

BIBLE READING DAY 4, WEDNESDAY: MARCH 2

John the Baptizer's Ministry,

Matthew 3:4–17; Luke 3:1–23; Matthew 4:1–11; John 1:6-9; 15–34

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness to the Light, that through him all might believe. He was not the Light but came to bear witness to the Light. The true Light that enlightens every man was always there, coming into the world: he was in the world, and the world was made by him; but the world did not know him.

John bore witness to him and cried, "This is he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than I, for he was before me.'"

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene; in the time when Annas and Caiaphas were High Priests, the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. And he went through all the valley of the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

John wore a garment of camel's hair with a leather girdle about his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Multitudes from Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region of the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by John in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of snakes, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Show by your actions that you are really repenting, and do not think to excuse yourselves by telling yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father!' For I say to you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree which does not bring forth good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

"Then what shall we do?" asked the multitudes.

"He who has two coats, let him give one to him who has none," replied John, "and he who has food, let him likewise share."

Some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Master, what shall we do?"

"Collect no more than the amount appointed you," said John.

Some soldiers also asked him, "And what about us, what shall we do?"

"Do not extort money from people by violence or bring false charges against men, and be satisfied with your wages," said John.

As all the people were in expectation and wondering about John, whether he might possibly be the Messiah, John answered them, saying, "I baptize you with water; but one mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to unfasten. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." And with many other exhortations, John preached the gospel to the people.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan, to John, to be baptized by him. But John protested, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

But Jesus answered, "Let it be so now, for it is right for us to fulfill all the obligations of righteousness."

Then John consented. And after he had been baptized, Jesus immediately went up from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And lo, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

And Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and nights, and afterward was hungry. Then the tempter came and said to him, "If you really are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread."

But Jesus answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that goes forth out of the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on a pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are actually the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge over you; they will bear you up on their hands, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

"But it is also written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God,'" replied Jesus.

Again, the devil took him up on a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and said, "All these things will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Then said Jesus, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

Now this was the testimony of John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He frankly acknowledged, "I am not the Messiah."

"Then are you Elijah?" they asked.

"I am not," said John.

"Are you the Prophet?"

"No," replied John.

"Then who are you?" they asked. "We must give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

John answered, "I am a voice crying in the wilderness, '**Make straight the way of the Lord,**' as the prophet Isaiah said."

Then the messengers, who were Pharisees, asked, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

"I baptize with water," replied John, "but among you stands one whom you do not know—the one who follows me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to unfasten."

These things took place at Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who will bear away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me will come a man who is greater than I, for he was before me.' And I did not know him; but in order that he might be revealed to Israel, I have come baptizing with water."

John also bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove out of heaven, and it rested on him and remained. And I did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, he it is who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

Approximate Timeline of Jesus's Public Ministry

BEFORE BAPTISM	BAPTISM	FIRST PASSOVER	SUMMER	FIRST BOOTHS	WINTER	SECOND PASSOVER	SUMMER	FIRST BOOTHS	WINTER	SECOND PASSOVER	SUMMER	THIRD BOOTHS	WINTER	FINAL PASSOVER
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DEVOTIONAL DAY 4 (WEDNESDAY MARCH 2)

Preparing to Turn

Based on Matthew 3:4–17; Luke 3:1–23; Matthew 4:1–11; John 1:6–9; 15–34

Have you ever worked on a project where the ease of reaching the end-product was based on the quality of the prep work put into it beforehand?

In Alaska this past summer, our mission team laid almost 5,000 square feet of carpet and baseboard. Before we could begin this project, we had to completely prepare the space for new flooring and baseboards. We had to remove the old carpeting, scrape away 50 plus years of old glue and tack stripping. We had to wash and mop the floor two or three times to remove the layers of dirt, dust and grime that had accumulated over the years. Then we had to begin repairing areas of the subfloor that had been destroyed, shifted, or corrupted over the years. It took time, it took sweating, and for some people it literally rubbed them the wrong way (big, ole nasty blisters) but in the end, the new carpet was laid.

God sent John the Baptizer to begin preparing the way for Christ to come in and move the people, as well as us today, into a New Covenant; that is, a covenant that allows everyone freedom from sin. John's mission was to prepare people's hearts to receive the gospel message.

John's message is one of repentance. He is warning us to carefully choose the path in which we will walk. Repentance is doing a 180 degree turn around on the sins in our lives, not the slow 360 degree turn that many people do. Yes, true repentance might take longer than you would like. Yes, true repentance will be a struggle and hard at times. And yes, true repentance might even rub you (and those closest to you) the wrong way. It will cause secular discomfort.

But John the Baptizer doesn't just leave it there. He says, "Look! It will all be worth it. Do you see? Jesus is coming to save you to make you whole once again. Prepare yourself. Prepare your heart for Him."

Questions to consider:

- 1.) Am I truly repentant? Have I prepared my heart to receive Christ? What areas of my life do I need to turn away from?
- 2.) Am I excited to receive the gospel message?
- 3.) Am I willing to pave a path for my family, my friends, my enemies to help them receive the gospel message? What are you doing to prepare the way for others?

Prayer: God, Thank You for forgiving me. Help me clear a path to receive You fully in my life. Help me set the example of how to follow You to the people in my life.

"We all want progress, but if you're on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive."

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

--By Matt Cornelius

Flavius Josephus was a historian who was Jewish by birth but loyal to Rome, having become a Roman citizen. The following comes from his writings, regarding an extra-Biblical account of the death of John the Baptizer [18.109-119].

About this time Aretas, the king of the Arabian city Petra, and Herod Antipas had a quarrel. Herod had married the daughter of Aretas [called Phasaelis] and had lived with her a great while. But when he was once at Rome, he lodged with Herod Philip, who was his brother indeed, but not by the same mother (this Herod was the son of the high priest Simon's daughter).

Here, he fell in love with Herodias, Philip's wife, who was the daughter of Aristobulus their brother, and the sister of Agrippa the Great. Antipas ventured to talk to her about a marriage between them; when she admitted, an agreement was made for her to change her habitation and come to him as soon as he should return from Rome: one article of this marriage also was that he should divorce Aretas' daughter.

So Antipas made this agreement and returned home again. But his wife Phasaelis had discovered the agreement he had made before he had been able to tell her about it. She asked him to send her to Machaerus, which is a place in the borders of the dominions of Aretas and Antipas, without informing him of her intentions. So, Antipas sent her there, unaware that his wife had perceived something.

Earlier, she had sent to Machaerus, and all things necessary for her journey were made already prepared for her by a general of Aretas' army. Consequently, she soon arrived in Arabia, under the conduct of several generals, who carried her from one to another successively. She met her father and told him of Herod's intentions.

So Aretas made this the first occasion of the enmity between him and Herod, who had also some quarrel with him about their limits near Gamala. So both sides raised armies, prepared for war, and sent their generals to fight.

In the battle, Herod's army was destroyed by the treachery of some fugitives, who, though they were from the tetrarchy of Philip, had joined Aretas' army.

So, Herod wrote about these affairs to the emperor Tiberius, who became very angry at the attempt made by Aretas, and wrote to Lucius Vitellius, the governor of Syria, to make war upon him, and either to take him alive and bring him to him in bonds, or to kill him and send him his head. This was the charge that Tiberius gave to the governor of Syria.

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God as a just punishment of what Herod had done against John, who was called the Baptist.

For Herod had killed this good man, who had commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, righteousness towards one another and piety towards God. For only thus, in John's opinion, would the baptism he administered be acceptable to God, namely, if they used it to obtain not pardon for some sins but rather the cleansing of their bodies, inasmuch as it was taken for granted that their souls had already been purified by justice.

Now many people came in crowds to him, for they were greatly moved by his words. Herod, who feared that the great influence John had over the masses might put them into his power and enable him to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best to put him to death. In this way, he might prevent any mischief John might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late.

Accordingly, John was sent as a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Machaerus, the castle previously mentioned, and was put to death. Now the Jews thought that the destruction of his army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure with him.