

Lesson #4- Matthew Chapter 3 Questions for Discussion (With Help for Teachers):

1. Remembering that Matthew wants his Jewish readers to see the connection of the Old Testament prophecies to Jesus, how does John point that out?

Help for Teachers:

- Matthew reminds them that John the Baptist's message, that everyone came out to hear, included the very thing Isaiah prophesied that the forerunner of the Messiah would cry out, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight". (Isaiah 40:3)
2. John the Baptist preached "repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". Many confessed their sins and were baptized by John. What was the significance of this? Were these people being saved?

Help for Teachers:

- Speaking to a small group of Ephesian "disciples" that he had found, Paul said to them in Acts 19:4 that John's baptism was unto repentance. When Paul learned that the Ephesian believers had only been baptized "unto John's baptism", Paul admonished that they should "believe on him that should come after, that is, on Christ Jesus", after which they were "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus". So, it seems the baptism of John was not believer's baptism, as the New Testament teaches and we practice, which is reserved for those that have professed saving faith in Jesus Christ. It does seem, at least to me, that these Ephesians that Luke identifies as disciples, had been saved by believing the message of John the Baptist (or maybe they heard Jesus Himself preaching after John introduced Him) and putting their faith in the coming, or present, Jesus Christ (in verse 2 Paul says that they had "believed"). What they lacked was the "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" portion of the great commission found in Matthew 28, which at the time of their conversion, had yet to be given by Christ. On this often-confused passage it is important to see that...
 - John the Baptist's function was exactly what Scripture declares he would do, announce to the Jewish nation that they must repent, turn from the wicked direction they had been going and go back to the truths of the Scripture God had brought into the world through their nation, remember the teachings of their prophets, and prepare their hearts to receive the long-awaited King and His Kingdom.

- John's baptism was received by the masses, but it was not the baptism commanded of one that professes saving faith in Jesus Christ. John's baptism was administered to those that identified with his preaching that they must repent, which is indeed one thing that will accompany saving faith (Jesus himself preached, "repent ye, and believe the gospel") and prepare to receive the Lord and His Kingdom. However, believer's baptism is reserved for those that repent **and** turn to Christ in faith.
- The preaching of John in the wilderness could have resulted in the salvation of some that heard. Mark records in chapter 1 that he preached the baptism of repentance **for the remission of sins**. Remission of sins is an act of God alone that requires justification. The only Just One is Jesus Christ and the only way anyone else becomes justified is when the righteousness of Jesus is imputed to them that are predestined at the point of calling and consequential belief (Romans 8:30). However, looking at what happens after this throughout the gospels, it seems most of those that came out to see John the Baptist merely identified with a need for repentance and the hope for a king to emerge to get rid of Rome and return to Israel, physically, the glory of their heritage under king David. (See Jesus' comments to the masses concerning John the Baptist in Matthew 11:7-19 concerning what people really thought)
- As an additional point of clarification if you are looking at the whole event concerning the baptism of the Ephesian disciples in Acts 19. Many people want to connect believer's baptism with miraculous gifts. Notice that in verse 5 these disciples are baptized in the name of Jesus. There is no talk here of filling with the Holy Ghost. That has already occurred, as it does in all that are in Christ, at the point of conversion. Verse 6 records a separate event, where Paul lays his hands on them, and the Holy Ghost comes on them and empowers them to do supernatural things. Pay attention that this only occurs a handful of times and at very specific junctures in church history in the entirety of Acts, yet the book of Acts records the salvation of literally thousands of people who apparently had no such experience.

3. In verse 7 the religious/ political leaders of Israel enter the narrative. We read how John reacts to them through verse 10. Why do you think John, on seeing this group he describes as a brood of snakes, react so aggressively?

Help for Teachers:

- God must have revealed to John the real reason for the visit from the Pharisees and Sadducees (or maybe their arrogant attitude was just that obvious). Their true interest was in discovering why the masses of people, that they desperately wished to control and be idolized by, were paying so much attention to a crude looking madman teaching a radical message. They would have been insanely jealous that John the Baptist was receiving so much acceptance as a teacher of religion and would have viewed him as a threat to their continued status as the ultimate Jewish authority.
- In verse 9 John confronts them at the deepest source of their pride, their racial heritage as descendants of Abraham. Little do these religious bigots understand that God is making of Abraham a people so much vaster than just physical Israel. As a matter of fact, God does not even consider those outside of faith in Jesus Christ to be children of Abraham, regardless of their birth certificate. As John informs them that God can take rocks and make children unto Abraham, we are reminded that God's promise to Abraham was that He would make him a father of many nations. Very few nations genetically come from Abraham- the nation of Israel and the few nations that come through the bloodline of Ishmael, so how is this possible? It is because the promise isn't to those that have Abraham's DNA. The promise is even to those who were far off; those who have faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.
- In verses 8 and 10 John demands that there be fruit that is consistent with real repentance. Jesus teaches the same thing in John 15, saying that if any man is not in Him, the Father will cut that man off like a withered, fruitless branch is pruned from a productive tree. Jesus plainly declares in verse 8 that His disciples will bear fruit.

4. In verse 11 John starts talking about the One that is to come. We have already looked at the baptism of John in comparison with believer's baptism that the church administers to those that come to faith in Christ, but now what is this baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire that Jesus will do?

Help for Teachers:

- There is a lot of debate among scholars concerning this statement of John the Baptist. It seems to me the most compatible with Scriptures to see this as two separate baptisms. Verse 12 seems to agree with this, as John says that Jesus will (1) gather his wheat into the garner and, (2) burn up the chaff with fire unquenchable. The wheat is obviously the good part, those that He is saving and to whom He has promised that if He goes away, He will send the Comforter, the Holy Ghost (John 14:16, 20, John 15:26, John 16:7). The chaff is easily identified as the part that has no value, of which John says Jesus will burn up, with fire unquenchable, those that are under condemnation, because they “hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

5. Why was it necessary that Jesus be baptized by John?

Help for Teachers:

- Jesus’ baptism identified Him as THE one Savior that all Scripture points to, past and future. For the Jewish observer who was educated in the law and Prophets, Matthew’s target audience, these blatant parallels would have jumped out.
 - In the creation story God makes everything out of the waters of chaos, as His Spirit “moves” over the face of the waters, as a bird would hover above. After each phase of creation God declares that “it is good”, just as the dove descended at Jesus baptism and declared God’s delight in His Son.
 - As Jesus descends into the baptismal waters of Jordan, portraying Him coming under the wrath of God and His sacrificial death, so Noah as a type of Christ, carries a remnant of people through the flood of God’s wrath to salvation as the waters of the flood abate. We see in Jesus coming out of the waters of the Jordan the same image, as God’s wrath is satisfied at the offering of His only begotten Son and God signals His delight with a dove, as was the case with Noah’s dove when the dry land emerged. Noah’s story represents that all creation dies because of our sin, but Jesus is the new creation through which we are saved, and all creation made new.
 - The Israelites considered Moses to be their greatest prophet, the man God used to bring the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. They escaped Egypt as Moses led them miraculously through the waters of the Red Sea, and then these same waters crashed down and destroyed their enemies. Emerging on the other side they entered the wilderness, where they faced temptation and failed. At last, after forty years of wandering, they once again passed miraculously through waters, this time of the Jordan River. Now under Joshua, the Greek name for Jesus, he led his people in conquering the idolatrous and wicked inhabitants of the land, but not completely. In similar fashion, Jesus passed through the waters of the Jordan River and coming out, immediately went into the wilderness forty days and was tempted, only unlike the children of Israel under Moses, Jesus, the

better Moses, defeated Satan and is bringing His people out of bondage and into a promised land of peace, where the conquest is complete.

- Jesus Christ, God becoming man and being born of the house and lineage of David, did for the people of Israel what they were never able to do for themselves. He fulfilled the Law that was delivered by God to Moses for the people. Jesus is much more than the leader of Israel. He is the one and only righteous member of God's covenant people. He is Israel herself. Where Israel, coming out of the waters of the Jordan River, became disobedient and refused to follow God's command to utterly rid the land of idolatry, Jesus, as Israel's representative, came out His baptism in the Jordan and was completely obedient to God's Word through every temptation.
- Jesus' baptism is most vividly a picture of what He has done in accomplishing our salvation. When John the Baptist objects to baptizing Jesus, recognizing the irony that the Just One would submit to a cleansing ritual as though He were guilty, Jesus tells John to "suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." As Jesus went under the waters of baptism, it was a picture of the innocent willingly coming under the flood of God's wrath to pay for the sins of the guilty. As He emerged from the water, we see Him rise in victory and vindication, having conquered death and the grave and accomplishing for His people salvation. Jesus' baptism is a picture of the only way that all righteousness could be fulfilled for us, His righteousness imputed into us, the innocent for the guilty. This picture played out on the cross and Jesus' resurrection.
- Much of the question #5, Help for Teachers, is from the TGC article titled "How the Baptism of Jesus Echoed the Future" by Trevor Lurance, dated March 30, 2018. You can view this article at:
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-jesus-baptism-echoed-future/>

- Additional help on the subject of Baptism:

- <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/why-was-jesus-baptized>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/i-baptize-you-with-water>