

Preparing the Way

Key Verse: *“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.”*
—*Matthew 3:3*

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 3:1-12

JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS given the honor of announcing the long-promised Savior. John rejoiced in this privilege, saying of himself, “the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.”—John 3:29

In the Bible there is a clear distinction between the faithful people of God who lived prior to and after Pentecost. Those living before Pentecost, such as John the Baptist, were called “friends” or “servants” of God. (James 2:23; Heb. 3:5) God’s people who have lived since Pentecost are called “sons of God.” (John 1:12) They are called “sons” because they are begotten of the Holy Spirit to a new nature and will, if they prove themselves faithful unto death, receive “immortality” as spirit beings in the “first resurrection.”—Rom. 2:7; 8:14; I John 3:1; Rev. 20:6

God chose John the Baptist, a rugged character, which was reflected in his simple clothing and diet, to announce that Messiah had come. His fortitude and complete devotion to God enabled him to be independent of all religious groups among the Jews and to freely preach. (Matt. 3:4) John’s mission was to arouse the people of Israel concerning the coming of Jesus, their promised Deliverer, and that they should prepare themselves by

repenting, turning from sin, and thus symbolize their heart reformation by being baptized.—vss. 2,6

John declared to the religious leaders of the Jews: “The axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” (vs. 10) This was a figurative way of stating that the testing time for the Jewish nation had come. Only those who bore good fruit in their characters and lives would now be recognized by God as true Israelites. The remainder would be cut off and go into the symbolic fire of tribulation and the destruction of their national existence. Nevertheless, God has a plan for Israel’s recovery, which will come about through the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth in due time.—Mic. 4:2; Zech. 8:22,23

The Jewish nation, as a whole, did not recognize nor accept Jesus as the Messiah. However, some individuals did. The Apostle John states that Jesus “came unto his own [nation of Israel], and his own received him not. But as many as received him [individually], to them gave he power to become the sons of God.”—John 1:11,12

John the Baptist’s preparatory work was followed by the greater teachings and higher baptism which Jesus instituted. Indeed, John prophesied of Jesus: “He who is coming after me is mightier, ... he will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire.” (Matt. 3:11, *James Moffatt Translation*) Messiah’s baptism, John said, would be of two kinds. Faithful “Israelites indeed” would be baptized “with the holy Spirit.” However, the unfaithful, non-fruitbearing would experience a baptism of “fire,” symbolic of the trouble which ultimately resulted in Israel’s national destruction for a time.

Paul explains that when the spiritual seed, the “sons of God,” shall be completed, the blessing of the Lord shall proceed from and through them to the natural seed, Israel, and to all the families of the earth.—Gal. 3:16,27-29; Rom. 11:25-32; Gen. 12:3; 22:18