

Proclaimed in Baptism

Key Verse: *“Lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*
—Matthew 3:17

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 3

JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS

the forerunner of Jesus and, in preparation for that greater ministry soon to come, he went about preaching repentance to the Jewish people, so that their hearts and minds would be in a proper attitude to receive the Gospel message of Christ. John was “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.”—Matt. 3:3

As John ‘prepared the way’ for the people to receive Jesus by preaching repentance, he exhorted them to do two things. First, he encouraged them to confess their sins. (vs. 6) This was important because it was necessary for the Jews to realize that, although the Law Covenant and its ceremonies typically cleansed them from year to year, it could not truly take away sin. By confessing their sins, they would give testimony of this realization and be in a proper frame of mind to receive Jesus—the only one through whom a true release from sin would be obtainable.

John’s second admonition to the people was that they “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.” (vs. 8) In other words, not only should they confess the fact that they were still sinners, but they should also demonstrate a desire to change their ways by examining their

words, actions, and course of life, and develop ‘fruitage’ which would give evidence that they were sincere in their repentance.

As John gave these admonitions to the people, he particularly warned the Jewish leaders that they were not excluded from these things, and if they did not comply they would be subject to God’s wrath and cut off from his favor.—Matt. 3:7,10

John instructed the people that they give public witness of their repentance by water baptism, but reminded them that there was a much greater baptism yet to come by the one who was to follow him—Jesus Christ. John states, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire.” (vs. 11) He further said that the one to follow him would execute God’s wrath, spoken of earlier, by burning “the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (vs. 12) This was symbolically speaking of the cutting off from special favor those of the Jewish nation who did not come to repentance.

The final four verses of Matthew, chapter 3, specifically identify Jesus as the one who would follow John. He, too, came to John, as many people had, to be baptized. However, his was not to be a baptism unto repentance, for as a perfect man he had no sin to repent of. Jesus’ baptism, recorded in Matthew 3:13-15, was symbolic of his full and complete consecration to do his Father’s will, even unto death. This was shown symbolically by his being lowered into the water by John—‘buried’ into sacrificial death. Being raised out of the water gave indication of his begetting as a New Creature by God’s Holy Spirit, and was visibly shown by a dove lighting upon him. (vs. 16) Our Key Verse shows that God was pleased with this entire arrangement, and thus Christ’s redemptive work could begin. ■