**Research: John the Baptist**

**Luke 3:2-4, 7-16**

2 . . . the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

“After Malachi there was no prophet until John the Baptist came. He appeared first in the wilderness of Judea. This was not an uninhabited desert, but a part of the country not thickly peopled, nor much enclosed. No place is so remote as to shut us out from the visits of Divine grace. The doctrine he preached was repentance; [Repent](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/3-3.htm) ye. The word here used, implies a total alteration in the mind, a [change](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/3-3.htm) in the judgment, disposition, and affections, another and a better bias of the soul. Consider your ways, change your minds: you have thought amiss; think again, and think aright” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“[John the Baptist] came forward in the twofold capacity of a prophet and the forerunner of the

Messiah. As prophecy had been silent for 400 years, and all patriotic Jews were longing for the coming of the Messiah to deliver them from the Roman yoke, it is not surprising that he was welcomed with enthusiasm . . .” (Dummelow 629).

3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;

“Matthew specifies that John launched his work in the wilderness of Judea, the barren territory between the low mountain ridge on which Jerusalem and the cities of Judah lie and the deep cleft where the Jordan River empties into the Dead Sea” (ICB 612).

“He made his first public appearance in the wilderness of Judea,  that is, in the uncultivated and thinly-inhabited parts of the hill-country round Hebron, where his father dwelt; [Luke 1:39-40](http://biblehub.com/context/luke/1-39.htm); but after his fame was spread abroad, and many came to him, he left Judea and passed over Jordan, residing chiefly at Bethabara, for the conveniency of baptizing, [John 1:28](http://biblehub.com/john/1-28.htm); [John 10:40](http://biblehub.com/john/10-40.htm). He travelled, however, through all that country; *preaching the baptism of repentance*— That is, calling sinners of all descriptions to repentance, and admitting the penitent to the baptism of water as an outward or visible sign, or emblem of the free and full remission of all their sins. In other words, he enjoined the penitent to be baptized, as a testimony, on their part, of the sincerity of their repentance, and on the part of John, who administered this ordinance by the commandment of God, as a [seal](http://d.7769domain.com/r/rd.html?#http%3A%2F%2F7769domain.com%2FAd%2FGoIEx2%2F%3Ftoken%3DWWVueUNiZ25rV1gyMjR6VUlkUDVtRlFmYjhiTnJHTFdCdHhDOE1CbGd4UzlQSXk1UU5jRTI5YkZCdUhRWTlteGxKenhDSlRTaUo5dWpucGZBaHQ0UUV4Z2JqeGRwblJvNmQvRnd6UmJDVTlPRUIrY3pIVnBlQVlOY1BvdnJMQnJ1NmpPRFpEYjVlc0tGNXBwa3B6MWl3PT01) or token that their sins were remitted” (Benson Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

*Repent* is *metanoeo* in Greek and means “to change one’s mind, i.e. to repent; to change one’s mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins. Repentance involves a turning with contrition from sin to God; the repentant sinner is in the proper condition to accept the divine forgiveness” (Thayer #3340).

“*Repent ye*. Repentance is not mere sorrow for sin, but a real change of life” (Dummelow 629).

“John’s preaching had two elements. The first was a call to repent. Though the verb *metanoeo* is often explained etymologically as ‘to change one’s mind,’ or popularly as ‘to be sorry for something,’ neither rendering is adequate. . . . 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’” (*EBC* 8*.*99).

4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

“John’s activity is described as fulfilling what was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah: a voice of one crying in the wilderness (see on Mark 1:2-3)” (ICB 612).

“Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight—This prediction is quoted in all the four Gospels, showing that it was regarded as a great outstanding one, and the predicted forerunner as the connecting link between the old and the new economies” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“**Prepare ye the way of the Lord.**—The imagery is drawn from the great strategical works of the conquerors of the East. They sent a herald before them to call the people of the countries through which they marched to prepare for their approach. A “king’s highway” had to be carried through the open land of the wilderness, valleys filled up, and hills levelled (the words used are, of course, poetical in their greatness), winding bye-paths straightened, for the march of the great army. Interpreted in its spiritual [application](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/3-3.htm), the wilderness was the world lying in evil, and the making low the mountains and hills was the bringing down of spiritual pride. When the poor in spirit were received into the kingdom of heaven, the valleys were exalted; when soldier and publican renounced their special sins, the rough places were made plain and the crooked straight” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

“*O generation of vipers*] Rather, **broods of vipers**. They were like “serpents born of serpents.” We learn from [Matthew 3:7](http://biblehub.com/matthew/3-7.htm) that it was *specially* pointed at the Pharisees and Sadducees, to whom it was addressed no less sternly by our Lord ([Matthew 23:33](http://biblehub.com/matthew/23-33.htm)). It described the venomous hypocrisy which turned religion itself into a vice, and hid a deadly malice under the glittering semblance of a zeal for orthodoxy” (Cambridge Bible, www.biblehub.com).

“Pharisees and Sadducees - The Jews were divided into three great sects - the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. In addition to these, some smaller sects are mentioned in the New Testament and by Josephus: the Herodians, probably political friends of Herod; the Galileans, a branch of the Pharisees; and the Therapeutae, a branch of the Essenes, but converts from the Greeks. The three principal sects are supposed to have originated about 150 years before Christ, as they are mentioned by Josephus at that time in his history. Of course nothing is said of them in the Old Testament, as that was finished about 400 years before the Christian era.

“The Pharisees were the most numerous and wealthy sect of the Jews. They derived their name from the Hebrew word *Pharash*, which signifies to set apart, or to separate, because they separated themselves from the rest of their countrymen, and professedly devoted themselves to special strictness in religion.

“They were proud, haughty, self-righteous, and held the common people in great disrespect, [John 7:49](http://biblehub.com/john/7-49.htm). They sought the offices of the state, and affected great dignity. They were ostentatious in their religious worship, praying in the corners of the streets, and seeking publicity in the bestowment of alms. They sought principally external cleanliness, and dealt much in ceremonial ablutions and washing.

“The Sadducees thought that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit [Matthew 22:23](http://biblehub.com/matthew/22-23.htm); [Acts 23:8](http://biblehub.com/acts/23-8.htm); and that the soul of man perishes with the body.

“They rejected all traditions, and professed to receive only the books of the Old Testament. They were far less numerous than the Pharisees, but their want of numbers was compensated, in some degree, by their wealth and standing in society. Though they did not generally seek office, yet several of them were advanced to the high priesthood (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehub.com).

8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

“ *Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance*— That is, a change of temper and behavior, answerable thereto; *forsake,*as well as *confess,*your sins, and let the integrity, regularity, holiness, and usefulness of your lives, manifest the sincerity of your repentance” (Benson Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“Bring forth therefore fruits ... - That is, the proper fruits of reformation; the proper evidence that you are sincere. Do not bring your cunning and dissimulation to this work; do not carry your hypocrisy into your professed repentance, but evince your sincerity by forsaking sin, and thus give evidence that this coming to Jordan to be baptized is not an act of dissimulation. No discourse could have been more appropriate or more cutting.

“Fruits – Conduct” (Barnes’ Notes, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“They regarded it as sufficient righteousness that they were descended from so holy a man as Abraham. John assured them that this was a matter of small consequence in the sight of God. Of the very stones of the Jordan he could raise up children to Abraham. The meaning seems to be this: God, from these stones, could more easily raise up those who should be worthy children of Abraham, or be like him, than simply, because you are descendants of Abraham, make you, who are proud and hypocritical, subjects of the Messiah's kingdom. Or, in other words, mere nativity, or the privileges of birth, avail nothing where there is not righteousness of life” (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehub.com).

9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

“The axe is laid at the root of the tree - Laying the axe at the root of a tree is intended to denote that the tree is to be cut down. It was not merely to be trimmed, or to be cut about the limbs, but the very tree itself was to be struck” (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehub.com).

10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

“He that hath two coats.—The remedy, in this case, was simple and practical. Selfishness was the root of evil. It was to be [conquered](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/3-11.htm) not by religious emotions only, but by acts of unselfishness.

“He that hath meat.—The Greek noun is plural, and includes all [forms](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/3-11.htm) of food” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“He that hath two coats ... - Or, in other words, aid the poor according to your ability; be benevolent, and you will thus show that your repentance is genuine. It is remarkable that one of the "first" demands of religion is to do good, and it is in this way that it may be shown that the repentance is not feigned. For. The "nature" of religion is to do good”

12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?

13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

“The publicans: There is reason to think that the "publicans" or "tax-gatherers" were especially oppressive and hard in their dealings with the people; and that, as they had every [opportunity](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/3-12.htm) of exacting more than they ought, so they often did it, and thus enriched themselves. The evidence of repentance in them would be to break off their sins in this respect, and to deal justly” (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehub.com).

14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse *any* falsely; and be content with your wages.

“The soldiers likewise - It seems that "they," also came to his baptism. Whether these were Jews or Romans cannot be ascertained. It is not improbable that, as [Judea](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/3-14.htm) was a Roman province, they were Jews or Jewish proselytes in the service of Herod Antipas or Philip, and so were really in the Roman service.

“Do violence . . . Do not take the property of any by unlawful force, or do not use unjust force against the person or property of any individual. it is probable that many of them were oppressive, or prone to violence, rapine, or theft, and burdensome even in times of peace to the inhabitants.

“Neither accuse any falsely. . . It is probable that when they wished the property of others and could not obtain it by violence, or when there was no pretext for violence, they often attempted the same thing in another way, and falsely accused the persons of crime.

“Be content ... Do not murmur or complain, or take unlawful means to increase your wages.

“Wages. . . This word means not only the "money" which was paid them, but also their "rations" or daily allowance of food. By this they were to show that their repentance was genuine; that it had a practical influence; that it produced a real reformation of life; and it is clear that "no other" repentance would be genuine. Every profession of repentance which is not attended with a change of life is mere hypocrisy. It may farther be remarked that John did not condemn their profession, or say that it was unlawful to be a soldier, or that they must abandon [the business](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/3-14.htm) in order to be true penitents. It was possible to be a good man and yet a soldier” (Barnes’ Notes, www.biblehub.com).

15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;

“*And as all the people were in expectation:* The austerity of John’s life, the important subjects of his sermons, the fervency of his exhortations, and the freedom, impartiality, and courage with which he rebuked all classes of sinners, raised him very high in the esteem of the generality of people; insomuch that many began to be of opinion he might be the Messiah” (Benson Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“whether he were the Christ—showing both how successful he had been in awakening the expectation of Messiah's immediate appearing, and the high estimation, and even reverence, which his own character commanded” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

16 John answered, saying unto *them* all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

““Here is emphatic testimony of John to the Messiahship of Jesus. Jesus is so great that John is unworthy to perform for him the function of the meanest slave. . . .” (Dummelow 631).

Baptize in Greek is *baptize* and means “to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge; to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to bathe (Thayer #907).

Mary Baker Eddy gives us two inspired definitions:

S&H 581:23

**BAPTISM.** Purification by Spirit; submergence in

Spirit.

S&H 588:7

**HOLY GHOST.** Divine Science; the development of eternal Life, Truth, and Love.

*Ghost* is *pneuma* in Greek and means “the spirit; the rational spirit, the soul, a spirit or simple essence, a movement of air, the wind, breath” (Thayer #4151).

*With the Holy Ghost, and with fire*. John says, in effect, ‘I can bring you to repentance, but no further. My baptism gives no grace. It only symbolizes the greater baptism which Jesus will give. His baptism will give you ‘the Holy Ghost,’ i.e. new spiritual life, and inward sanctification, and ‘Fire,’ i.e. holy fervor and zeal in God’s service” (Dummelow 631).

“Fire often has a purifying, not destructive, connotation in the OT. John’s water baptism relates to repentance; but the one whose way he is preparing will administer a Spirit