

## John's Ministry

### Matthew 3:4—12

#### More Repentance

All too often we who believe the church began mid-Acts try to separate this Mystery age from the Prophetic age; the Gospel of the Grace of God from the Gospel of the Kingdom. We have trained ourselves to become experts in looking for distinctions instead of similarities. One area we do this in is repentance. It's easy to see how Israel needed to repent and be baptized for salvation because Peter clearly connects these two things together to be saved (Acts 2:38). When we look at the requirements of salvation in this dispensation of Grace we are saved by believing in Jesus Christ and His work of death, burial and resurrection with no mention of repentance. Our assumption is they needed to repent but we do not.

This, however, is in contradiction to what Paul says. Repentance of a Body believer is addressed in a number of passages including Acts 17:30; 20:21; 26:20; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:9—10; 12:21.

**Romans 2:4** Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

**2 Corinthians 7:9—10**<sup>9</sup> I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point* of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of God*, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.<sup>10</sup> For the sorrow that is according to *the will of God* produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Repentance is turning around and going the opposite way, a change of mind. It is not feeling sorry for your sins as can be seen from 2 Corinthians 7:9 but sorrow can certainly be a part of repenting.

So how are we to understand repentance spoken of in the Gospels and early Acts compared with later Acts and Paul's writings? I believe repentance must be interpreted within each dispensational setting. When John began his ministry he came preaching that the Kingdom was near so Israel needed to repent, confess and be baptized. This repentance was a call for Israel to turn back to God (Luke 1:16—17). Every prophet sent by God to Israel preached this same message. Peter continued this same message to Israel in Acts 3:19 with the promise of the Millennial Kingdom if they heeded his plea. Individuals were also called to repent and turn from their sinful ways so they could serve the Lord (Luke 15:10; Acts 2:38).

Paul never calls us to come back to God but does call on the unbeliever to turn to God. As believers we are to put off the old nature and put on the new. This contains the idea of repentance—turning from our old sinful life and living for God (Romans 13:14; Ephesians 4:22—24).

We can see from the above that even though repentance crosses dispensational boundaries the word repentance can only be properly interpreted within each particular dispensation. Repentance under the Kingdom gospel has a slightly different meaning than repentance under the Grace gospel.

#### More Baptism

When the word baptism comes up most people immediately think of water baptism not realizing that the Bible lists at least seven different types of baptisms. Matthew 3:11 lists three baptisms: water, Holy Spirit and fire. Along with these three there are the baptism into Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2), baptism into Christ and baptism into death (Romans 6:3). Others could be listed.

Identification is a word that could be substituted for baptism. When we are baptized into Christ we are identified with Christ. When the children of Israel were baptized into Moses they were identified with Moses and had experienced all things as Moses had experienced in the desert. Those who submitted to John's baptism were those who were identified with John and publically demonstrated their commitment to his ministry. We can consider our old nature dead because we are identified with Christ and therefore have died with Christ.

**Romans 6:4** Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

There are many who confuse Christ baptizing believers with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 with the Holy Spirit baptizing us into Christ Jesus to become a member of the Body of Christ.

**Acts 1:5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

**Galatians 3:27** For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

**1 Corinthians 12:13** For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Pay attention to who is doing the baptizing and with what medium He is baptizing. In early Acts it was Jesus Christ who was pouring out the Holy Spirit on the Kingdom believers but after Paul was raised up and given the Gospel of the Grace of God, the Holy Spirit is the person who is baptizing us into Christ. Even though this difference is clearly stated in Scripture most ignore it and say it is the same thing stated in slightly different ways. Those who believe the church began at Pentecost hold fast to this way of thinking so they can hold on to their system of theology. If they were to admit that there are two different baptisms with Christ and the Holy Spirit reversing roles with each other, they would have difficulty defending the idea of the Church beginning at Pentecost.

One very easy way to see that baptism in early Acts is different than our baptism into the Body of Christ is to test to whom the groups are identified with. Are both groups identified with the same Person (Holy Spirit) or with two different Persons (Christ and the Holy Spirit). When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Kingdom believers in early Acts they produced the signs of the Holy Spirit. They spoke and interpreted strange languages, performed miracles, were in complete agreement with one another. The Holy Spirit had taken them over and they were completely identified with His person. When we become saved in this age of Grace we no longer see all these miraculous manifestations of the Spirit. In fact when a person now becomes a believer there is often no exterior demonstration of that inward change. We are, however, completely identified with Christ so much so that we are considered to have died because He has died and raised because He was raised.

**Colossians 2:12** having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

## Summary

Israel		Body of Christ
Needed to believe in the person of Jesus Christ as their Messiah. (Matthew 16:16; John 20:31)	Believe (Faith)	Need to believe in the Person of Jesus Christ and in His work on the cross (1 Corinthians 15:1—4)
The nation of Israel needed to turn back to God after serving other gods (Acts 3:9; Luke 1:16). Individual Israelites were to turn from their sins and be morally upright (Acts 2:38; Luke 15:10). The good works (fruit) of the Law were necessary to demonstrate their faith (Matthew 3:8; 19:16—19). If they did not do the works they were not truly saved.	Repentance (To turn or change your mind)	We are never told to repent to be saved, however, the process of repentance is contained in the act of believing. When you believe you have repented (Romans 2:4). Good works should naturally flow from our believing and repentance (Acts 26:20). These good works have nothing to do with becoming saved but should be a result of our salvation.
Israelites needed to confess their individual sins and the sins of their nation from the past (Leviticus 26:40; Daniel 9:20).	Confession (To agree or say the same thing)	We confess (agree) with God that Jesus Christ is God and believe in His work on the cross then we will be saved (Romans 10:9—10).
Individual Israelites needed to be water baptized. Baptism did not save them, however, not being baptized demonstrated a lack of true faith. Jesus gave the Disciples a ministry that included water baptism (Matthew 28:19).	Baptism (Identification)	Members of the Body of Christ are baptized by the Holy Spirit into Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13). This is the one and only baptism we need (Ephesians 4:4). Jesus Christ gave Paul a ministry that did not include water baptism.

## Verses 4—10

Now back to John the Baptist. When the people went out to be baptized by him they were completely identifying themselves with his ministry. They had to go outside the city of Jerusalem to find the spiritual refreshing they needed since they could not find it in the temple with the Pharisees and Sadducees. This is why the leadership of Israel became quite concerned about what was going on. They were seeing their power over the people starting to erode. God put these people in charge of His people Israel but instead of building them up they were using Israel for their own good.

**Jeremiah 10:21** For the shepherds have become stupid And have not sought the LORD; Therefore they have not prospered, And all their flock is scattered.

**Jeremiah 23:1—4** <sup>1</sup> “Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!” declares the LORD. <sup>2</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: “You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds,” declares the LORD. <sup>3</sup> “Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. <sup>4</sup> I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the LORD.

Jesus contrasts Himself with these bad shepherds by calling himself the Good Shepherd (John 10:21).

John’s greeting to the Pharisees and Sadducees was not exactly flattery for when they came out to see what was going on John calls them a brood of vipers. Snakes have been given a bad name from the time Adam was tempted by Satan in the Garden of Eden. John knew what was in their hearts because he was indwelt by the Holy Spirit from conception. Even though their hearts were not right John still gives them an opportunity to repent and be baptized and to do the works that would indicate they were truly repentant.

Those who do not repent and don’t do the works of righteousness will be cut down and burned up. They will be baptized (identified) with those who are destroyed in the Tribulation when God pours out His judgment on the world (verse 11). This is emphasized in verse 12 with a picture of God separating the wheat (those bearing good fruit) from the chaff (those not producing good fruit) and the chaff being burned up. This picture is used throughout the Gospels (Matthew 7:19; 13:40, 42, 50; Luke 3:9, 17; John 15:6). Paul never uses this picture for believers. The believer will never see judgment unto condemnation but his works will be judged and the wood, hay and straw will be burned up while the gold, silver and gems will withstand the flames (1 Corinthians 3:13).

Notice that verse 10 indicates that the time of judgment has already begun for the axe is already laid at the root of the tree. This seems to correspond with the parable of the fig tree in Luke 13:6—9. They were right at the doorstep of the end times of Israel (according to prophecy). When Peter announces that the end-time events of Joel were happening in Acts 2:16 he did so by the power of the Holy Spirit knowing that according to prophecy the Tribulation was about to begin.

## Verses 11—12

John announces the coming of the Holy Spirit in verse 11 then the Tribulation was scheduled (by prophecy) to come shortly after. The Holy Spirit’s arrival was prophesied in Ezekiel and this prophecy was beginning to be fulfilled in Acts 2. Joel 2 would have been completely fulfilled if Israel had accepted her Messiah in Jerusalem. The events happening at Pentecost would have then spread to Judah, Samaria and to the utter most parts of the world as the Disciples were commanded in Acts 1:89. See also Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28—29.

**Ezekiel 36:26—27** <sup>26</sup> Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

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