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Matthew 3:1-6 **King by Messenger.**

Matthew 3:1-6, *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.'"⁴ Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.⁵ Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him⁶ and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.*

Matthew is presenting Jesus Christ as the king in his Gospel.

Not only as the king, but as the king of kings.

Not only as the king of kings, but as the anointed of God.

That is his intention; and, in so doing, everything sort of focuses on that reality.

In chapter 1, Matthew presented Jesus as King by virtue of His birth. He showed us the royal character of Jesus' birth.

In Matthew chapter 2, he presented Him as King by virtue of the circumstances that surrounded His birth. The magi, Parthian king makers acknowledge Him as King. The hatred of Herod. was an acknowledging that He was a king and a threat to Herod's own throne.

The fulfilment of the Old Testament prophetic Word. The Old Testament prophecies that pointed to the King in specifics were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Matthew has one other approach here in the beginning of his gospel to show us that He was a king.

His approach is this: He is a King as indicated by the fact that God sent a king's harbinger to announce his arrival.

The fact that John is the forerunner/ harbinger/herald/ of the King is evidence that Jesus, in fact, is a king.

Matthew introduces us to the herald of the King, who also happens to be the greatest man who ever lived up until his time.

John the Baptist is presented as the forerunner of Jesus. He prepared the way for Jesus' arrival. The whole passage emphasizes this.

In ancient times, it was common when a king was coming to a city to send ahead of him certain servants, certain heralds, and they had two functions.

- One of the functions was to announce the king was coming.
- Other function was to prepare the road so that the travel would be easy.

So usually, the herald would go ahead with the idea of verbalizing the arrival of the king, and also with a camp of servants who could fix the road. Since roads in those days were subject to all kinds of pitfalls, hazards, and broken places.

This was very important that the king not be delayed, that the king not be injured as he travelled because something was not foreseen.

V 1, *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea*

John was an official herald announcing the arrival of a king.

He was calling the people to work on the path to get it ready for the King to arrive. So to John was given the role of being the herald of the King, announcing the King's arrival and making sure the people made the preparations so that the path was smooth.

This was a customary oriental thing, and John was called to do it. Only in his case, he was heralding the King of kings; and in his case, he was not asking people to prepare a dirt road. He

was asking them to prepare the road into their hearts, that the King might enter there. That was his purpose.

"In those days"

A big gap between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3.

At the end of chapter 2, they have just arrived in Nazareth, and Jesus is still a little tiny child under a year old.

Now John the Baptist is announcing the King is coming.

So somewhere around 29 or 30 years elapsed between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3, and Matthew totally skips over those periods.

In fact, only Luke gospel that even mentions any event in those entire 30 years.

When Jesus was 12 years old there was an incident took place when they family went to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem.

(Luke 2:41-50)

But apart from that, these are the silent years.

Luke 2:52, *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.*

The days in which He was living in Nazareth - the days in which He was a Nazarene.

For 30 years Jesus has been living in relative obscurity. But with the arrival of John is the announcement that triggers the beginning of Jesus' official ministry.

Acts 10:37, *that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:*

The gospel of peace by Jesus Christ began from Galilee after John's preaching. Acts 10 tells us that when John began to herald, Jesus began to minister. He was the official herald of the King.

By the way, John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin.
He was Jesus' cousin, and he was six months older than Jesus.

Luke 1:36, *Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.*

John the Baptist.

Great name.

John means "God graciously gave." "God's gracious gift,"

He was surnamed the Baptizer, the Baptist, not because he belonged to the Baptist Church of Galilee. There was no such thing. He was given that title because that was a nickname attached to his name because of the fact that that's what he did. That was the unique thing that he did.

The most obvious characteristic of his work was his baptizing; and that's why people branded him "John the Baptizer."

Special man.

He was special from the moment he was born.

Zacharias was a priest. He was married to Elizabeth, and they were righteous people, but they never had any babies because Elizabeth was barren, and they were old. Like Abraham and Sarah.

Luke 1:11-15, *Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.*

This is an unusual baby.

Luke 1:16-17, *And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

Luke 1:76-80, *"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, ⁷⁷ To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, ⁷⁸ Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; ⁷⁹ To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace." ⁸⁰ So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.*

What an unusual child?

- Filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb.
- Great in the sight of the Lord.
- Turning many to righteousness.
- Living his entire life in the desert.
- Right time he was to announce and show to the people the arrival of the King.

Matthew 11:11, *“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

These are the words of Jesus.

The greatest man that ever lived up until his time!

It is fitting that the great King of kings would have that man to be His herald!

If the greatest man that ever lived is only the herald for the King, then the King must be greater than the greatest man that ever lived?

John knew his task, also. There was no doubt his whole life that he knew his task. In John's gospel, written by the apostle John, not John the Baptist.

John 1:19-23, *Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”²² Then they said to him, “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?”²³ He said: “I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Make straight the way of the Lord,” ’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”*

He knew who he was.

There was never a doubt.

His parents knew it.

They told it to him from the time he was a child, and he went out into the desert, and he stayed there.

The Jewish people knew the Messiah would have a forerunner. They knew the Messiah would have a herald. They knew somebody was going to come along and announce that the Messiah was coming.

Do you know who they thought it would be?

They thought it would be what prophet Elijah.

At every Passover ceremony, every orthodox Jewish Passover ceremony, there is a cup at the table reserved for the prophet Elijah. At the circumcision of a child, a chair is placed for Elijah, anticipating that if Elijah would ever come and sit in the chair or drink the cup, that would be the sign that the King was arriving.

They failed to see was that though John was not actually Elijah. John was the fulfilment of the prophecy that Elijah would come. He was the Elijah of the New Testament.

Malachi 4:5-6, *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. ⁶ And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts*

of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

The prophet Malachi closes the Old Testament closes with this, "The next man on the scene will be Elijah, and he is going prepare you for the coming of the King."

That is the last word in the Old Testament.

How do we know John fulfilled that?

Luke 1:17, *He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

Malachi 4:5 quoted again. The Elijah that is being referred to is none other than John the Baptist. He is the Elijah.

Matthew 17:10, *And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"*

The Jews knew that Elijah must come first so they ask Jesus the question.

Look at the reply of Jesus.

Matthew 17:11-13, *Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. ¹² But I say to you*

that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.”¹³ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

John was the fulfilment.

He was not Elijah, but he came in the spirit and power of Elijah and fulfilled the intention of the prophecy.

Matthew 11:12-14, *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.¹³ For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.¹⁴ And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.*

What Jesus says that John will be this Elijah if you receive him.

What did they do?

They did not receive him.

What happened to John?

They beheaded him.

When they did that to John, they stopped the fulfilment of that prophecy and another Elijah, another one in the spirit and power of Elijah, will have to come in the future to get the people ready for the kingdom that is yet in the future.

John would have been that Elijah that is what verse 14 says. But they did not, and so there is an Elijah yet to come. Elijah of the future is one of the two witnesses of Revelation chapter 11. We have a separate message on the 2 witnesses.

He came to get the people ready for the King. Now you know what happened. He came to get them ready for the King. The King came to offer them the kingdom. They did not want the forerunner. They beheaded him. They did not want the King. They crucified Him. The whole thing fell apart. Israel was set aside, and it is all got to be redone in the future.

The kingdom was postponed, and there has got to be another forerunner to get Israel ready again for the coming kingdom.

- Everything about this man was startling.
 - Everything about this man was unique.
 - Everything about him, his sudden appearance, his lifestyle, his preaching, his baptizing, even his birth was incredible.
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- He was born to people who were barren.
 - He was born to be a, to be a priest by heritage, but he turned out to be a prophet.
 - He turned his back on his father's world, for his heavenly Father's will, and after spending his lifetime in the desert until the right moment.

God spoke to his heart and he began to thunder out the message that God had given him in the desert and begin to announce, "The King is coming."

He spent his whole life out there in the unlikely parish that God gave him was the wilderness of Judea. It is the south end of the Jordan Valley, around the north part of the Dead Sea.

That is arid, bleak, dry land extending when you go from Jerusalem down that plateau and all that area in the south there, south part of the Jordan Valley, is just arid, rolling bad lands. Desolation.

It was there that John spent his life, and I think there was something symbolic in it. Because John was calling people away from the system.

John was calling them away from the hypocrisy of their religiosity. Away from the hypocrisy of their temple worship. Away from all the luxury and the involvement in the system. Calling them out to a desolate spot where they could begin to focus on the desolate, arid qualities of their own hearts.

He wanted them away where they were freer to think and hear and forget, where they did not have the influences of all those around them, and all the things they had become so comfortable with. They had to leave the system. They had to leave the city of Jerusalem. They had to leave the temple. They

had to go way out in the boondocks - way out in desolation - to meet the man, the greatest man that ever lived.

Message:

What did they hear?

V2, and saying, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”*

"Repent!" That was the message.

He wants you to worship Him, but you cannot worship Him legitimately until you get sin out of the way.

You cannot come to Jesus Christ and just worship Him first. First, you have got to deal with your sin.

He was saying to Israel that they just cannot accept the King and begin to worship the King unless they get rid of their sin.

Identical message that Jesus preached when He came.

Matthew 4:17, *From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

The Greek word *metanoeo*, translated as “repent” means more than just sorrow.

It means “to turn around.” “to be converted.”

- A change of opinion.
- A change of purpose.
- A change of direction.
- A change of mind.
- A change of will.
- A change from sin to holiness.

Wherever this Greek word is used in the New Testament, the reference is to change the mind and the purpose from sin to holiness. It implies sorrow for sin, but it means to turn around.

2 Corinthians 7:9-10, *Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*

John the Baptist wanted them to change from sin to holiness. Only then they will have the kingdom.

The King is coming, and everything will be all right if you will just turn around 180 degrees. You totally change your lifestyle, and you can have the King.

The Jews who thought that they were the favoured of God. They were like Nicodemus. Nicodemus came to Jesus to ask Him a theological question.

Jesus looked him in the eye and said not that you need to add a few more good works. You need to be born all over again. Nicodemus, you got to start from scratch.

Imagine the message of John the Baptist.

The King is coming. Now He just wants one thing out of you, and that's total conversion. Turn completely around from what you are.

Shocking to them!

Repent, the word used by John the Baptist is a

- radical change,
- radical turnaround,
- radical transformation of mind and heart.

- ✓ John asked for a turn around.
- ✓ Jesus asked for a turn around.
- ✓ Peter asked for a turn around.
- ✓ All the apostles asked for a turn around.

Do you believe that you need to repent to be saved?

Of course! Yes!!

That is being saved.

- You got to say no to sin and yes to holiness.
- No to sin and yes to Christ.

John thundered out one word!

This was a shock, because he was challenging the prevailing Jewish belief that they were already saved.

- That they were already righteous.
- They were the seed of Abraham.
- They were the people of God.
- They were ones in the covenant.
- They were the chosen.

Matthew 3:9, *do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*

So do not gloat over your ancestry.

Matthew 3:10, *And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

The message was clear.

- Did not matter that they were the children of Abraham.
- Did not matter that they had been given the promises and the covenants.
- Did not matter that they were in the land that God had given His people.
- Did not matter, because they were sinful, and they needed to turn around.

What John meant was there is no difference between you and Gentiles. Just because you are Jews you have no right to the kingdom until you get converted. Till you turn from sin to holiness. Personal conversion.

Motive:

Why should they get converted?

Why should they turn around?

V 2, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

The long expected Messianic reign was near, and the people had to get ready. If they were going to have the King and be in His kingdom, they must be ready.

At present, they were not ready.

It has been 400 years since they heard any prophet speak to them. God was silent and, after Malachi, 400 years of silence. God did not break the silence. There was a time where there was no voice nor any that answered, and now suddenly, the silence is shattered.

They were expecting that the silence will be shattered by announcement of Joy to get into the kingdom. Whereas they are hearing the voice of a man to get ready and repent to come into the kingdom.

He does not give a message of joy or hope or victory but a message of get ready. He does not give a message of comfort but a message of judgement.

Matthew 3:12, *His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

The message by John the Baptist was shocking and unacceptable. No wonder they beheaded him.

Should have a been good news about the King and the kingdom, but they had to get the bad news first. The bad news was they were not ready, because they were sinful, and they had to be converted.

The children of Abraham, sons of the covenant, sons of the promises, circumcised, people of the King had no right to enter the kingdom. That is a shock. No right. No different than a Gentile.

The Jews thought that salvation was for them and them alone. Few proselytes who got in on it.

John broke loose from the traditional beliefs. God kept Him in the desert for 30 years is so he would not get cluttered up with bad theology that was in existence in his time. The man was so

pure and so uncluttered in his mind, because God had given him His message, and it was uncluttered.

What is the kingdom of heaven?

It is an Old Testament concept.

Daniel 4:37, "the king of heaven."

Daniel 2:44, "the God of heaven".

Daniel 4:25, "He will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed."

The God of heaven, the King of heaven, God and heaven are then associated. The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God then are associated terms.

Matthew uses the term "kingdom of heaven" 32 times.

Matthew is the only gospel writer that ever uses it.

Mark, Luke, and John do not use it.

They use "the kingdom of God," and there may be a special reason for that.

From Daniel, and there are many other illustrations, heaven and God were thought of as synonymous. God was the King of heaven.

The reason Matthew may use it is because Matthew's gospel is a characteristically Jewish gospel. Jews historically in their

Judaism, a Jew would never say the name of God. They would substitute frequently the term “heaven.”

Matthew is in some sense accommodating a current substitute by calling the “kingdom of heaven” that rather than the “kingdom of God,” so that there is not an overt offense.

No great distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. Passages in Matthew, Mark, Luke, all recording the same incident where one time Matthew uses “kingdom of heaven,” Mark uses “kingdom of God,” and Luke uses “kingdom of God,” interchangeably, identical terms.

The kingdom of heaven has two aspects.
The outer and the inner.

Sometimes, in the gospels, the outer is in view, and sometimes the inner is in view.

The kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, includes everybody who professes to acknowledge God.

Matthew 13 that the kingdom of heaven's got in wheat and tares. That the kingdom of heaven is like a great big bush with birds in it. We have got the true and the false, the real and the non-real.

The kingdom of heaven is, is everybody that professes. But in the inner sense, it is only the really regenerated, born-again, genuinely saved people.

In some passages, the inner is in view. The big circle of profession includes the true and the false. The little circle only those truly born again in Christ.

There are five distinct phases in the kingdom.

1. Rule of God.

The rule of God over the hearts of men and over the world. Both are included. Now, the first phase of this thing is the prophesied kingdom.

Daniel said that God is going to come and set up a kingdom. A kingdom that will never be destroyed. Daniel foresaw that Christ would be the King of that kingdom. It was a prophesied kingdom.

2. Present Kingdom

The present kingdom or the kingdom at hand. This is the kingdom described by John the Baptist. He was saying, "The prophesied rule of God is now imminent. It's now ready."

Jesus said it.

The apostles said it.

It is coming. It is near. The rule of God, the reign of Christ, both internally and externally and it is here.

3. Invisible Kingdom

After the King was rejected by Israel, the King returned to heaven, and the kingdom now exists in a mystery form. Christ is not literally in the world, literally reigning, literally sitting in Jerusalem ruling the kingdom.

But He reigns a kingdom in the hearts of all who acknowledge Him as Lord.

So, it is an invisible kingdom, the mystery form.

Romans 14:17, *for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

4. Millennial Kingdom

A thousand-year millennium that is to come. It will involve an external rule where Christ literally rules, physically in the earth, and an internal where He rules the hearts of the believing people.

The book of Revelation talks about this. Jesus, in Matthew 16, gave people a glimpse of this in the transfiguration.

5. Eternal Kingdom

The everlasting kingdom.

2 Peter 1:11, *for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

The Old Testament prophesied a kingdom — a kingdom that would be external, where they would literally be in the earth. The earth would be the place of the kingdom.

The earth would be ruled by the King and it would also be internal, the hearts of the believing people would submit to that reign.

John and Jesus and the apostles said it is at hand. But it was rejected, and so an interim, internal kingdom has taken form now that we call this mystery age. But one day the kingdom will be manifest internally and externally, and then that thousand-year kingdom will exist and, at the end of that, an everlasting kingdom.

So, John was talking about the at-hand.

If they received John, and Jesus Christ, there never would have been the interim and there never would have been the mystery church age. They would have gone into the thousand-year

manifest kingdom and from there right into the everlasting kingdom.

John would have been that Elijah and it would have all been fulfilled. But when they killed the forerunner and they killed the King, the whole thing was future postponed and in the meantime the mystery kingdom dwells in the hearts of believing people. Christ may not be reigning in the world, but He is reigning in our hearts.

So, John was calling the nation to turn its back on sin, to be converted, to get ready for the kingdom, because the kingdom was coming.

The tragedy of it is that they did not hear his message. They never received the kingdom, and that whole generation died without the King, died without the kingdom, and went into hell.

Mission:

V 3, *For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.'"*

John fulfilled **Isaiah 40:3**.

Isaiah 40:1-3, *"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. ² "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her*

warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the Lord's hand Double for all her sins." ³The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God.

Why?

Because the kingdom is coming, and he describes it.

Isaiah 40:4-5, *Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; ⁵The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

One of the passages of the Messiah taken from that marvellous text.

John was crying to prepare the people for the kingdom. As Isaiah described the kingdom in 4 and 5. He was fulfilling the prophetic word of Isaiah.

So, John's mission was preparation, and deep conviction. He wanted to bring to bear on Israel such conviction that they confessed they were unfit, sinners, poor, damned, and miserable.

He was a judgment preacher designed by God from way back in the book of Isaiah to confront a wicked, evil nation and get them right for the arrival of the King. He fulfilled prophecy.

Another note from Matthew to help us to see Jesus is the King. Even His herald is a fulfilment of prophecy.

Manner:

V 4, Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Here was a man who did not care at all for the things that people lived for.

- He was a self-disciplined man.
- His self-renunciation was a stinging rebuke to the worldliness and luxury of his own day.
- His appearance was a sermon if he never said a word.

Camel's hair was very durable, and something woven out of coarse camel's hair would have been long-lasting and durable, not fashionable by any stretch of imagination. In fact, it was a gross thing.

A leather belt?

Leather lasts longer.

A living illustration to people who made fine garments and fancy clothes their preoccupation. A living illustration to people who made food and drink their preoccupation.

- His object was not to make people into ascetics.
- His object was not to make people into hermits.
- His object was to help them escape from the wrath to come.

- He was an intimidating man.

Maybe he modelled it from Elijah?

2 Kings 1:8, *So they answered him, "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."*

Durability, functional clothes.

The man, by his lifestyle, was a rebuke and then his diet.

Locusts?

Deuteronomy 32:13, *"He made him ride in the heights of the earth, That he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, And oil from the flinty rock;*

We can understand eating honey, but locusts, baked, and salted.

Leviticus 11:22, *These you may eat: the locust after its kind, the destroying locust after its kind, the cricket after its kind, and the grasshopper after its kind.*

Lord permitted, and by implication even encouraged, the Israelites to eat four different kinds of insects which, today, we would call locusts. He literally ate bugs, insects.

Everybody has got their delicacy.

V 5-6, *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him⁶ and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.*

They were going out group after group from Jerusalem. Undoubtedly, the East Bank and the West Bank and everybody in any area around there were all coming out. They were being baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

What was the response to his preaching?

John had an amazing impact. He called the society to attention.

Matthew 21:26, *But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet."*

It was common belief that John was a prophet from God, and they went out. As much of a shock as it was, people came, and they were baptized, and they confessed their sin.

The fact that they were baptized is shocking.

Never in all history had any Jew submitted to being baptized. This is something new.

The Levitical washings of the hands and the feet and the head and all of that were frequent. There was certain ceremonial bathing among the Essenes, which was a community of the Jews living out in that area.

All those purification ceremonies were repeated daily and even hourly if you sin. These were just ceremonial washings, and every time you suspected another pollution, you did it again.

John's baptism was one-time.

Jews never did that.

Why?

Because single baptism was exactly what was required of a Gentile proselyte, who was entering into Judaism. A Jew who would submit himself to that kind of baptism would be saying, in effect, "I am an outsider seeking entrance into the people of God."

They were literally indulging themselves in proselyte baptism.

A member of God's chosen people, a son of Abraham, assured of God's salvation, baptized like a common proselyte?

Yet, that is exactly what John asked of them.

He called Israel to realize that their nationality could not save them.

Their race could not save them.

They had to forsake sin.

They had to be converted to righteousness.

They had to get in the kingdom like everybody else did.

So, John was calling for a fundamental transformation that even a Jew had to make.