

Matthew 3:1-10 – John the Baptist

In a relatively short time, Jesus's life was the fulfillment of at least five prophecies. He had the right ancestry to sit on the throne of king David. He was born of a virgin and would be called "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14). He was born in Bethlehem, the place where the Messiah was prophesied to be born (Micah 5:2). He was God's son called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1). Herod's attempt to kill him fulfilled the prophesied weeping of Rachel (Jeremiah 31:15). From chapter 2 to chapter 3, Matthew fast forwarded about three decades.

Read Matthew 3:1-6.

In verse 1, who appeared on the scene? ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV all have "came". BDAG says that the word in this context means "make a public appearance". Where did he appear? The wilderness of Judea is east of Jerusalem and extends to the Dead Sea. It includes southern parts of the Jordan River where the Jordan River eventually flows into the Dead Sea. When did John begin his ministry? See Luke 3:1-2. The more common dates are 27, 28 or 29 AD. William Hendriksen puts the date as early as 26 AD. Luke has details about John's background. See Luke 1:5-25, 57-80. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all refer to John at some point as "John the Baptist". We don't know if he was a Southern Baptist, GARBC Baptist, or other. That is a joke! We know he was Presbyterian. That is also a joke! The word "Baptist" is only used in the NT of John. Interestingly the Gospel of John only refers to him as John and never "John the Baptist". (3:1)

In verse 2, what was John's message? The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is unique to Matthew. That phrase does not appear in any other book of the Bible. It appears 32 times in Matthew. Matthew also uses the phrase "kingdom of God" 4 or 5 times (depending on what translation you use). That is in comparison to Luke who used the phrase, "kingdom of God", 32 times. ESV, KJV, and LSB have "is at hand". NASB and NIV have "has come near". BDAG says that the word in this context means "to draw near in a temporal sense". (3:2)

In verse 3, what passage from Isaiah was quoted? See Isaiah 40:3. Matthew stated that this passage was written about John the Baptist. This OT passage is so significant that it was quoted in all four Gospels: Mt 3:3, Mk 1:3, Lk 3:4, and Jn 1:23. In John 1:23, John quoted part of this passage in response to the question "who are you?" Matthew's quote follows the LXX with the exception of "his paths" in place of "paths of our God". What is the significance of this passage? (3:3)

In verse 4, what did John wear and eat? Who else in the Bible shared his sense of fashion? See 2 Kings 1:8. When Ahaziah, king of Samaria, heard that a man wore a garment of hair and a leather belt around his waist he immediately knew who it was. Mark 1:6 has a similar description of John the Baptist. It is still a tradition among some Jews to have an empty cup for Elijah at the Passover meal. Some open the door to see if Elijah has come. They do this because they understand that Elijah will be the one who comes before the Messiah. See Malachi 3:1 which Mark, in 1:2, cites before the Isaiah 40:3 quotation. Also see Malachi 4:5. Jesus explained the John / Elijah link in Mt 11:7-14 and 17:9-13. (3:4)

In verse 5, the wilderness of Judea, where John was, does not sound like a vacation destination. Where did people come from to see John in the wilderness? In 11:7, Jesus asked the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see?" Why do you think they went to see John. See what Jesus' answer was in 11:9-11. (3:5)

In verse 6, what did the people do when they came to John? What are some examples in the OT when a large number of people publicly confessed their sins? See 1 Samuel 7:3-6, Nehemiah 9:1-3, and Ezra 10. What do these passages have in common, if anything? (3:6)

Read Matthew 3:7-10.

In verse 7, who did John notice in the crowd and call out? What was John's opinion of the religious leaders who came to him? See 12:34 and 23:33. What was the coming wrath? (3:7)

In verse 8, what did John command the Pharisees and Sadducees to do? Do you think the Jewish religious leaders were baptized by John and confessed their sins? See 21:23, 31-32. Why do you think they come to John? (3:8)

In verse 9, what did the Jewish leaders place their confidence in? Why was it a false confidence? (3:9)

In verse 10, what did John warn the Jewish leaders about? What was John talking about? The second half of the verse is the same as what Jesus said in 7:19. (3:10)

If we peek ahead at the first part of verse 11, John said, "I baptize you with water for repentance". John prepared the way of the Lord by baptizing with water and preaching repentance and the coming Messianic kingdom. Would you add or subtract anything to the previous statement? John Calvin believed that John the Baptist essentially administered the sacrament of Christian baptism. See verse 11 of <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/matthew/3.htm>. R. C. Sproul said "This was not New Testament baptism. This was not the baptism that is the covenant sign, which Jesus instituted. This was preparatory baptism." See <https://learn.ligonier.org/sermons/ministry-john-baptist>. Do you generally agree with Calvin or do you generally agree with Sproul?