

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARED THE WAY

Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 3:1-14

STRUCTURE

Key-person: John the Baptist

Key-location: Jordan River

Key-repetitions:

- Baptism, including baptizing and baptized (Mat 3:6, 7; Lk 3:3, 7, 12, 15, 16).
- John the Baptist gave counsel to specific groups: all (Lk 3:7); Pharisees and Sadducees (Mat 3:7-12); tax collectors (Lk 3:12-13); soldiers (Lk 3:14-14).
- Repent: John the Baptist preached "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near" (Mat 3:3); people confessed sins (Mat 3:6); John called for people to produce fruit that showed that they had repented (Lk 3:8; Mat 3:8); John baptized people to show that they had repented (Mat 3:11).
- Promised one coming: Isaiah described John the Baptist as the one who prepared the way for the Lord's arrival (Mat 3:3); John spoke of the main character who would come after him (Mat 3:11-12).

Key-attitudes:

- Harshness of John the Baptist's preaching.
- John the Baptist's listeners' desire to know how to repent.
- John the Baptist's admiration for the one who was to come.

Initial-situation:

The Bible is silent about Jesus' life after his childhood until he was twelve years old. At that time, at the end of a trip to Jerusalem, Jesus stayed behind in the temple without his parents' knowledge. From the time Jesus was twelve until he was thirty years old, the Bible doesn't narrate facts about his life. During those years, Jesus lived in the town of Nazareth, worked as a carpenter, and was unknown outside of his home town.

Initial-problem:

John, son of Zechariah, received a message from God and went into all the country around the Jordan River, preaching repentance and baptizing.

Final-situation:

John the Baptist proclaimed that the main character in the drama comes after him and is greater than he. The one who comes after will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

BIBLE STORY

Jesus was about thirty years old. That was the time when God spoke to John the Baptist, son of Zechariah, who was living in the desert country of Judea. John went into all the country around the Jordan River Valley, preaching and baptizing. John preached, "Repent; turn back to God for the Kingdom of Heaven will soon be here."

Isaiah, the prophet, spoke about John the Baptist when he said, "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare for the Lord's arrival! Make the road smooth and straight!'" (Mat 3:1-3; Lk 3:1-6).

John the Baptist's clothes were made from camel hair. He wore a leather belt around his waist. His food was grasshoppers and wild honey. People went out to John the Baptist from Jerusalem, Judea, and the countryside around the Jordan River. They confessed their sins and were baptized by John in the Jordan River (Mat 3:4-6).

John the Baptist told the crowds coming out to be baptized, "You're poisonous snakes! Who warned you to run from the coming judgment? Produce fruit that shows that you have repented and given up your sins."

The crowd asked John, "What should we do then?"

John answered, "If you have two coats, give one away to the person who has none. If you have food, share that, too."

John told the tax collectors who came to be baptized, "Don't make people pay higher taxes than the law requires."

John told the soldiers who came to be baptized, "Don't force people to give you money in exchange for you leaving them alone. Don't accuse people falsely. Be content with your pay" (Lk 3:7-14).

John told the Pharisees and Sadducees (*religious leaders*) who came to where he was baptizing, "You bunch of snakes! Who warned you to flee from the coming judgment? Produce fruit that shows that you have repented and given up your sins. Don't say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that God could make children for Abraham from these stones. The ax is already at the root of the trees. Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mat 3:7-10).

John proclaimed to all, "I baptize you with water to show that you have repented and given up your sins. But the main character in this drama comes after me. He's greater than I am. I'm not good enough to carry his sandals. He'll baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to separate the good wheat from the husks. He'll store the wheat in the barn and burn up the husks with a fire that can't be put out" (Mat 3:11-12).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?

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| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 5. How did the characters face their problems? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe John the Baptist.
2. What did John the Baptist preach?
3. Who were some groups who went to John, and what did he tell each group?
4. What does it mean to repent?
5. How did John want people to prove they had repented?
6. How can we prove to others that we have repented of our sins?
7. What was the mission of John the Baptist?
8. Who has been similar to John the Baptist in your life by preparing you to meet Jesus?
9. How can we be similar to John the Baptist and prepare others to meet Jesus?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Jesus is Savior/Destroyer.** John introduced Jesus as the one who has the winnowing fork in his hand to separate the wheat from the husks. His purpose is to gather and save the wheat grain into his deposit; however, he will burn the husks (Mat 3:12). The winnowing fork was a long fork of wood, used by the threshers to throw the wheat into the air, so that the heavier grains of wheat would fall to the ground while the husks were blown away by the wind.
2. **True repentance implies sorrow for past offences together with reformation of conduct that gives evidence that the person has repented.** John the Baptist said for the people to do good works to prove they had repented from their sins (Lk 3:8; Mat 3:8).
3. **A poor person can be a servant of God.** John the Baptist was a prophet of God; however, he was very poor. His food was found in the desert (Mat 3:4). Some teach a false doctrine that being faithful to Jesus results in wealth. Many of the greatest prophets of God lived in poverty. John the Baptist was poor. Even Jesus was a poor man during his life on Earth.
4. **God struggles against proud people.** John the Baptist's words to the religious leaders were severe, because they were proud people who resisted God and refused to listen to God's message (Mat 3:7-9).
5. **When God's servant receives honor, he should transfer the honor to Jesus.** When the people thought that maybe John was the Messiah, John the Baptist spoke about Jesus, explaining that Jesus was the more important one (Mat 3:11).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Pantomime Retelling of the Story:

The storyteller tells the story once. Then the storyteller designates a person to stand in front of the listeners and pantomime the story while he retells it.