. Verse 4—*“John had his raiment of camel’s hair”*
- A. In Matthew, we are not told very much at all about John the Baptist, but we do know from the Book of Luke something significant about the type of person that John the Baptist was.
 1. **Luke 1:80** says, *“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.”*
 - B. As John was growing up, John spent a lot of time in the desert alone, and so we can imagine that John the Baptist was a meditative type of person.
 1. This is a characteristic of a man of God.
 2. **Joshua 1:8** says, *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”*
 3. **Psalms 1:2** says, *“But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”*
 - C. Matthew does tell us some significant details about John the Baptist in **Matthew 3:4**.

- a. The verse says, *“And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.”*
- D. Now, what was distinctive about John the Baptist was what he wore and what he ate.
- E. First, there was John's clothing. It was made out of camel hair.
1. This was not camel skin which might be soft (especially if it was the skin from the under belly of the camel). However, this was camel hair.
 2. Camel hair is stiff and coarse and can get long.
 3. It might be good for tents to protect from the elements, but as a coat, it was pretty uncomfortable. It was strictly for protection only.
- F. As you looked John the Baptist over, you would notice that his belt was leather. It was probably a large belt that possibly had pockets in it.
- G. For meat, John the Baptist ate locusts
1. I have never eaten locusts, but I suppose you tear off the wings, and it is like eating Captain Crunch
 2. Locusts would dry out in the sun and be a non-perishable food that would be a good protein source. Depending on the season and if there was a swarm of them, you could get a lot of them.
 3. One advantage of eating locusts is that you don't have to spend a lot of time planting and growing and harvesting or tending animals and slaughtering.
 4. If you want to have simple and convenient food to eat, locusts is the best food for you.
- H. For carbohydrates, John the Baptist ate wild honey. Honey is non-perishable and is easy to get if you can smoke the bees away.
1. Maybe John dipped the locusts in the honey? I don't know.
- I. But, this is what people saw when they went into the wilderness. They would find a meditative type of man who spent his childhood in the desert alone wearing camel hair clothes with a distinctive leather belt eating locusts and honey and crying out for people to repent because God the King is soon to come.
- J. Now, John's clothes and lifestyle made a clear statement that John had turned his back on the best that the world had to offer.
1. John's clothing and lifestyle was a pretty clear statement that John had renounced the world.
 2. To others, John the Baptist looked like the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a. **Isaiah 53:2** says, *“For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.”*
 - b. The beauty of John and the Lord Jesus Christ was not on the outside, but it was on the inside.
- K. This is how John the Baptist looked to people on the outside. John the Baptist looked different to God who saw John on the inside. The Lord Jesus Christ said how John the Baptist looked to God in **Luke 1:15**.
1. The verse says, *“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.”*
 2. As far as how he looked to God, John the Baptist was, *“Great in the sight of the Lord.”*
 3. As a matter of fact John the Baptist looked so great in the sight of the Lord that he says the following in **Matthew 11:11**: *“Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.”*

- a. What a statement! That for all people born, there was not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.

L. **Luke 1:15** tells us that John the Baptist would not drink wine or strong drink.

1. John was not interested in wine or liquor. He did not need it to relax after a hard day, and he did not need it to have a good time.
2. When it says that John the Baptist did not drink wine, that did not mean that John the Baptist did not drink non-alcoholic grape juice.
3. Because wine in the Bible is **not** non-alcoholic grape juice, wine in the Bible was alcoholic, and John the Baptist did not drink alcohol.
4. People today look to alcohol for what God can do for them as stated in

Ephesians 5:18.

- a. The verse says, *“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;”*
- b. That verse in **Ephesians 5:18** says to not be filled with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.

M. John the Baptist embodied **Ephesians 5:18**. John the Baptist was not drunk with wine, but John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit when it says in **Luke 1:15**.

1. The verse says, *“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.”*
2. For John the Baptist, it was a choice of either to be filled with alcoholic spirits or to be filled with the Spirit of God. John chose to be filled with the Spirit of God.

N. There was a consequence for John to be filled with the Spirit of God. That is stated in the following verse of **Luke 1:16**.

1. **Luke 1:15-16** says, *“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.¹⁵ And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.¹⁶”*
 - a. Everybody wants to know the secret to Jewish evangelism. How do you turn the Jewish people to the Lord their God?
 - b. The secret is in this verse when it says, *“He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost...and many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.”*
2. Being filled with the Spirit is the key of evangelism.
3. That is what John was. He was a man who was filled with the Spirit. He is not seen speaking in tongues or in a fit of a trance or slaying people in the spirit or causing people to fall backwards.

O. John is filled with the Spirit, and because of that, John turns many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

VII. Verse 5—*“Then went out to him Jerusalem”*

A. John is preaching in the wilderness, and we read what happened in **Matthew 3:5**.

1. The verse says, *“Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,”*

B. That is interesting that verse 5 does not say that the people from Jerusalem went out to John the Baptist, but it says that the city of Jerusalem went out to John in the wilderness.

C. That is painting the picture of how the whole city of Jerusalem was sick with sin. John in the wilderness had the remedy. The whole city of Jerusalem went out to the wilderness to get the cure from John the Baptist. The cure was repentance.

- D. That must have been quite a scene of all the city of Jerusalem flowing out of the city to John, and they would be filled with shame and guilt and maybe crying and confessing their sins as John baptized them.
- E. It is that picture of Jerusalem leaving that reminds us of what happened in Moses' day when the Jewish people were so full of sin that Moses moved the Tabernacle from inside the camp of the Jewish people to outside the camp.
 - 1. **Exodus 33:7** says, *"And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that every one which sought the LORD went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp."*
- F. When you see Jerusalem leaving the city like a repenting city, it is like seeing Jerusalem leave and flows outside the organized religion to find true forgiveness and cleansing from sin.
- G. This is a picture of the call to Jewish believers to leave Judaism in **Hebrews 13:13**.
 - 1. The verse says, *"Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."*
- H. In verse 5, there is an emphasis on all the people that did come out to John in Baptist in the wilderness.
 - 1. **Matthew 3:5** states, *"Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,"*
- I. That scene of all those people going out to John the Baptist is a picture of **Luke 16:16**.
 - 1. Verse 16 says, *"The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it."*

VIII. Verse 6—*"And were baptized of him in Jordan"*

- A. We can see this line formed of all these people as one by one we see them in verse 6.
 - 1. The verse says, *"And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."*
- B. **Zechariah 13:1** says, *"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."*
- C. There will be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Just like they did with John the Baptist, they will come to be baptized.
 - 1. The traditional way for baptism for the Jewish people is called the Mikvah, and it is not a sprinkling; it was a total immersion.
- D. Baptism here is a symbol of repentance where the whole body is immersed in water to indicate the desire to be cleansed from sin.
 - 1. That was the response of the people who heard John's preaching to repent; they were baptized.
 - 2. This baptism was a baptism of repentance.
- E. The Jewish baptism called the Mikvah had another meaning.
 - 1. Outside the city walls of Jerusalem, there was a place of several Mikvahs where water was channeled into pools that have steps going down into the them. This was for people to go into to be immersed in water.
 - 2. This was for groups who were following a particular teacher or rabbi.
 - 3. Religious Jewish people or the Orthodox characterize themselves by the teacher they follow.
 - a. For example, some Orthodox follow Nachman as their teacher while others follow Schneerson as their teacher.
 - 4. The same has been true for thousands of years. Some followed Gamiliel.
 - 5. When the followers came to the city walls of the city following their teacher, they would follow their teacher into the waters of the Mikvah and be baptized to that teacher.

- 6. That indicated that those followers were following the teaching of that rabbi.
- F. When these people came out of Israel to be baptized by John the Baptist, that meant that they were following John's teaching on the need to repent. They were confessing their sins; they were baptized to John the Baptist.
- G. When followers were baptized to Jesus of Nazareth, that meant that they were following the teachings of the Lord Jesus.
- H. Baptism was meant to show a final decision for a person that he would forever be devoted to his teacher.
- I. Now, baptism took on another meaning after the death of the Lord Jesus. Then, we are told how baptism took in a meaning of following the Lord Jesus into death to the world and life to God in **Romans 6:3-4**.
 - 1. The verses say, *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ³ Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."⁴*

IX. Verse 6—"In Jordan"

- A. From verse 6, we see that John was baptizing in the Jordan River.
 - 1. **Matthew 3:6** says, *"And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."*
- B. The Jordan River has a special significance. That was the place of Israel's entrance into the Promised Land when they were led by Joshua.
 - 1. That was a dramatic entrance where the priests carried the Ark, and God made the Jordan River to part like the Red Sea. The people walked through the river bed on dry ground while the waters of the Jordan River stood as a wall on either side while the priests stood in the middle of the river bed.
 - a. **Joshua 3:17** says, *"And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan."*
 - 2. There, God told Joshua to take 12 stones from the dried river bed and make a monument with them outside the river.
 - a. **Joshua 4:3** says, *"And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night."*
- C. The first significance to the Jordan River was the place where a new life started in the Promised Land.
 - 1. With repentance and confession of sin, the baptism in the Jordan River was the start of a new life with God.
- D. The other great event that happened in the Jordan River was with a Gentile Syrian captain named Naaman who was a leper.
 - 1. **2 Kings 5:1** says, *"Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper."*
- E. Naaman came to the prophet Elisha to be cleansed and Elisha told Naaman what to do in **2 Kings 5:10**.
 - 1. The verse says, *"And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean."*

F. When Naaman did that, he was cleansed in **2 Kings 5:14**.

1. **Verse 14** says, *“Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”*

G. So, these were the two meanings that the Jordan River had.

1. First, it was a place of a new beginning with God. That is what the people wanted when they came to John the Baptist to be baptized in the Jordan River.
2. Second, it was a place of cleansing, and that is what the people also wanted. They wanted to be cleansed from their sin when they came to John the Baptist to be baptized in the Jordan River.