

File No. 107

MATTHEW 3:1–17

Isaiah 40:3; Mark 1:1–11; Luke 3:1–22; John 1:19–34

A PROPHET FOR GOD'S PEOPLE / JOHN BAPTISES JESUS

(SBS Bk 4 Story Nos. 40 & 41)

Story Notes

John the Baptist was to prepare the way of the Lord (Isaiah 40:1–5). It was 'the Lord' who was coming, and coming to establish his rule (kingdom) in Israel, and then, the world. He was coming, especially, to comfort his people. John's appearance was like Elijah's (II Kings 1:8), and his ministry had a similar purpose (Matt. 11:14; 17:12–13).

A prophet had not appeared for some four hundred years, but John was recognized as one, and many went out to hear him. Baptism was understood as a purification rite and many wanted to be right with God and ready for the coming of his Messiah.

John taught that God's kingdom would be established by the one coming after him, the Messiah. This would be a time for cleansing the nation. John also knew that the Pharisees wanted the praise of man and the Sadducees sought political power, and warned them severely. They could not presume on their heritage.

If people thought John's ministry was decisive, what of the ministry of him who was to come, baptizing the nation in the Holy Spirit and fire? Clearly, no evil would remain when he had finished his work.

John knew that Jesus was much greater than himself, but Jesus insisted on being baptized by John, his older cousin (as we learn from Luke). Jesus knew that his Father wanted him to be one with the people who were confessing their sins and preparing for the reign of God. For him, this was righteousness (cf. Jer. 23:5–6).

The Father identified Jesus as his Son (fulfilling Psa. 2:7) with whom he was pleased (fulfilling Isa. 42:1) by sending the Spirit as a dove to alight on him, and by speaking about him to all who were there. He was identified as God's Son who would rule the nations (Ps. 2:7; cf. Gen. 22:2), the Servant of the Lord whom God loved (as in Isa. 42:1; also Matt. 12:18). He would establish justice in the earth.

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