



Lesson 4 December 26th, 2020

Called to Prepare the Way

MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

Study Scripture – Matthew 3:1-12

Background Scripture – Matthew 3; Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3

Key Verse:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!

Matthew 3:3

INTRODUCTION

The angel of God appeared and announced the imminent birth of both the Messiah and His Herald, (Luke 1-2). Neither the Messiah nor His Herald came with great national or extraordinary public displays of power and glory. The revelations of their birth however came in extremely significant but modest ways and were confined to relatively few people. This gives us a clue as to how God operates.

Nothing much is recorded of their childhood and their experiences as young adults. God chose to shroud this period of their lives in relative obscurity. There is no indication that outwardly they were different from other children, but we know that they grew in wisdom and reached the point where they were fully qualified to begin their ministry.

There is little said about the actual conception and birth of John the Baptist, except for that found in the Book of Luke. Suddenly however, John is revealed as a full-grown man, beginning his ministry of preaching in the wilderness. Almost instantly, the three-to-four-hundred-year silence of the prophetic voice was dramatically broken. God had left the nation without a prophet for very many years, Malachi being the last. Malachi spoke about the coming of this Herald or forerunner to the Messiah and then the long silence began.

How you feel if God placed you in such a difficult situation?

Would there be special Rewards for your successful completion of the Task?

Can you be sure the Holy Spirit would equip you for carrying out this great work?

Focusing of the life of Mary and Joseph and now on the life of John the Baptist will help us and give us the assurances we need.

During the long years of silence there was a steady degeneration in the life of the nation on all fronts. The political leaders were corrupt and played political games with the occupying power, Rome and with Herod their local appointee. The religious leaders were also corrupt and only had a façade of piety. The people had deceitful 'shepherds' and were themselves generally degenerate. Spiritual darkness reigned over the land and only in a few places could one find faithfulness and the true worship of God.

The announcement that pierced the darkness comes in our Study Text. The announcement was that the King of all creation had come and therefore it was time for the people of Israel and those of every nation that heard the call to give up their sovereignty and submit to His righteous reign.

In the ancient world, a herald of the court would “proclaim”, “preach”, or herald the arrival of the King. So, it was at this time, for the Lord was about to arrive to restore the remnant of the people from their idolatrous state and bring about a new exodus from sin. Those that heard and heeded the call would be marked out as repentant and would have to demonstrate this. This demonstration pointed to the identity of those who came to the Herald, and to the King. As we look at this act today, we will hopefully understand that the message of this Herald highlights the difference between *symbolic* and real baptism. When we speak about baptism then, we must remember that we are talking about more than a simple ritual which people undergo. The rite of water baptism demanded by the Herald was a symbol of something else, and it is this something else which constitutes the real meaning of baptism, the reality behind water baptism.

Note that the Herald would tie together the symbol and the reality. He said, and we paraphrase:

“I am baptizing you with water as a mark of your repentance from sin, as a sign of your confession of your sins, but this does not complete the meaning of baptism. Water baptism must be accompanied by belief in and commitment to the who was greater than John the Baptist. Consequently, John continued, there is one coming after me, who has not committed and will never commit any sins, one who is mightier than I, in fact, one whose sandals I am not even worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

The King when He came had to be baptized as this identified Him with His people. For Him then baptism was a matter of identification, and it was therefore most necessary.

As we study, we must never forget the importance of John the Baptist. Jesus Himself had said of John the Baptist in Matthew 11

“Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist”.

It should be obvious therefore that whatever John the Baptist said in his ministry is extremely important for it lays the foundation for the Gospel itself. It is hardly possible to really understand the Gospel without understanding clearly what John the Baptist is saying.

This therefore is one ***“crying in the wilderness”*** in fulfillment of the prophecy made 400 years before to the nation of Israel. The prophetic voice has been silent for 400 years and now it was solid again and so what John the Baptist is doing is the most important thing that was happening at this time. It was a time when there were other great men and important men like Tiberius Caesar the Roman Emperor, Pontius Pilate the procurator or governor of Judea, Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, Philip the tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas the religious leaders and High priest, and yet God the Father did not consider these men as important for He sent His word to John the Baptist.

Consider therefore that you might have what you call a lowly ministry but in the sight of God it will very well be of better quality than that of famous persons around you.

We sometimes forget that though there are important men in the Capitals of our country and abroad in foreign countries that what is really happening because of the decisions they make is



not truly significant though to our finite human minds it might appear so. What they are doing cannot be compared to the ministry of the word of God. Those rulers are supposed to be servants of God but often times they are really servants of Satan and so we have to be careful how we rank or rate them. Their doom is really fixed.

The burden given to John the Baptist by the Lord God Almighty is really therefore a proclamation to dying men and women for death always works in human beings from the day they were born. There is no more important task than that of pointing persons to the only true source of Life. Doing that will make you great in the sight of God.

The Context here is very important for the prophecy had stated that there would be a forerunner to the Suffering Servant of God who would come to do and to make the establishment of the Kingdom of God in a manifest way. The message to the people of Israel was to go back to the Covenant relationship that they should have remained in. They had been sent into Exile but despite this experience they had not really returned with a heartfelt change. So, the ministry of John the Baptist was to get them to go back to the Covenant relationship with their Lord God.

This of course makes the meaning of “repentance” somewhat different to when Gentiles are called to repent. Yes, there is a change of heart that is called for, but it is a change of heart to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But now we are looking at a call to return to the Covenant which they had known and which their fathers had known. The word meaning therefore would shift a little bit when we apply it to the ministry to Gentiles.

It is by “belief” in the Lord Jesus Christ that we Gentiles are taken into the Covenant. But these people to whom John speak were already into the Covenant. The problem was despite the very punishments they have suffered and the exile into which they had been placed, they were still disobedient to the terms of the Covenant and therefore they faced the wrath of God and destruction. They would in effect face a new exile and the destruction of their beloved Temple. For us therefore we will be called on by this Study to focus on the fact that the King is coming. He came already but He is coming again. We are challenged to repent, for the Kingdom of God has come and will come and we are called on to shown by our life that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ so that we will be taken into the covenant relationship with Him.

THE TEXT

Verse 1. It was the fullness of time. The Book of Luke gives us a precise time. It was the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, from the period when he was associated with Augustus Caesar in the government of the Empire. Pontius Pilate was Procurator in Judea, Herod was Tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, the region lying to the northeast of Palestine and extending up to Damascus, Lysanias was Tetrarch of Abilene.

At this time Annas the wealthy and wily Jewish powerbroker, was deposed from his post as High Priest, but still retained much of his power, probably as a deputy, officiating along with his son-in-law Caiaphas, who was installed as High Priest. The nation was broken up into different regions and was in servitude to the Romans. Even the High Priest owed his position to the Imperial power. The people of Israel had no power, and the laws of God held little sway. The land was in darkness. The political elite were interested in maintaining the integrity of the nation and in perpetuating their political power, with not much thought for the interest of God or the interest of the poor. Those that were in charge of religious life were more interested in maintaining their traditions, rather than in following the directions of Scripture. There were



frequent famines, economic distress, violent upheavals and troublesome expressions of nationalistic fervour, with no one to whom the people could turn for help.

We get a window into this disinterest and corruption when the Magi or Wise Men came to Jerusalem from their long arduous trip looking for the One that was born King of the Jews. They had seen His 'star' in the East and came to worship Him. Though the Magi were told that the prophecies recorded in the sacred Scrolls revealed that the Messiah King would be born in Bethlehem some five to seven miles away, no one bothered to go with the Magi to see the King that was born. Such was the degradation of the nation. The only interest was from Herod the Great who wanted to destroy any possible rival to his throne whether or not any Scripture said that there was a rival that would take over.

Suddenly, John the Baptist appeared, "proclaiming", doing the job of a herald, a matter of great importance. He preached in the 'wilderness of Judea', the desert valley of the Jordan, just a little north of Jerusalem. This was reasonably close to where he lived before. The area was sparsely populated and did not have many fields, great pastureland, or vineyards. It was certainly away from the populated areas where there would be more corruption and influence from Gentiles and paganism.

John's work is described as that of a herald. The work was to proclaim and publish whatever it was that the people should hear. Note that John's commission came from God and thus was a message with 'royal' authority. John the Baptist was a priest of the line of Aaron but apparently never served in the Temple. His commission was given in the wilderness, just as the Law of God was given to Israel in the wilderness. His business was preaching, and we note that it is by the 'foolishness' of preaching that the Kingdom of God comes into the hearts of men (1 Cor.1:18-21).

Verse 2. The preaching was all about the arrival of the Kingdom of God and the necessity of repentance. This was therefore not simply a call for an emotional feeling and feeling sorry for their sins. That might have been a wonderful feeling, but they were called on by John to treat repentance as a call to action, a return to the Covenant.

Remember that this is what God established with His people so that the Kingdom of God which reigns fully in Heaven would be on Earth as it is in Heaven. The work of Messiah would be to initiate the spiritual reign and made the people of God understand that God would always be fully in control and the disobedient Earth would be reined in. Those who want to draw distinctions between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are really doing so to make their theories fit with the plain teachings of Scripture.

The people John spoke to knew very well what the Kingdom of Heaven was all about for they expected to be in this Kingdom simply because they were the physical children of Abraham. They very well knew there were ethical, eschatological teachings in Scripture which made known that God's rule everywhere was real and continuous with no boundaries and with physical as well as spiritual elements.

His proclamation was first to the common people in the countryside, who, though they lived far away from the temptations of city life, and the political and religious hypocrisy of the capital, still needed to repent, give up their rebellion against the covenant and come to God for mercy. God did not consider them innocent.

The word 'repentance' comes from root words that mean a sinner hears and understands that he has been headed in the way of folly, madness, and death, and with hearing he grows wise



again. After examining the Greek and subsequently translated Latin root of the word, one writer puts it this way:

“Repentance then, implies that a measure of divine wisdom is communicated to the sinner, and that he thereby becomes wise to salvation, that his mind, purposes, opinions, and inclinations, are changed; and that; in consequence, there is a total change in his conduct. It needs scarcely be remarked, that, in this state, a man feels deep anguish of soul, because he has sinned against God, unfitted himself for heaven, and exposed his soul to hell. Hence, a true penitent has that sorrow, whereby he forsakes sin, not only because it has been ruinous to his own soul, but because it has been offensive to God.”

Note that the truly penitent have changed their thinking about God, Christ, sin and the world from what they held prior to coming to repentance. The mind undergoes a change and consequently their way of life changes. This is true sorrow for evils done. Care not to repeat those errors is important.

Repentance was necessary because the coming of Messiah was very near and it was a matter of urgency that people got right with God. The people needed to change their mindset, for they believed they were entitled and guaranteed entry in Messiah’s kingdom because they were children of Abraham, the one with whom Yahweh made an irrevocable Covenant.

John uses Daniel's great vision in Daniel 7:13-14 where the *Son of Man* comes in the clouds of glory to the *Ancient of Days*, to receive His appointment to reign over all peoples, nations, and languages, in an everlasting dominion. John declared that this *Kingdom of Heaven* was now at the door.

Men must therefore repent in order to obtain the mercy of God, and to save themselves from national judgment. They must personally repent, so that the Kingdom would be opened to them. They had to give up their complacency, superficial religiosity and hypocrisy.

This proclamation was a great inducement for the people to accept the pardon and forgiveness of God. The righteousness, peace, and joy to be obtained would be eternal and there would be purity in the worship of God and blessedness to worshipers.

Verse 3. John identified himself with a quotation from Isaiah 40:3-4, a prophecy that pointed to the coming of the gracious gospel of salvation for the people.

He was the herald and forerunner of the Christ, coming to prepare the way of the Lord. The idea of the ‘crier’ in the wilderness came from the practice of Eastern Kings, who before they went through the desert or on any journey, sent out people before them to prepare for their safe passage, opening passes, levelling the mountain pathways and precipices, and removing all impediments. Great expense was usually incurred. We should understand that generally speaking there were not roads in the ancient world comparable of our modern road system and it was only a specific area where Royal or military actions needed to take place that there was any real attempt to establish permanent roads. The practice of Rome to develop an extensive road network so that their armies could move quickly to maintain the peace of the Empire linking critically important areas therefore was a major change in ancient history.

John was likening his nation to a desert country, which had needed extensive spiritual preparation and a restoration of true worship. The nation was really a wilderness and the John was sent to prepare the way for the promised Messiah. The crooked ways of the heart had to be straightened or made straight.



The people John addressed were proud of their privileges as descendants of Abraham and the patriarchs. They did not think that their spiritual life had decayed to the point where they had lost all sensitivity to sin. Their difficulties had not humbled them nor changed their high opinions of themselves. The mountains of prejudice, pride, haughtiness, departure from the word of God, substitution of man-made rules, insensitivity to open sins, and the general lack of righteousness, had to be removed. The heart had to be bowed down to receive the Messiah and his righteousness.

They were in the crooked ways of sin, and the paths had to be made straight and prepared for Christ.

Verse 4. There had to be a radical departure from the style and way of life then in vogue among the people and John appeared in a peculiar way and style, in order to show them that the ways of God were totally different from their ways.

The prophets wore clothing of coarse or rough material, according to Zechariah 13:4. The prophet Elijah was clothed in an eye-catching way, according to 2 Kings 1:8, marking him as separate from the luxurious styles of the world and showing the self-denial of those who are committed to God.

Prophets were men who mortified the 'flesh' and did not delight in the things of the world. They were lowly in heart and did not use the adornment of clothing for their delight. John's clothing was very plain, made of camel's hair, held up with a leather girdle. He dressed similarly to Elijah. He did not wear the kind of impressive long flowing robes of the scribes nor the soft clothing worn in the court.

His food was also plain, consisting of locusts, which could either have been from the top of a special plant, or grasshoppers, which were regarded as clean and good for food. (See Leviticus 11:22.) He also used wild honey in his food. Nowadays dried locusts fried in honey are still consumed in the East.

Clearly, John did not think that divine and spiritual pleasures came from eating rich and luxurious food and dressing in the ornamental styles of the world. He was indifferent to them, rejecting the vanities of the world as being contrary to preparing the heart for the kingdom of God.

Ancient prophets were quite different from the "so-called modern prophets".

Verse 5. The Holy Spirit then did His unique work, drawing to John a significant portion of the people from Jerusalem, from all over Judea and from the region around the Jordan. These people were aware of their sins and so were revived and awakened. They flocked to hear John's preaching in great multitudes, and soon they heard the news that the Kingdom of Heaven would soon arrive. They held this great expectation, and they at least were ready for it, unlike the scribes and Pharisees. They so eagerly looked forward to the work of God that they went out to the wilderness to seek out John. They were attracted by the great glory that was to come to the nation.

They had a great need for they were suffering from sin, guilt, fear, and oppression. They came from all over for they knew that they had to change to suit Messiah. They did not want to keep on living in fear and uncertainty. They recognize that what John was saying had been spoken of in the Old Testament Scriptures and so they came in the wilderness to prepare and to get what God had promised them.



Note sadly however, that of the many that came, few seemed to have held on to the repentance they proclaimed, for when Jesus actually came, He met a relatively cool reception in Judea and around Jerusalem. They loved the healing and the miracles but little else. There were many hearers but few true believers. Many were affected for a while, but most did not subject themselves to the real power to enable true, godly living that comes with repentance.

Verse 6. The people who came and confessed their sins, receiving his doctrine, were baptized by John in the Jordan. **By so doing they testified that they believed that the Kingdom of Messiah was at hand. They would have confessed that they were sinners who needed cleansing. By accepting this 'Baptism of repentance' whose origin was in Heaven, they would have accepted that John was on a divine mission, and his baptism was different from all other previous baptisms.**

The people accepted the blame for their condition and that it rested on them and not on God. They cast their souls on the mercy of God for their salvation. The tense indicates that they were continuously confessing their sins as they were baptized. They knew what was required of them.

Note that the ministry of John the Baptist was not one where he split theological hairs, used tired clichés, catered to the follies of the spiritual leaders who obviously catered to their fleshly desires. John was blunt and straight to the point. His message was attractive because John did not say things that the Pharisees, the Sadducees and other religious and spiritual rulers had been saying over the years. It was clear to the people that they spoke a certain way, but they did not say words that came from the living God. They like many leaders today lived to benefit themselves.

The practice of baptizing was characteristic of John. We know that Jews loved baptism, but this was confined to Gentiles who wanted to become proselytes and come into the Jewish community. If a Gentile wanted to come into the community, he would be baptized by immersing himself and he would be circumcised and then he would offer a gift to the Temple. But John's baptism was not like that at all for there was no mention about circumcision or the individual immersing himself. John did a strange thing of baptizing Jews, but they accepted it as necessary as a sign that they were changed. They had repented because they understood that they had left the terms of the Covenant and so they were no been baptized to show that there was remission of their sins. They knew that the word "**repent**" was a covenantal term meaning "to turn" or "to return" to the Lord which meant returning to the covenant promises that God had given them.

John was helping them to change their mind, cease their revolt, and come back to the blessings of the unconditional covenantal promises that have been made to them.

Verse 7-10. It was not only the ordinary people that came to the baptism. Some of the Pharisees and the Sadducees also showed up. The Pharisees were a very small but influential separatist group that had worked strenuously for the nation to live by the revealed Law. They considered themselves to be holy persons who lived strictly according to the law, rejecting all pagan influences. They did much to restore obedience to the Scriptures, but like many other religious groups, they degenerated, lost sight of their original principles, and by the time of Christ, mostly had a form of godliness, living by rules without the Spirit of God.

Jesus assessed their behaviour as making the outside of the cup and platter clean, while inside was filthy. They observed rules, but there was no evidence of the Spirit of God.



The Sadducees were very different from the Pharisees. They accepted a very circumscribed interpretation of the five books of Moses, but denied the existence of angels and spirits, denied the resurrection of the dead, and rejected all divine influence and inspiration, such as those of the prophets. Their view of Scripture rejected all supernatural influences, and their style of accommodating themselves to the ways of the world made it easy for them to accept the imperial rule of Rome.

Their members were generally of the aristocrat party and they were considered to be materialists and deists. They had no qualms about cooperating with the hated Romans and Herodian overlords and were considered to be compromisers.

John began his harsh welcome to them by calling them venomous and poisonous snakes. They were obviously malicious, and the enemy of everything that John considered good. Their fathers were wicked, and they were following in the steps of their fathers. One writer explains the force of John's attack on these groups who though they believed differently were nevertheless all away from God's teachings:

“John's hearers were not all good descendants of their ancestors anyway. “Viper” was certainly an insult, and *brood of vipers* (offspring of vipers) carries the insult further. In the ancient Mediterranean many people thought of vipers as mother killers. In the fifth century B.C. Herodotus declared that newborn Arabian vipers chewed their way out of their mother's wombs, killing their mothers in the process. Herodotus believed that they did so to avenge their fathers, who were slain by the mothers during procreation (Herod. Hist 3.109). Later writers applied his words to serpents everywhere (Aelian *On Animals* 1.24; Pliny *N.H.* 10.170; Plut. *Divine Vengeance* 32, Mor.567F). Calling John's hearers vipers would have been an insult but calling them *a brood of vipers* accused them of killing their own mothers, indicating the utmost moral depravity. That Matthew applies this phrase to religious leaders may be unfortunately significant”.

Do not forget therefore that these were religious men, religious leaders of the day but there was disobedience existing in the heart of the religious. Do not forget therefore that men can be like Judas who heard all of Christ's sermons. It is therefore possible for us to hear a lot of preaching, attend a lot of meetings, attend many Bible Study sessions, and still be called a generation of vipers.

John declared that they were in danger of the wrath to come and wanted to know who had warned them of the frightful things that were in store for them. John was declaring that they had deceived themselves, and were deceiving the people, but God intended to unmask them and show them up.

He then stated that since they were warned to flee from the terrors that God had in store for them, and since they were professing repentance, and seemed agreeable to accept the doctrine and baptism of repentance, they should be prepared to show that they were truly repenting in their hearts.

If they were true penitents, they would show this by forsaking all their sins and living a life showing the goodness that God rooted in the Scriptures.

One writer gives all of us this warning:

“Those are not worthy the name of penitents, or their privileges, who say they are sorry for their sins, and yet persist in them. They that profess repentance, as all that are baptized do, must be and act as become penitents, and never do anything unbecoming a penitent sinner.



It becomes penitents to be humble and low in their own eyes, to be thankful for the least mercy, patient under the greatest affliction, to be watchful again all appearances of sin, and approaches toward it, to abound in every duty, and to be charitable in judging others.”

John cautioned the Pharisees and Sadducees not to make a big deal about the fact that they were descendants of Abraham. They should resist depending on foolish thoughts of conceit, for all things which did not conform to the word of God were false and were fallacies which lead to delusions and deceptions. Those commonly accepted myths were lies that would lead to their destruction.

They were not to fool themselves into thinking that because they were Jews, they were a holy and peculiar people and therefore did not need repentance. Their relation to Abraham and their position in the Covenant would not save them from judgment and secure them from the *wrath to come*. Even though they were Abraham's seed, because of their sins and impenitence, they would still come under the wrathful judgment of God. One's life must match one's profession and repentance had to be demonstrated in practice. So, for those expecting that they can simply appeal to their poverty, intellectual weakness, or ethnic character, or descent from Abraham or anyone else they are barking up the wrong tree. Ezekiel Chapter 31 had already warned Israel about a tree being cut down.

In addition, God would raise up children to Abraham or from the very stones and so those listening to him should not take their status as God's people for granted as they had long done. So, we should all remember that, or ethnic origin is insufficient to guarantee salvation unless of course our life is accompanied by righteousness. Amos 3:2 and 9:7 as well as other Scriptures made that clear.

Salvation demands personal commitment. Do not take your spiritual status for granted because you might be Jewish, Catholic, Baptist, evangelical, Black, White, Chinese, Indian or anything else.

We note that visible church membership does not in and of itself protect one from the Judgment. We must repent and live a life of repentance.

John warned that there was not a moment to spare, for even as he spoke, God was about to destroy anyone that did not obey Him. They were marked for destruction. God intended a quick judgment, and this could only be avoided by speedy and sincere repentance. (Note that nations were often represented as forests and trees. See Jeremiah 46: 22-24 and Ezekiel 31: 3, 11, 12). Under this metaphor the nation of Israel was the tree, and the Romans were the axe. If the nation of Israel did not repent, they were doomed. God wanted good fruit. If there were no good fruit, God would disown the people as being unworthy, and would cast them into the fire of his wrath.

Verse 11. The herald then pointed the leaders of the nation and the people to the coming Messiah. His baptism of repentance was designed to turn people to the One that was much greater than he.

John clearly indicated that Christ was pre-eminent and that everything he did was designed to magnify Christ. God gave Him power and a Great Commission, but this was nothing to be compared to the power and authority of the Christ who was coming.

Though John was in the service of the Messiah or the Christ, he was not fit to be even doing the work of the vilest of slave in terms of personal service to Messiah. His ministry would not



compare to that of the Lord Jesus Christ ministry. He is in fact saying that his baptism with water unto repentance was symbolic and preparatory, being a baptism in water. But there was a baptism coming that was real and final.

Fire was the end.

Verse 12. The Messiah was coming, and it was in His power to baptize with the Holy Ghost. Judgment was in His hands. He had the wisdom to see everything in their true light and would separate the true believers from the worthless hypocrites.

He would separate the true from the false, destroy the false, but gather the true believers into the Kingdom where they would be safe from corruption. No one could escape His searching eye, or His refining fire.

One writer comment: **“To baptize with fire means to bring the fires of judgment, which will purify the pure, but destroy the wicked like ‘chaff’. Chaff is the worthless residue of a wheat stalk after the kernel of grain has been removed. These proud and unrepentant leaders are just as useless to God...**

John’ metaphorically describes God separating the true and the false, the repentant and unrepentant, in a future judgment. This thorough judgment will result in the preservation of the believing Israelites and the destruction of the unbelieving. The barn probably refers to the kingdom and the “unquenchable fire” to the endless duration and the agonizing nature of this punishment”.

They were warned that they could not escape the consequences of sin and hypocrisy.

There has been much discussion about whether the image of “fire” means purification as in Isaiah 1 and Isaiah 4 or alternatively Judgment as it does in Isaiah 26 and Isaiah 65. It seems highly unlikely that John meant that the Pharisees and the Sadducees would receive the Holy Spirit and be purified. Some very likely would be baptized with the Spirit and some would be baptized with fire meaning they would be judged.

The winnowing fork was used to cast wheat in the air so that the wind would blow the chaff or rubble away and the grain would fall to the ground and be gathered together while the chaff would be burned.

Some argue that the judgment was symbolized by unquenchable fire, or eternal judgment while others believe that when the Text says “burnt up” it simply means unquenchably hot which would lead to some people being purified but they will survive.

We should however remember that there is a wrath of God that will come but the problem is that we ignore or disregard it because it is not something that necessarily will come in a dramatic way immediately. But the trouble is that the wrath of God has already been revealed according to Romans 1 and many of the things that happen to us and which we see happening around us are really manifestations, though quiet manifestations, of the wrath of God which resulted in men being confirmed in their sinful practices.

This wrath of God is certain and is terrible and one cannot fight against it. It is fair and well deserved.

The only way to survive is to take swift and immediate action to flee.

One should never be foolish enough to think that **fleeing** will help except it is **fleeing** into the hands of the one Saviour that can help. Jesus came of His own accord to bring Light. John the Baptist therefore has brought something which will prepare us for the Great Light that has



come to all men that are in darkness. We therefore pray that God will open our eyes to see the Light.

CONCLUSION

In the same way as Mary and Joseph are examples for us, so also John is an example for us. Follow them. It appears that there was to be diligence in the Christian life.

John's honourable position came from his role as pointing to the Messiah.

We too will have great honour, even greater than the honour given to John, by pointing men to the gracious revelation of Christ. The greatest thing we can do is to point men directly to Christ Himself. We have a full revelation of Christ, having seen Him come, live, minister, die, be resurrected, and ascended to God. We must carry this full message to the world, and for that we will be greatly honoured.

John dedicated himself to the service of God. As a servant of God, committed to God, he rejected the things of the world. John showed that the standards of the world, its style, its preferences, and the way it operates, are contrary to the ways of God. The world of intellectual spirituality and materialism in Jerusalem had caught the leaders in a bear trap and they had done nothing about that. They thought that this simply dressed John living in the wilderness could not really have been sent by God. Those that might have thought that would have to be silent for the people in power would destroy them.

But it is clear that this lesson is a difficult one for people to learn, even if they profess to be believers. Apparently the 'tug' of the world is all too strong. The *narrow way* is still not the way of choice. The *broad way* still seems to be the most attractive.

It has been pointed out by one commentator that-

"The great commendation of John the Baptist was, that God owned his ministry, and made it wonderfully successful for the breaking of the ice, and the preparing of people for the kingdom of heaven.

From the days of the first appearing of John the Baptist, until now (which was not much above two years), a great deal of good was done; so quick was the motion when it came near the Christ the Center... Since that time "the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it". Multitudes are wrought upon by the ministry of John and became his disciples."

The ministry of John was the beginning of the Gospel. Now the Word of God Himself was here, and John clearly showed the way to Him, the Light of the world, and the Lamb of God.

He spoke the truth irrespective of the corruption and the pressures around him from leaders and people. He worked without fainting to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. He spoke the truth at all times, and Jesus confirmed that the work of John was to be praised.

