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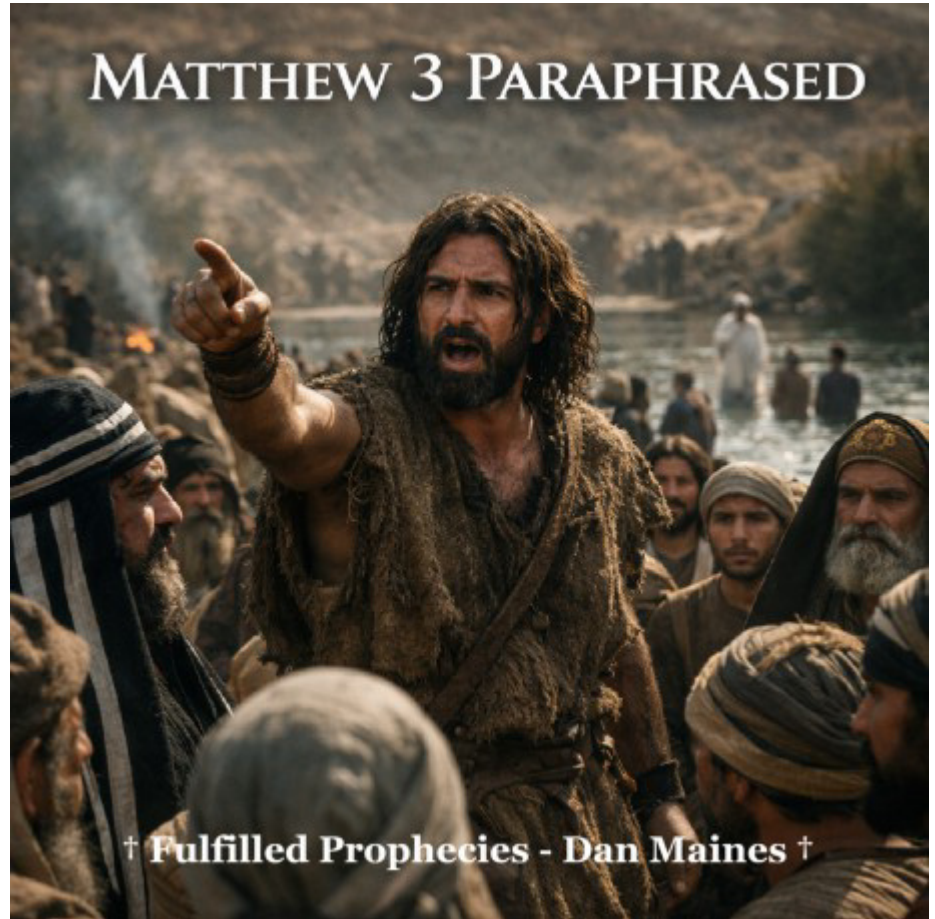
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Matthew 3 Paraphrased



By Dan Maines

Matthew 3 Paraphrased

Introduction

† Matthew 3 introduces John the Baptist and the beginning of the public call for Israel to repent before the coming judgment that would fall on that generation. John wasn't preaching a new religion, he was preparing the covenant people for the arrival of their Messiah and the closing of the Old Covenant age (Malachi 3:1; Luke 1:16-17).

† His message was urgent because the kingdom of heaven was drawing near. In the fulfilled perspective this points to the approaching climax of redemptive history that would reach its completion in the first century with the judgment of Jerusalem and the full establishment of Christ's kingdom (Matthew 16:27-28; Matthew 24:34).

† The events of this chapter show the transition from the prophetic expectation of the Old Covenant into the revealed ministry of Christ. John stands as the final Old Covenant prophet preparing the way for the Messiah (Malachi 4:5-6; Luke 7:26-28).

Matthew 3:1

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, preaching to the people.

† John emerges in the wilderness because the wilderness had always been a place of preparation and renewal in Israel's history. Israel came through the wilderness when they first entered covenant with God (Exodus 19:1-6).

† His ministry fulfilled the prophecy of a messenger who would prepare the way for the Lord before the coming day of judgment (Malachi 3:1).

† Luke confirms that John came in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the people for the Lord (Luke 1:16-17).

Matthew 3:2

He was saying, Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is about to arrive.

† Repentance means a change of heart and direction. Israel needed to turn back to God because the promised kingdom was drawing near in their generation (Matthew 4:17).

† The phrase kingdom of heaven refers to the reign of God being established through the Messiah and his covenant people (Daniel 2:44).

† Jesus later confirmed the same message that the kingdom was near during that generation (Matthew 10:7).

Matthew 3:3

This was the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah when he said, A voice is calling out in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the Lord, make his paths straight.

† Matthew directly connects John's ministry with Isaiah's prophecy showing that he was the promised forerunner of the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3).

† Preparing the way meant calling Israel to repentance so they would be ready to receive the Messiah.

† The language also reflects the ancient practice of clearing roads before the arrival of a king.

Matthew 3:4

John wore clothing made from camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

† John's clothing deliberately reflected the appearance of Elijah the prophet (2 Kings 1:8).

† This visual connection reinforced that John fulfilled the prophecy that Elijah would come before the day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5).

† His simple lifestyle showed separation from the corrupt religious leadership of Jerusalem.

Matthew 3:5

People from Jerusalem, all Judea, and the entire region around the Jordan were going out to him.

† John's message spread quickly because the people sensed that something significant was happening in Israel.

† The gathering crowds show that many were expecting the arrival of the Messiah during that time.

† Josephus also records the widespread influence of John the Baptist among the Jewish people.

Matthew 3:6

They were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.

† Baptism symbolized cleansing and repentance. It showed a person's desire to turn away from sin and return to God.

† Confession of sins demonstrated that repentance involved open acknowledgment of wrongdoing (Proverbs 28:13).

† This preparation pointed forward to the greater cleansing that would come through Christ.

Matthew 3:7

When John saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism he said to them, You brood of vipers, who warned you to escape the coming wrath?

† John directly confronts the religious leaders because they represented the corruption that had overtaken Israel.

† The coming wrath refers to the judgment that would soon fall upon Jerusalem and the temple system (Matthew 23:36).

† Jesus later used the same language when rebuking these same leaders (Matthew 23:33).

Matthew 3:8

Therefore produce fruit that shows true repentance.

† Genuine repentance produces visible change in a person's life.

† The prophets had long warned Israel that outward religion without true obedience was worthless (Isaiah 1:16-17).

† Jesus later taught that a tree is known by its fruit (Matthew 7:16).

Matthew 3:9

Do not assume you can say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones.

† John challenges the idea that physical descent from Abraham guaranteed covenant blessing.

† God has always been able to raise up faithful people beyond biological lineage (Romans 9:6-8).

† This statement foreshadows the inclusion of the nations into God's covenant family.

Matthew 3:10

The axe is already lying at the root of the trees. Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

† This imagery speaks of imminent judgment.

† The trees represent Israel's leadership and those who refused repentance.

† The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 would bring that warning to fulfillment.

Matthew 3:11

I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one coming after me is greater than I am. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

† John clearly distinguishes his preparatory ministry from the greater work of Christ.

† The baptism with the Holy Spirit points to the outpouring that began at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

† The fire refers to judgment that would purify and separate the faithful from the unfaithful (Malachi 3:2-3).

Matthew 3:12

His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will thoroughly clear his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

† The imagery of threshing shows separation between the faithful and the unfaithful within Israel.

† Wheat represents those who received the Messiah.

† Chaff represents those who rejected him and faced judgment during that generation.

Matthew 3:13

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John in order to be baptized by him.

† Jesus approaches John publicly marking the beginning of his earthly ministry.

† Though sinless, Jesus identifies with the people he came to redeem.

† This moment publicly reveals the Messiah to Israel.

Matthew 3:14

But John tried to stop him, saying, I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?

† John understood the superiority of Christ.

† His hesitation shows his recognition of Jesus' authority and holiness.

† Even the greatest prophet recognized that the Messiah stood above him.

Matthew 3:15

But Jesus answered him, Allow it now, because this is the proper way for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then John permitted him.

† Jesus submits to baptism to fulfill God's redemptive plan.

† His obedience demonstrates perfect righteousness.

† This act also identifies him as the representative of his people.

Matthew 3:16

After being baptized, Jesus immediately came up from the water, and the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and resting on him.

† The descent of the Spirit confirms Jesus as the anointed Messiah.

† This moment fulfills the prophecy that the Spirit would rest upon the chosen servant of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2).

† It publicly reveals the divine approval of Christ's mission.

Matthew 3:17

And a voice from heaven said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

† The Father's voice confirms Jesus as the Son of God.

† This declaration echoes the messianic language of Psalm 2:7.

† It also fulfills Isaiah's prophecy about the servant who pleases the Lord (Isaiah 42:1).

Historical References

† Josephus recorded that John the Baptist had a powerful influence among the Jews and gathered large crowds because of his call to righteousness.

† Justin Martyr wrote that John prepared the people for the coming of Christ by calling them to repentance.

† Eusebius later affirmed that John stood as the final prophet announcing the arrival of the Messiah.

How It Applies To Us Today

† John's message still reminds us that repentance is the doorway into God's kingdom.

† It shows that religious identity alone doesn't save anyone, true faith produces real fruit.

† It reminds us that Christ is the center of God's redemptive plan and the one we must follow.

Q & A Appendix

Q Why was John called the Baptist?

A Because he baptized people as a sign of repentance and preparation for the coming Messiah (Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:4).

Q Why did Jesus get baptized if he had no sin?

A He did it to fulfill righteousness and publicly begin his mission as the Messiah (Matthew 3:15).

Q What does baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire mean?

A It refers to Christ bringing both spiritual renewal to believers and judgment upon the unrepentant (Acts 2:1-4; Malachi 3:2-3).

Q Who were the Pharisees and Sadducees that John rebuked?

A They were two major religious leadership groups in Israel during the first century. The Pharisees focused on strict tradition and oral law, while the Sadducees controlled much of the temple leadership. John rebuked them because they relied on their status rather than true repentance (Matthew 3:7-9; Matthew 23:1-3).

Q What did John mean when he said God could raise up children for Abraham from stones?

A John was teaching that covenant membership wasn't based on physical ancestry. God could raise up faithful people by His power, meaning faith and obedience mattered more than lineage (Matthew 3:9; Romans 9:6-8).

Q What does the axe at the root of the trees represent?

A It represents the coming judgment that was about to fall upon

unrepentant Israel. The warning pointed to the destruction that would come upon Jerusalem and the temple system in that generation (Matthew 3:10; Matthew 23:36; Luke 21:20-22).

Q What does the wheat and chaff imagery mean?

A Wheat represents those who received Christ and entered the kingdom, while chaff represents those who rejected Him and faced judgment. This separation was fulfilled during the events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 3:12; Matthew 13:30; Matthew 24:34).

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

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Source Index

† Matthew 3:1-17; Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3; Luke 1:16-17; Matthew 16:27-28

† Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 18.5.2; Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho; Eusebius, Church History 1.11

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