

## II. THE PREREQUISITES FOR THE KINGDOM

### Matthew Chapter 3:1-12

by Pastor Richard H. Jones

#### A. MATTHEW CITED THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AS A PREREQUISITE FOR THE KINGDOM (Matt. 3:1-4).

1. Matthew pointed out that the ministry of John the Baptist was a fulfillment of the Scriptures (Isa. 40:3). Matthew said, "This is he that was spoken of by the prophet" (Matt. 3:3). Notice there was a period of 28 or 29 years between Matthew 2 and Matthew 3. During these years Jesus was growing up in Nazareth where He was preparing for public ministry. John the Baptist had come on the scene to serve as the forerunner for the king of Israel. This is what the angel Gabriel had said to Zacharias (Lk. 1:8-19). Notice this was John's answer also when he was questioned by those sent by the Pharisees (Jn. 1:19-38). This, then, is Matthew's argument: if John the Baptist had fulfilled the Scriptures and he was sent of God as the forerunner of the Messiah, then his ministry confirmed Jesus to be the Messiah and King of Israel.
2. Matthew then describes John the Baptist and how he was associated with Elijah (Matt. 3:4). Matthew's description of John's dress and diet would associate him with Elijah who was clothed in a similar manner (II Kings 1:8). Since Mal. 4:5 states that Elijah would come again before the Messiah, the Jews were looking for him and this is no doubt why Matthew made mention of John's dress. It was for his readers to associate him with Elijah. Later Jesus said to His disciples that Elijah had already come referring to John the Baptist (Matt. 17:12).
3. Notice what the ministry of John the Baptist has to do with the establishment of the kingdom. For the kingdom to be established Israel needed to recognize the ministry of John the Baptist that he was the forerunner of the King and Messiah who is Christ.

#### B. MATTHEW CITED THE MESSAGE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AS A PREREQUISITE FOR THE KINGDOM (Matt. 3:1,2).

1. John's message called for repentance for the kingdom of Heaven had come near. The Jews had a saying, "When all Israel repents on the same day, Messiah will come." Sin, therefore, had to be addressed before the Messiah would come and the kingdom would be established. Notice, while the other gospel writers use the term "Kingdom of God" to refer to both God's spiritual kingdom, as well as, the millennial kingdom, Matthew never uses "Kingdom of God" when referring to the millennial kingdom. Matthew alone uses the term "Kingdom of heaven" and has in mind the literal, Davidic, millennial, kingdom over which the Messiah would rule and reign. This is what the Jews were looking for and anticipating. John's message then was a call for the Jews to prepare for the Messiah and His kingdom. Note Dan. 2:44; II Sam. 7:12-16; Zech. 12:8.
2. Matthew records how the people in general responded to John's message (Matt. 3:5,6). Many came out to John and dealt with their sins, confessing them and were baptized by John. Their actions expressed a readiness to accept the coming King and submit to His rulership.

3. Matthew then records how the religious leaders of Israel responded to John's message (Matt. 3:7-10). They did not come to be baptized and express repentance on their part. They refused to turn from their religious hypocrisy and self-righteousness and they refused a call to genuine repentance. John's response must have come following their own assertions. They had no doubt claimed their descent from Abraham as their passport to heaven and denied any need for John's baptism. As a result, John denounced them for their lack of repentance and warned them of coming judgment. Later when these leaders questioned the authority of Jesus, He questioned them about John's baptism (Matt. 21:23-27).
4. Notice what the message of John the Baptist has to do with the establishment of the Kingdom. For the Kingdom to be established Israel needed to heed the message of John the Baptist and to turn in repentance in order to receive the Messiah's rule.

**C. MATTHEW CITED THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AS A PREREQUISITE FOR THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM (Matt. 3:11,12).**

1. Matthew recorded what John the Baptist had said about himself and what he had said about the Lord Jesus (Matt. 3:11). John had said the One coming after him was mightier than he and that he himself was not even worthy to bear His shoes. Mark, Luke and John record, John the Baptist, saying he was not even worthy to stoop down and loose the latchet of His shoes (Mk. 1:7; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:27). John the Baptist also declared that he was sent before Christ and that he himself would decrease (Jn. 3:28,30).
2. Matthew records what John the Baptist said about his own ministry and the ministry of Jesus (Matt. 3:11,12). John said he was baptizing with water unto repentance. The water baptism was ceremonial and had no power to cleanse. When those who heard John repented of their sins, he baptized them in water as an outward symbol of their change of heart.

John the Baptist said, on the other hand, Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matt. 3:11,12). Notice the baptism of the Holy Spirit and of fire are not one in the same. The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred at Pentecost and the baptism of fire will occur at the Second Coming of Christ. The baptism of fire mentioned in Matt. 3:11,12 is prophetic of Christ's judgment to come (Mal. 3:2; Isa. 64:2). Here the Lord is pictured using a winnowing fan. The wheat speaks of true believers and the chaff of unbelievers.

3. Notice what John's testimony has to do with the establishment of the Kingdom. For the Kingdom to be established Israel needed to believe John's testimony of Jesus and receive Him as Messiah and King.

## EXPOSITORY NOTES

**3:2** The word "repent" used here means to change one's mind. It involves a change of attitude about God and a turning from one's sins. For this reason repentance must preclude genuine faith which results in salvation. Until a man sees himself as a lost sinner he will see no need to seek the Saviour. Therefore, it must be seen that repentance and faith are two inseparable things in the matter of salvation (Acts 20:21). Repentance would involve sorrow for sin and unbelief and a turning from them to God and believing the gospel. An antonym for repentance would be to continue in one's sins and unbelief.

Note the word translated "repent" (metanoeo) used here in Matt. 3:2 has to do with the negative aspect of changing one's mind and turning from sin. This aspect of repentance is demonstrated in the first four beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-4). Another word translated "repent" (epistrepho), and used in I Thess 1:9 has to do with the positive aspect of turning to God.

**3:2** This verse says literally, "The Kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." This means the rule of the God of the heavens had come near on the earth. This Kingdom was present in the person of the Messiah. God's rule would be manifested in the ruling and reigning Messiah, but such rule was predicated upon Israel's repentance. Note Dan. 2:44; 4:25,32.

**3:2** Notice the Kingdom of Heaven must be distinguished from the Kingdom of God, or God's spiritual and universal Kingdom. The Kingdom of Heaven includes only men on the earth who have professed to come under the rule of God. In this sense, we will find that it involves tares, along with the wheat, in its mystery form. The spiritual and universal Kingdom of God comprises all those saved and who have come under the rule of God (I Chron. 29:11). This includes therefore all the O.T. saints and all the N.T. saints who make up the church. It will include those also who are saved in the tribulation as well.

## QUESTIONS WE CAN APPLY TO OUR LIVES

(1) What differences are there between the Kingdom of heaven and God's universal Kingdom?

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(2) How is repentance related to salvation and why is it inseparable with genuine faith?

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(3) What warning is there for the unsaved in verses 11,12? \_\_\_\_\_

(4) What lesson about works and ancestry can we learn from John's denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees?

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(5) How do some confuse the two-fold ministry of Christ mentioned in verses 11,12?

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(6) How do you know the church today is not the Kingdom of which John the Baptist spoke?

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