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By Dan Maines

Matthew 3

Matthew 3:1-2

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

† John announces that the kingdom of heaven is not far off but near, ready to break into history. His message of repentance is covenantal, calling Israel to turn back to God before judgment

fell.

† Josephus mentions John as a righteous man who urged the Jews to practice virtue and baptism (Antiquities 18.116-117). His influence was widely known and respected.

† To us today, it shows that repentance is the entry point into the kingdom. The kingdom has come, and we live within its blessings because it was truly at hand then, not postponed.

Matthew 3:3

For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "The voice of one calling out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!'"

† Isaiah 40:3 foretold a forerunner preparing the way for the Lord. Matthew identifies John as that voice, declaring that Yahweh Himself was coming in the person of Christ.

† The Dead Sea Scrolls community also cited Isaiah 40:3 to describe their own mission in the wilderness (1QS 8.13-14), but Matthew shows that John was the true fulfillment.

† To us today, this proves God's promises were fulfilled in that generation. John prepared the way, and the Lord came in judgment and salvation.

Matthew 3:4

Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

† John's clothing and lifestyle reflect Elijah, who also wore a garment of hair and a leather belt (2 Kings 1:8). This fulfills Malachi 4:5 that Elijah would come before the day of the Lord.

† Early church fathers like Tertullian pointed out John's austere life as evidence of his prophetic calling (On Baptism 10).

† To us today, it shows that God's messengers often stand apart from worldly luxury. True service demands devotion, not indulgence.

Matthew 3:5-6

At that time Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

† John drew massive crowds, proving Israel was in expectation of the Messiah. Baptism was a sign of cleansing, but here it symbolized preparation for imminent covenant judgment.

† Josephus confirms that John called people to righteousness and baptism, which stirred great attention (Antiquities 18.116-117).

† To us today, it shows that repentance must precede renewal. The multitudes who responded foreshadow the new covenant community being formed.

Matthew 3:7-9

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance; and do not assume that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children for Abraham."

† John confronts the religious elite, exposing their hypocrisy. Their claim to Abrahamic descent was worthless without true repentance. The coming wrath refers to the covenant judgment of AD 70.

† The Mishnah shows Pharisees prided themselves on lineage and outward observance (Mishnah Sotah 5:2). John destroys that false security.

† To us today, this proves heritage or religion cannot save. Only true repentance and faith in Christ matter.

Matthew 3:10

And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is being cut down and thrown into the fire.

† Judgment was imminent. The axe was already at the root, not delayed for thousands of years. The unfruitful trees represented Israel's corrupt leaders and system.

† Josephus records the coming destruction of Jerusalem as a fiery judgment, cutting off the nation (Wars 6.271). John's prophecy points directly to this.

† To us today, it confirms that God keeps His word. The judgment John announced did come, and the kingdom was established.

Matthew 3:11-12

"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

† John distinguishes his baptism from Christ's. Jesus would bring the Spirit for the faithful and fiery judgment for the unrepentant. The imagery of wheat and chaff depicts covenant separation.

† Origen emphasized that the Spirit and fire both purify and judge (Commentary on Matthew 10.23).

† To us today, it means Christ's kingdom is both blessing and judgment. Those in Him receive life, those rejecting Him face fire.

Matthew 3:13-15

Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan, coming to John to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have the need to be baptized by You, and yet You are coming to me?" But Jesus, answering, said to him, "Allow it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

† Jesus was sinless, but His baptism identified Him with His people. He fulfilled righteousness by entering fully into their covenant experience, preparing to bear their sins.

† Irenaeus explained that Christ sanctified the waters of baptism by His submission (Against Heresies 1.21.2).

† To us today, it shows Christ's humility and obedience. He fulfills the law on our behalf.

Matthew 3:16-17

After He was baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and settling on Him, and behold, a voice from the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

† This is the public confirmation of Jesus as Messiah. The Spirit anoints Him, and the Father's voice declares Him the Son. Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1 echo in these words.

† Eusebius wrote that the baptism marked the beginning of Christ's mission, sealed by the Spirit (Ecclesiastical History 1.3).

† To us today, it assures us that Jesus is the true Son of God, anointed to fulfill all prophecy.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

Source Index

† Josephus, Antiquities 18.116-117; Wars 6.271

† Dead Sea Scrolls: 1QS 8.13-14

† Tertullian, On Baptism 10

† Mishnah, Sotah 5:2

† Origen, Commentary on Matthew 10.23

† Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1.21.2

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 1.3

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