

Verse 1

- In those days...
 - Jesus in Nazareth; About 30 years later (Matthew giving us what we need to know & believe)
- John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea
 - New character (**see verse 4**) (= garb and lifestyle of an ancient Jewish prophet) (cf. Elijah)
 - This was an incredibly significant event, for God had been silent for 400 years, as no prophet had come on the scene. The Jews believed **the next prophet** would have messianic significance.¹
 - See **Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 11:7-14; Luke 1:16-17, NASB**
 - In the spirit and power of Elijah (i.e. not literal, but just like)
 - A ministry of turning people back to God / preparing them for His kingdom
 - His mission/work were prophesied about (cf. **Malachi**) (**see verse 3**)
 - **The voice of one crying in the wilderness** (cf. vv. 1 + 3) (**Judean wilderness = map**)
 - Cf. **Isaiah 40:3** (Matthew is connecting Jesus to the story of Israel)
 - OT usage often meant to bring to mind the whole picture (cnt. granular)
 - Turn to **Isaiah 40:1-11**
 - The return from exile (cf. the ministry of Jesus) (ultimate fulfillment)
 - **Isaiah, Elijah and John = To prepare Israel for the coming of their Messiah**
 - **Make his paths straight** (picture of roadwork)
 - The metaphor is the clearing of obstacles (cf. road)
 - Before ancient kings would travel, forerunners would prepare the roads
 - Amend and adjust the terrain
 - Here, the work is spiritual
 - **How did Israel need to be spiritually adjusted/straightened to be ready for the King?**
 - The king was to bring the promised blessing and rule of God
 - The **obstacles** = **the commitment to sin in people's hearts**
 - Kept them from being blessed and ruled by God
 - The King brings the kingdom (kingdom = His blessing and rule)
 - Obstacle to His rule is our commitment to sin (= its subsequent rule/curse)
 - So, J the B called people to **turn from sin and to God (a people prepared for the Lord)**
 - The **straight paths** = **repentance** of people (in this case, Israel) (pic. = **baptism**)
 - Action = **verses 5-6**

John's work of baptism was a unique event

- Not the same as (prefigures) Christian baptism (pictures death/new life and entrance into the Kingdom)
- Before John the Baptist's ministry only gentiles converting to Judaism were baptized
 - Baptism was a way of saying: "I am an outsider, renouncing my former ways, and embracing faith in the one true God"² (i.e. coming under His **blessing and rule**)
 - = Radical that Jews were coming to be baptized (confession that they had stepped out of God's **blessing and rule**)
 - They were admitting that **being Jewish did not** alone grant them entrance to the kingdom

"bear fruit in keeping with repentance" -- Notice to whom John the Baptist is speaking when he says that (v. 8)

- **New characters (see verses 7-9)**
 - Meet: Pharisees and Sadducees (religious leaders; Sanhedrin; political—power structures)
 - **Brood of vipers...**
 - ★ They came **to watch him baptize** (cf. NLT), not be baptized
 - Saw themselves as being good enough with God because of **external conformity** to the rules and because of **ancestry** (descendants of **Abraham**)
 - Hypocrites and fakers (**Matthew 23**) and **saw themselves as not needing to change/repent**
 - Renounce reliance on self
 - Rely on the mercy of God

¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* (Grand rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 110.

² David Platt, *Christ Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (Nashville, TN; B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 52.

Verse 2 (crux; hinge: central point or principle on which everything depends)

- “**Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**” (Cf. Jesus in 4:17)
 - John is calling Israel to a renewed relationship with God
 - The promised **blessing and rule** of God is about to appear (in Jesus) (**kingdom**)
 - The **blessing and rule** must be entered into (through **repentance**)
 - I.e. The king is here, and the King is right. I am wrong.
 - Gets them (us) tuned in, attentive, going God's way
 - **John's preaching** = an urgent message to turn around while there is still time
 - Part of the arrival of the kingdom is the promise of impending judgment (**vv. 10 + 12**)
 - Metaphors:
 - **Trees with bad fruit** (don't remain) + Separating **chaff** from the **wheat** (a difference)
 - Psalm 1, NIV
 - **Repent** =
 - If you look it up in a dictionary = to feel or express regret about one's wrongdoing (cf. sorry!)
 - The Greek idea could imply merely a change of mind (Cf. American)
 - The Biblical picture is different
 - It draws from the OT and Jewish concept that demands a **lifestyle change**
 - In the OT the idea was a radical return to God for those who had broken the covenant with him
 - **Metanoia** = a change in one's way of life
 - **Present imperative** = an **ongoing and complete** change of mind and action (**Cf. 3:8**)
 - The idea is that of turning **from sin to God** in every area of one's life—**regularly**
 - **Repentance involves:** Confession (owning), sorrow (godly), action (renounce, turn from)
- Cf. **a lifestyle of repentance** (getting on course continually) [Israel has wandered—needed rep.]
- **Kingdom of Heaven** (usage in Matthew)
 - Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God are synonymous
 - **Idea** = God is King (promised blessing and rule/reign)
 - **God's promised blessing and rule (kingdom) extended into the world:**
 - **Through Israel**
 - **Through Messiah**
 - Through the Church (John's ministry continues in a way)
 - **Through Messiah and His people** (Church and Israel)

Kingdom living = living under and extending the blessing and rule of Christ (show quote that is on p. 3)

- **The kingdom is at hand**
 - The **Kingdom of God** has come and is coming
 - The people of God live between the ages, feeling the tension of the **already and the not yet**
 - (cf. kingdoms in conflict)
 - In the Messiah the kingdom has **arrived**, yet the events have only been **inaugurated**, and the final stage is still **future**
 - The current stage is important:

- How do we **live in the tension** of the Kingdom having come and yet still coming?
 - Cf. kingdoms in conflict
 - The answer is found in verse 8: **Bear fruit in keeping with repentance**
 - To think and act and so live in consonance with God's blessing and rule

How? He will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit** and with **fire** (v. 11) (Cf. Joel 2 and **Malachi 3:2-3, NIV**)

- I.e. transformation through **conversion** and **sanctification** (entirely His work)

"A Christian is (or should be) defined as one who humbles himself or herself and chooses to enter into discipleship, to follow Jesus' path, to build his or her life upon His teachings and His practices even at great cost, to pass those teachings and practices on to others, and thus to enjoy the unspeakable privilege of participating in the advance of God's reign." -*Kingdom Ethics*, p. 30³

³ Glen H. Stassen & David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2003), 30.