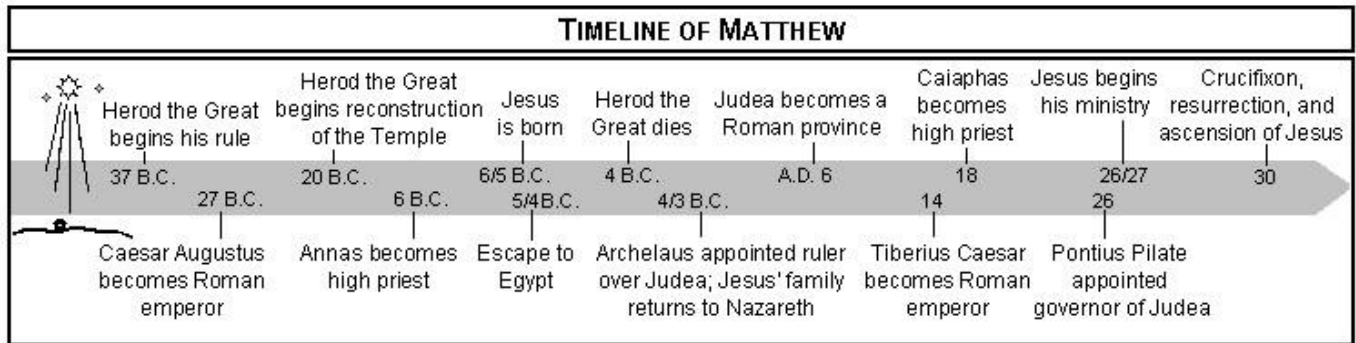


## Book of Matthew

### Chapter 3:1-12

<sup>1</sup> *Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,*

Ryrie Study Bible



***In those days*** > Robertson > This phrase is a general term that says little about specific time but identifies what follows as historical. It is a common transitional statement in Matthew's narrative

***Now in those days John the Baptist came*** > Sproul > After two thousand years of redemptive history, recorded for us in the prophecies of the Old Testament, the voice of God became silent, and there was not a single word from God in prophetic utterance for a period of four hundred years. The last prophecy in the Old Testament is found in the book of Malachi: <sup>5</sup> *“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> He will turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and strike the land with complete destruction.” (Mal. 4:5–6).*

Here at the end of the Old Testament God is saying that instead of bringing a curse upon the world, He is going to bring back the voice of Elijah the prophet. Four hundred years later that prophecy was fulfilled, according to Jesus, in the person of John the Baptist. Our Lord declared that John came in the spirit and power of Elijah (**Luke 1:17**).

**Luke 1:17** (The angel Gabriel talking to Zechariah ... the father of John the Baptist) > <sup>17</sup> *And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers back to their children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

(One of the commentators tells us > “John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets.” True!)

**Came** > MacArthur > from *paraginomai*, which often was used to indicate an official arrival, such as that of the magi (**Matthew 2:1**), or the public appearance of a leader or teacher (**Matthew 3:13**).

**Matthew 2:1** > <sup>1</sup> Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived (*paraginomai*) in Jerusalem, saying

**Matthew 3:13** > <sup>13</sup> Then Jesus arrived (*paraginomai*) from Galilee at the Jordan, coming to John to be baptized by him.

**Wilderness** > Utley > "Wilderness" was uninhabited pastureland, not an arid desert.

HELPS > properly, an *uncultivated, unpopulated* place; a *desolate* (deserted) area

MacArthur > It was symbolic of John's ministry to call the people away from the corrupt and dead religious system of their day—away from ritualism, worldliness, hypocrisy, and superficiality. John called them away from Jerusalem and Jericho, away from the cities into the wilderness—where *most* people would not bother to go if they were not serious seekers.

<sup>2</sup> **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

**Repent** > Carson > Though the verb *metanoēō* is often explained etymologically as "to change one's mind," or popularly as "to be sorry for something," neither rendering is adequate. In classical Greek, the verb could refer to a purely intellectual change of mind. But the NT usage has been influenced by the Hebrew verbs *nāḥam* ("to be sorry for one's actions") and *šûb* ("to turn around to new actions"). The latter is common in the prophets' call to the people to return to the covenant with Yahweh. What is meant is not a merely intellectual change of mind or mere grief, still less doing penance, but a radical transformation of the entire person, a fundamental turnaround involving mind and action and including overtones of grief, which results in "fruit in keeping with repentance" (v.8).

Utley > The Hebrew equivalent meant "to change one's actions," while the Greek word meant "to change one's mind." It implied a willingness to change.

MacArthur > John A. Broadus observes that "wherever this Greek word is used in the New Testament the reference is to changing the mind and the purpose from sin to holiness."

Swindoll > Repentance is a change of thinking that causes a change in direction

Precept Austin > It is not an intellectual decision but a change of mind that issues in a change of behavior. Stated simply repent means “to change one’s mind and act on that change.

MacArthur > Recognition of personal sin is the important first step. But by itself it is useless, even dangerous, because it tends to make a person think that mere recognition is all that is necessary.

- **A hardened pharaoh** admitted his sin (Ex. 9:27)
- A **double-minded Balaam** admitted his (Num. 22:34)
- A **greedy Achan** acknowledged his (Josh. 7:20)
- An **insincere Saul** confessed his (1 Sam. 15:24)
- The **rich young ruler** who asked Jesus how to have eternal life went away sorrowful but not repentant (Luke 18:23).
- **Even Judas**, despairing over his betrayal of Jesus, said to the chief priests and elders, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood” (Matt. 27:4).

All of those men recognized their sin, yet none of them repented. They were experiencing what Paul called “the sorrow of the world” that “produces death” instead of the “godly sorrow” that “produces a repentance” (2 Cor. 7:10-11).

Robertson > The tragedy of it is that we have no one English word that reproduces exactly the meaning and atmosphere of the Greek word.

Wuest Translation > *Be having a change of mind which issues in regret and a change of conduct*

**Kingdom of heaven** > MacArthur > Matthew uses the phrase kingdom of heaven thirty-two times, and is the only gospel writer who uses it at all. The other three use “the kingdom of God.” It is probable that Matthew used kingdom of heaven because it was more understandable to his primarily Jewish readers. Jews would not speak God’s name (Yahweh, or Jehovah), and would often substitute heaven when referring to Him—much as we do in such expressions as “heaven smiled on me today.”

<sup>3</sup> *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!’”*

Swindoll > Matthew presents John’s message as a fulfillment of **Isaiah 40:3**, in which a voice cries out, “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.”

From Matthew's perspective, if John's preaching was to prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus, and if that ministry fulfilled Isaiah's reference to a voice preparing the way for the Lord God, then in some way the coming of Jesus was the coming of God Himself!

**Isaiah 40:3** > *The voice of one calling out, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

**Isaiah 40:3 (LXX)** > *The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God.*

Swindoll > R. T. France notes, "It is one of several places in Matthew (and throughout the New Testament) where Old Testament passages about the coming of God are seen as fulfilled in Jesus."

MacArthur > **Luke 1:17** confirms that when it says of John > <sup>17</sup> *And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers back to their children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

MacArthur > **Matthew 17:11-13** > <sup>11</sup> *And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; <sup>12</sup> but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wanted. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." <sup>13</sup> Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.*

MacArthur > Because he was not received by the great body of God's chosen people, he was not able to be the Elijah and there is therefore an Elijah yet to come.

**Paths** > HELPS > *tríbos* (from *tribō*, "to rub") – properly, a rut (path) formed by rubbing (constant use)

<sup>4</sup> *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.*

**Camel's hair** > Barnes > This is not the fine hair of the camel from which our elegant cloth is made called camlet, nor the more elegant stuff brought from the East Indies under the name of "camel's hair," but the long shaggy hair of the camel, from which a coarse cheap cloth is made, still worn by the poorer classes in the East, and by monks.

Uteley > Compare this to the clothing and lifestyle of Elijah recorded in **2 Kings. 1:8**

**2 Kings. 1:8** > <sup>8</sup> *And they said to him, "He was a hairy man with a leather<sup>l</sup>belt worn around his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."*

Constable > Elijah had called the Israelites back to God at the time of their most serious apostasy. John called them back to God on the eve of their greatest opportunity.

***His food was locusts and wild honey***



<sup>5</sup> *At that time Jerusalem **was going out to him**, and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan;* <sup>6</sup> *and **they were being baptized** by him in the Jordan River, as they **confessed** their sins.*

***Was going out to him ... they were being baptized*** > Robertson > It is the imperfect tense to show the repetition of the act as the crowds from Judea and the surrounding country kept going out to him (εξεπορευετο), imperfect again, a regular stream of folks going forth.

Broadus > It was centuries since a prophet had appeared, and the Jews had often longed for prophetic guidance. Thus Judas Maccabeus and his followers laid away the stones of the desecrated altar "until a prophet should appear to answer concerning them" (1 Maccabees 4:46).

In the time of Christ, some were expecting the personal re-appearance of Jeremiah (below, Matthew 16:14), and many that of Elijah; (John 1:21, Luke 9:8, Matthew 16:14, Matthew 17:10, Matthew 27:49) while others were looking for the prophet like unto Moses. (John 1:21, Deuteronomy 18:15, Deuteronomy 18:18) And now the report spread far and wide, that at last a prophet had come, who in dress and place of abode resembled the great Elijah, who might be Messiah, or at least a forerunner of Messiah, for he declared that the Messianic reign was near, who performed a very striking rite, and spoke severe rebukes and earnest exhortations to turn from evil ways, such as had been spoken by all the prophets, such as will always arrest the attention of mankind. No wonder the Jews, from all the country adjacent to the scene of his ministry, and for many months, continually poured forth to see and hear him, and, more or less, impressed by his announcement of the Messianic reign and his call to repentance, confessed their sins and submitted to his baptism.



**The Jordan** > Bible Study Tools > Heb. Yarden, "the descender;" Arab. Nahr-esh-Sheriah, "the watering-place" the chief river of Palestine. It flows from north to south down a deep valley in the centre of the country. The name descender is significant of the fact that there is along its whole course a descent to its banks; or it may simply denote the rapidity with which it "descends" to the Dead Sea.

Broadus > The word Jordan, always with the article in the Hebrew and the Greek, signifies 'the descender,' and was so named from its rapid descent in a long and deep valley or fissure. The highest of its three principal fountains on the slopes of Hermon is seventeen hundred feet above the level of the Mediterranean; the first lake it forms, Huleh, has its surface only one hundred and twenty feet above the Mediterranean, while the second, the Lake of Galilee, is six hundred and eighty-two feet (Conder) below the level, and the third Lake, the Dead Sea, is twelve hundred and ninety-two feet below the level of the Mediterranean, besides being itself some thirteen hundred feet deep.

**Baptized** > Barnes > At the time of John, and for some time previous, they had been accustomed to administer a rite of baptism, or washing, to those who became proselytes to their religion; that is, to those who were converted from being Gentiles. This was done to signify that they renounced the errors and worship of the pagans, and as significant of their becoming pure by embracing a new religion.

It is interesting to read the various views of the Commentators as to what the rite of baptism appears to them.

Precept Austin > (*baptizo* from *bapto* = cover wholly with a fluid; stain or dip as with dye; used of the smith tempering the red-hot steel, used of dyeing the hair; of a ship that "dipped" = sank) has a literal and a figurative meaning in the NT. The literal meaning is to submerge, to dip or immerse as in water. A study of the 77 NT uses reveals that most of the uses of *baptizo* in the Gospels and Acts are associated with literal water baptism.

The Greeks used *baptizo*

- to describe the dyeing of a garment, in which the whole material was plunged in and taken out from the element used.
- *Baptizo* was used of the act of sinking ships.
- *Baptizo* also meant to bathe of a boat which had been wrecked by being submerged and then stranded on the shore.
- Figuratively, *baptizo* pictures the introduction or placing of a person or thing into a new environment or into union with something else so as to alter its condition –

or its relationship to its previous environment or condition. In this sense baptizo means to be identified with.

Barnes is adamant that it doesn't mean immersion. He specifically says > "It cannot be proved from an examination of the passages in the Old and New Testaments that the idea of a complete immersion was ever connected with the word, or that it ever occurred in any case."

Broadus expresses an opinion exactly 180° opposite of Barnes > "This controversy has led to a wide examination of Greek literature with reference to this term, and in all the instances of its use that have been found, whether literal or figurative, its fundamental meaning (whatever may be the particular rendering most suitable to the connection and to English idiom) is always 'immerse,' that being in the great mass of cases the only possible sense, and in all cases appropriate and natural."

Edersheim > Lutherans traditionally baptize by effusion (sprinkling or pouring). However, many Bible scholars and church historians believe that immersion was the method used. It is impossible to identify the method of baptism that John used from what the Gospels tell us. However, extrabiblical sources indicate that Jewish proselyte baptism took place in large tanks (Heb. mikvah) in which the person undergoing baptism stood.

Walvoord > The issue boils down to whether one takes the word baptism in its primary sense of submersion or in its secondary sense of initiation.

Plummer (talking about John's ministry) > It is his office to bind them to a new life, symbolized by immersion in water

**Confessed** > Precept Austin > (*exomologeō* from *ek* - wholly out from or *ex* = out or intensify meaning [implies full, frank, open confession, openly or publicly] of *homologeō* - to say the same thing about from *homos* = same + **legō** = speak) means to speak the same thing that another speaks, to fully agree with someone else in this case agreeing with God that they missed the mark (sinned).

Hiebert notes that *exomologeō* is literally *confessing out*, which pictures the openness and fullness of their confession

Wuest translates the passage with his own interpretation of the word > *Then there proceeded out to him in a steady stream, Jerusalem and all Judaea and all the surrounding country about the Jordan. And they were being immersed in the Jordan river by him while making a public confession of their sins.*

<sup>7</sup> *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?"*  
<sup>8</sup> *Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance;*

**Coming for baptism** > MacArthur > This group was coming for baptism, the Greek preposition *epi* (for) being used in a construction that clearly indicates purpose. (The author's comments are disputed by some of the other commentators. A number felt the Pharisees and Sadducees came to observe and comment.)

**Who warned you** > Strong's > to show secretly, to show by tracing out, to teach, make known

MacArthur > John calls the Pharisees and the Sadducees a brood of vipers, and asks them **who has suggested to them** to flee from the coming wrath.

Wuest Translation > *Offspring of vipers, who gave you a private, confidential hint that you should be fleeing from the wrath about to break at any moment?*

<sup>9</sup> *and do not assume that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you that God is able, from these **stones**, to raise up **children** for Abraham.*

**We have Abraham as our father ...** > Broadus > One Rabbi in a Midrash even says (Wet.), "In the age to come Abraham sits beside the gates of Gehenna, and suffers no circumcised Israelite to go down"; though the Rabbi does make ingenious provision for an exception in the case of those who have sinned excessively.

Mishna Sanhedrin 10 > All of the Jewish people, even sinners and those who are liable to be executed with a court-imposed death penalty, have a share in the World-to-Come, as it is stated: "And your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, for My name to be glorified" (Isaiah 60:21).

Edersheim: "No principle was more fully established in the popular conviction, than that all Israel had part in the world to come, and this specifically because of their connection with Abraham.

**"Zechut Avot > The Merit of Our Fathers"**

Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David (Greg Killian)

Judaism is a religion that maintains that salvation depends upon the sacrifice of a beloved son centuries ago. The Midrash teaches us that when Avraham (*Abraham*) put the knife to Yitzchak's (*Issac*) throat, his soul departed.



Judaism is a religion whose adherents believe that their sins are expiated because someone long ago offered himself up to be sacrificed. Though this may be hard to believe, it is absolutely true.

The sacrifice of which I speak is not the crucifixion of Yeshua, but rather it is the binding of Yitzchak from the book of Bereshit (*Genesis*). Because Avraham willingly offered his beloved son to HaShem (*less straightforward way of referring to God in contexts other than prayer, scriptural reading, etc because the name itself is considered too holy for such use.*) as a sacrifice, HaShem blessed Avraham, and, just as important, HaShem blessed Avraham's descendants.

This is straight from the Torah. According to our Sages, because Yitzchak offered himself freely to HaShem as a sacrifice, HaShem blessed Yitzchak, and, just as important, HaShem blessed Yitzchak's descendants. Therefore, our generation, a generation of descendants, benefits from the righteousness of Avraham and Yitzchak. We are blessed because of their willingness to sacrifice.

One aspect of this blessing is that HaShem is merciful toward us. Because our ancestors so dutifully obeyed HaShem's command, HaShem is more willing to look past our sins. Indeed, our Sages teach that HaShem is more willing to forgive our sins because of our righteous heritage. If our sins are thereby forgiven, then we will secure our place in the world to come. Simply stated:

Because Avraham and Yitzchak obeyed HaShem, HaShem blessed their descendants. This blessing includes HaShem's mercy, and HaShem's forgiveness of our sins. Our sins having been forgiven, we will enjoy eternal life in the world to come. Through this progression, we can draw a causal connection between the attempted sacrifice of a beloved son and the forgiveness and salvation of a later generation. Believe it or not, this is Jewish.

***Stones ... Children*** > Utley > This was a word play using the Aramaic words for "stones" ('*ebnayya*) and "children" (*benyya*), which sounded similar.

Wuest Translation > *for I am saying to you that God is able out of these stones as source material to raise up children to Abraham.*

<sup>10</sup> *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.*

**Already** > Precept Austin > In the Greek text *already* is in an emphatic position to get across the sense of urgency inherent in John's message! It pictures the axe poised to chop down the trees. ... In keeping with the previous passage, John's metaphor is depicting the people's repentance as like "fruit trees." No spiritual fruit indicates no real repentance.

MacArthur > What he said was shocking; it was unexpected and unacceptable. It was inconceivable to them that, as God's people, they had anything to do to inherit God's kingdom but simply wait for and accept it. The Messiah was *their* Messiah, the King was *their* King, the Savior was *their* Savior, the promise was *their* promise. Every Jew was destined for the kingdom, and every Gentile was excluded, except for a token handful of proselytes. That was the common Jewish thinking of the day, which John totally shattered.

In Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus, it is overlooked that the rich man in hell addresses Abraham as "Father," and Abraham, speaking from heaven, calls the rich man his "Child."

But the rich man was then told by Abraham, "Between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us" (**Luke 16:25-26**). A child of Abraham in hell was beyond their thinking.

**Luke 16:25-26** > <sup>24</sup> *And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'* <sup>25</sup> *But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.'* <sup>26</sup> *And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set, so that those who want to go over from here to you will not be able, nor will any people cross over from there to us.'*

<sup>11</sup> *"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**.*

**I am not fit to remove His sandals** > Utley > This term may be translated two ways

1. to take off and carry a visitor's shoes to the storage place
2. to "untie and remove"

Both acts were traditionally done by slaves. Not even the students of rabbis were asked to perform this task. This was an idiomatic statement of John's understanding of the superiority of Jesus.

**And fire > Malachi 3:2-3 > <sup>2</sup>** *“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire, and like launderer’s soap. <sup>3</sup> And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.*

<sup>12</sup> **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.”**

***His winnowing fork is in His hand***



***Thoroughly clear*** > Strong’s > diakatharizó > from *dia* (through) and *katharizo* (to cleanse)

Precept Austin > (only Biblical use) indicates that this separation is absolute and complete and there will not be a few "husks" of unbelievers (so to speak) on the threshing floor mixed in with the valuable, believing "wheat"!

Wuest translation > *He himself will baptize you in the sphere of and by means of the Holy Spirit and fire, whose winnowing fork is in His hand. And He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing-floor and will gather His wheat into the granary. But the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable.*