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## **Isaiah chapter 11**

### **New International Version**

**1** A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. **2** The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD--

**3** and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; **4** but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

**5** Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. **6** The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. **7** The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

## Psalm chapter 72

### New International Version

**1** Of Solomon. Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness.

**2** May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. **3**

May the mountains bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. **4** May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the

children of the needy; may he crush the oppressor. **5** May he endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. **6** May he be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth.

**7** In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.

## Romans chapter 15

### New International Version

**1** We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. **2** Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. **3** For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.' **4** For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

**5** May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, **6** so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**7** Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. **8** For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed **9** and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name.'

**10** Again, it says, 'Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.'

**11** And again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him.'

**12** And again, Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope.'

**13** May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Context Summary

Romans 15:1–7 concludes Paul's teaching on how Christians with strong faith, those who understand their freedom from the law, should live with those of weaker faith. All Christians must please each other and not themselves. After all, Christ didn't come to please Himself. With God's help and encouragement, everyone in the church can live together in harmony and glorify God with one, unified voice, as they serve each other ahead of themselves. They must welcome each other as Christ has welcomed them.

Romans 15:4, NIV: For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

### What does Romans 15:4 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul seems to take a bit of a detour from his main point with these words. In the previous verse, he quoted from Psalm 69 to support the idea that because Christ did not please Himself in this life, self-gratification should not be the main priority of Christ-followers.

Now Paul seems to comment on his practice—seen in Romans and throughout his other letters—of quoting Scripture to support his teaching about Christ. For the modern reader, Paul's references are from what we now call the Old Testament. It is true that Christians have died to the law in Christ and have been released from any obligation to obey the requirements of the law (Romans 7:4–6). That does not mean, however, that the scriptures from the "former days" have stopped being valuable.

Paul insists that those older Scriptures were written to teach modern Christians, not just those who read them in the former times. Those Scriptures are for us, too, to bring encouragement and hope to God's people in every generation. They help us to endure, even in and through suffering.

This verse serves as an answer to modern Christians who ask, why even bother to read the Old Testament? Regardless of age, those writings remain the revelation of the heart of God. The fact that we have been freed in Christ from following the law does not stop those 39 books from being the Word of God, full of truth, wisdom, history, and great encouragement for believers. Paul insists that we place value on those Scriptures and seek out encouragement and hope from them.

Romans 15:5, NIV: May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had,

### **What does Romans 15:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Here, Paul transitions back to the main point he has been teaching since the beginning of chapter 14. In the previous verse, he wrote that the Scriptures written in former days are intended to be a source of encouragement and hope for modern Christians. Now he offers a prayer to the God of endurance and encouragement.

What beautiful names for God! Paul views God as the ultimate source of encouragement and endurance. God is not merely the one to whom we will all give an account of our lives (Romans 14:12), He is also the one who will lift us up and help us to keep going. Paul asks God to give to the Christians in the church in Rome the ability to live in harmony with each other as they all live in accord—or in step—with Jesus Himself.

Paul will go on in the following verses to pray that the church in Rome will be unified, as well. Harmony, though, is something different. It is a metaphor about music, of course. The sense of it is that all Christians are singing the same song, but that we are singing different parts. This requires two things: We must adjust our pitch and tone to coordinate with each other while also performing our individual parts in the song.

Romans 15:6, NIV: so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**What does Romans 15:6 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

This verse concludes a prayer for the church in Rome that Paul began in the previous verse. There he asked the God of endurance and encouragement to grant them the ability to live in harmony with each other in Christ.

Now he asks for something that describes the very purpose of the church. We exist, in part, to glorify God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is what we are here for. One of the ways we accomplish that, according to Paul's prayer, is by living in unity as if singing with one voice. In other words, Paul prays that the Christians in Rome will be unified in their purpose to glorify God together as if they were all singing the same song.

It's a beautiful picture of what life in the church should be like. To get there, though, Paul has made it clear that both the strong and weak in faith (Romans 14:1) will have to yield to each other and refuse to judge each other (Romans 14:13). They will have to set themselves aside to be able to harmonize and sing with one voice

Romans 15:7, NIV: Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

**What does Romans 15:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul has prayed for the unity and harmony of the church in Rome. Now he instructs them one more time to welcome each other as Christ has welcomed them. This is not merely a nice-sounding phrase to tack on the wall. Paul is commanding believers to fully accept and include other Christians in community with themselves, including those who disagree strongly about what is and is not permitted (Romans 14:1–2; 14:20–21). He is commanding them to set their Christ-won freedoms aside, if necessary, to build up the church (Romans 14:13).

Why would they do this? In the end, it is all to add to God's glory. Put negatively, a refusal to welcome Christians who disagree with my convictions will keep me from participating in bringing glory to God. It will keep me from achieving the very purpose of my life. Acting as if my own convictions are beyond doubt—as if I

were infallible or beyond reproach—makes it difficult for me to appreciate God's holiness and majesty, let alone my own role in the body of Christ.

Romans 15:8, NIV: For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed

### **What does Romans 15:8 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul is addressing Christ's unique relationship with the Jews and the Gentiles. First, Christ, during His time on earth and continuing even now, became a servant to the circumcised. Israel's identity was closely associated with circumcision. Christ, then, became in His earthly life and ministry a servant to the Jewish people.

Jesus said something similar in Matthew 15:24, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Paul echoes this idea about Jesus' purpose in Galatians 4:4–5, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law."

It's not that Jesus' work on earth did not also benefit non-Jewish people, as the following verse will state clearly. It's that in Jesus, God was keeping all His promises to Abraham and the patriarchs. In sending Jesus as the Messiah, God was proven to be a keeper of His promises to Israel.

Romans 15:9, NIV: and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name.'

### **What does Romans 15:9 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul is describing the reasons Christ came to earth. First, He was sent to become a servant to the Jewish people. He was, in fact, the means by which God kept all the promises He had made to Abraham and the patriarchs of Israel.

Now Paul says that Christ also became a servant to the Jews for another reason: so that the Gentiles would glorify God for His mercy. When the Israelites, for the most part, refused to come to God through faith in Christ, God offered the gift of His grace through faith in Christ to the rest of the world (Romans 11:11–12). That's how Jesus' mission to serve the Jews resulted in so many Gentiles giving glory to God for His mercy in forgiving their sins and sharing His glory with them.

Paul offers several quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures to show that this was always God's plan. He begins with the quote in this verse, most likely from Psalm 18:49. It's also possible Paul is citing 2 Samuel 22:50. The picture Paul uses this verse to construct is of David or the Jewish people praising God alongside the Gentiles

Romans 15:10, NIV: Again, it says, 'Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.'

### **What does Romans 15:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul is providing several quotations from Old Testament Scriptures to support the idea that Christ came to serve the Jews both to fulfill God's promises to them and to cause the Gentiles to glorify Him.

This is a quote from a text similar to Deuteronomy 32:43, though it reads differently from that specific passage. Paul uses the quote to show that the Gentiles will rejoice along with God's chosen people, the Jews. Within the context of this passage, Paul is showing that God's plan was always to show mercy to both the Gentiles and the Jews as they came to Him through faith in Christ. Then they would rejoice and praise God together.

Romans 15:11, NIV: And again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him.'

**What does Romans 15:11 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul is continuing to provide quotations from Old Testament Scriptures to support his teaching that Christ came to serve the Jews both to fulfill God's promises to them and to cause the Gentiles to glorify Him.

He now quotes almost directly from Psalm 117:1. David calls these people "the nations," a common Old Testament reference to all non-Jewish people: the Gentiles. Again, Paul is showing that God planned all along for Gentiles and Jews to praise the Lord together as they came to Him through faith in Christ.

The verse following Paul's quotation, Psalm 117:2, shows the Gentile nations praising the Lord for His steadfast love and faithfulness. This follows a major theme of New Testament teaching: that the gospel applies to all people and cultures, throughout all of mankind (Galatians 3:28–29).

Romans 15:12, NIV: And again, Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope.'

**What does Romans 15:12 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul is offering quotations from Old Testament Scriptures to support his recent claim. He is teaching that God's plan all along, has been for both the Jews and the Gentiles to come to faith in Christ. Those prophecies may not have explicitly spelled out how this would come to pass, but Paul is eager for his readers to see that the prophecies always pointed to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the praise of God.

Now Paul refers to something written by the prophet Isaiah in a version of Isaiah 11:10–12. "The root of Jesse" refers to the descendant of Jesse who will rise to rule over Israel and all the Gentile nations. This is a prophecy about the coming of Israel's promised Messiah. The Gentiles, however, will not merely become the servants of the Messiah. The verse ends with the statement that they will hope in Him.

Paul is connecting that Scripture to the truth that Christ has become Lord of all peoples, and the Gentiles who come to God through faith in Christ have placed



their hope in Him for their salvation. Paul's bottom line is that Jesus is the fulfillment of all these Old Testament writings both for Israel and for the Gentile nations (Galatians 3:28–29).

Romans 15:13, NIV: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **What does Romans 15:13 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul's prayer for the Christians in Rome found in this verse is often used in churches today as a closing benediction. It is a powerful statement about what God can do in the heart and mind of every Christian.

Paul makes this request of the God of hope, another beautiful name for God. He is the only lasting source of hope we have for meaning in this life, and for a life beyond death. Paul asks that the God of hope fill these believers with all joy and peace "in believing" or as they trust in Him. In other words, Paul is not asking God to simply dump joy and peace into their hearts without cause. He is asking that as these believers trust in God, their faith will bring joy and peace to their hearts. In other words, help them to keep believing so that they can experience joy and peace.

Finally, Paul asks that they might have this joy and peace in believing so that they may abound with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul is asking God to give them more than just regular human hopefulness. He is asking for supernatural, Holy Spirit-powered hopefulness.

What a fantastic prayer to ask God for others or for ourselves. What more could we wish for other believers than to be filled with joy and peace and abounding in hope?

## Matthew chapter 3

### New International Version

**1** In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea **2** and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

**3** This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

**4** John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. **5** People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. **6** Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

**7** But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **8** Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. **9** And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. **10** The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

**11** I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **12** His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

### Context Summary

Matthew 3:1–12 introduces John the Baptist, preaching and baptizing in the wilderness of Judea near the Jordan River. John, dressed in camel hair and a leather belt in the style of the prophet Elijah, has a simple message: repent because the kingdom of heaven is coming. Crowds come from miles around, including even Israel's religious leaders. John calls those leaders vipers and warns that Messiah will bring the wrath of God against the unrepentant. The Messiah will baptize the repentant with the Holy Spirit and fire. The trees that do not bear fruit, spiritually speaking, will be cut down and burned.

Matthew 3:1, NIV: In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea

### **What does Matthew 3:1 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Matthew's telling of Jesus' life jumps forward in time between chapters 2 and 3. The apostle reports nothing of what happened from when Joseph settled in Nazareth to the meeting between Jesus and John the Baptist in Matthew 3. Around 25–30 years have passed.

Luke gives a very thorough telling of how John the Baptist came to be born to Zechariah and Elizabeth, both of the priestly line of the Levites (Luke 1:5–25, 39–80), and the important part he would play in preparing the way for Jesus.

Before he was born, an angel of the Lord told John's father about the man John would become: "He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will 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 for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:16–17). Matthew's gospel introduces John the Baptist already doing exactly that.

Matthew describes the time as "in those days." We can place the scene in this chapter more specifically between AD 26 and 29. The prophet has already taken up residence as a preacher in the wilderness of Judea, which was some rough, dry country located west of the Jordan River near the Dead Sea. His location meant that those who wished to listen had to come to John; he did not go to the high-traffic areas of Israel to be heard by those passing by.

John was called "the Baptist" because baptizing people as a sign of their repentance from sin was a cornerstone of his ministry.

Matthew 3:2, NIV: and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

### **What does Matthew 3:2 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

This gospel jumps forward in time from Jesus' arrival as a small boy in Nazareth (Matthew 2:23) to the ministry of John the Baptist. At least 25 years have passed. John the Baptist was a prophet specially sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus' ministry on earth. John—not the same as the author of the gospel of John—preached in the wilderness area of Judea, west of the Jordan River. He delivered one central message to the Israelites, found in this verse.

The word "repent" is *metanoieite* in Greek, which means "to change one's heart and mind." More literally, it means to change direction, to stop going the wrong way and to start going in the right way. It conveys an active change. The chapter will show that John was calling the people of Israel to confess their sins and submit to God's true law.

John called these people to repent because the "kingdom of heaven" was at hand. John's Jewish listeners would have been familiar with the idea that a new kingdom would one day be established by the promised Messiah. John will point to Jesus as that Messiah, and to the imminent establishment of His kingdom. John will insist, though, that repentance—turning from sin—was necessary for his Jewish listeners to be included in that kingdom. The mere fact of their Israelite heritage would not be enough. This would have been a new idea to some.

Scholars from different theological traditions have debated about whether this coming kingdom of heaven is best understood as spiritual or physical. The Jewish people were looking for a physical kingdom; they assumed Messiah would overthrow the Romans and establish peace and prosperity in Israel. Jesus' kingdom, though, would first be spiritual in the sense that He would begin to rule on earth by ruling in the hearts of those who followed Him (John 18:36). Eventually, He will also reign over a physical, political kingdom on earth (Revelation 20:6).

Matthew 3:3, NIV: This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'

### **What does Matthew 3:3 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Matthew has introduced John the Baptist as a man preaching a simple message in the wilderness: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 3:1–2). Now Matthew directly connects John to the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3, "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"

To Isaiah's original audience, this text was about preparing the literal roadway for the Israelite exiles to return to Judah from captivity in Babylon. Matthew, like the writers of the other Gospels, shows this verse is also about John the Baptist preparing the way of Jesus and those who would follow Him. John's role was to symbolically "clear the path" for Jesus by calling Israel to repent of sin and turn back to the way of God. If they did so, they would be ready to follow God's Son. As it was with the proportion of those who returned to Judah from Babylon, only a small percentage of Israelites would turn and follow Christ.

Matthew also continues to make the connection between the experiences of the nation of Israel and the life of Jesus

Matthew 3:4, NIV: John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

### **What does Matthew 3:4 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Scripture's description of John the Baptist intends to show him as something more than just a wild character. Of course, he was wild, indeed. He wore unusual clothing, like a camel's hair garment with a leather belt, and ate unusual food, such as locusts and wild honey. Matthew's description also connects John the Baptist to the prophet Elijah, who dressed in a similar way (2 Kings 1:8). Malachi prophesied that Elijah would return (Malachi 4:5).

John's clothing and diet also connected him to the poor. Wilderness-dwelling people in the Middle East still eat locusts, which are similar to large

grasshoppers. John's simple, frugal lifestyle echoed his message to the Jewish people to humbly confess their sins and repent: to turn back to following God.

Matthew 3:5, NIV: People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.

### **What does Matthew 3:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

John the Baptist became a well-known figure in Israel, known for one clear message: Repent from your sins and be baptized because the coming of the Messiah is near (Matthew 3:1–2). The fact that he preached his message in an area of wilderness didn't keep the crowds away. People traveled from Jerusalem and all around the region to listen to him and to be baptized by him.

Of course, almost nobody knew that John would identify Jesus as the long-promised Messiah of Israel. They also did not know that the kingdom Jesus would establish would come first to the hearts of those who follow Him and only much later would take the form of a political kingdom on earth.

Matthew 3:6, NIV: Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

### **What does Matthew 3:6 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

People travelled some distance to come and hear the preaching of John the Baptist in the wilderness (Matthew 3:1–2). The odd-looking preacher spoke and acted like the prophets of Israel's history, especially Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), who some suspected had returned to Israel in the form of John the Baptist (Malachi 4:5; John 1:21).

John's message was simple and clear: The kingdom of heaven was near. Messiah was coming. Confess and repent of your sins. Demonstrate your commitment to leading a holy life by being baptized. Many people were doing

exactly that, confessing their sins and being immersed by John in the Jordan River during an ongoing series of public baptisms.

John's baptism wasn't exactly the same as the Christian baptism practiced later in the church (Acts 18:25; 19:3–6). It was—like Christian baptism—a symbolic religious rite meant to declare a person's agreement with God about his or her sin. The main purpose of John's baptism was to publicly declare a renewed commitment to live as God had commanded in the law. Being immersed in the water and raised up out of it seems to have symbolized the cleansing of sin and escaping God's judgment.

Matthew 3:7, NIV: But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?'

### **What does Matthew 3:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

John the Baptist was attracting large crowds from all around the region (Matthew 3:1–2). People were traveling from Jerusalem and all Judea to hear him preach (Matthew 3:5). Many of those who came confessed their sins and were publicly baptized by John to symbolize their repentance from sin and commitment to lead holy lives in preparation for the coming of the Messiah (Matthew 3:6).

This seems to have caught the attention of Israel's religious leaders. It's unclear from the text why the Pharisees and Sadducees had come to the wilderness to hear and see John's baptism. Were they there to repent and be baptized themselves as a religious act or were they there to observe and decide if they agreed with John's teaching about the coming Messiah? Checking on John's message would have been part of their spiritual duties (John 1:19–28); however, other gospels show these men are more interested in refuting John than in learning from him.

The Pharisees and Sadducees did not like each other very much. Pharisees were religious leaders and teachers more closely connected to the common people at the local level of the synagogues. They set the tone for everyday religious life in Israel. Highly respected and even feared, they held themselves—

and others—to very strict standards when it came to following the law. They also developed a system of rules that went beyond the inspired law of Moses.

The Sadducees were a much smaller group of wealthier priests and religious aristocrats. They held different views than the Pharisees on key spiritual issues. Sadducees were committed to protecting their power. They were known for their cooperation with Rome's occupation and were resented by the people.

John the Baptist clearly did not fear or admire either group. He calls them a brood of vipers, the same term Jesus will later use when talking to the Pharisees (Matthew 12:34). This name connects them to the deceiving serpent in the garden of Eden. John asks them who warned them to flee from God's impending wrath? John saw in his prophecy of the coming of the kingdom of heaven as good news for those who lead holy lives but terrible news for those who continued in sin. His words show that he saw Israel's religious leaders as sinful and unrepentant.

Matthew 3:8, NIV: Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

### **What does Matthew 3:8 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

John the Baptist's message to Israel was designed to bring comfort to some and discomfort to others. He proclaimed in the wilderness, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). This was both a promise and a warning. It meant that God was about to begin His rule on earth, bringing justice and vindication for those Israelites who were faithful to Him and judgment for those who were in rebellion. This was true even though the kingdom would be grounded in the hearts of Christ's followers (John 18:36) and only in the very end times become a political, physical reality (Revelation 20:6).

In the previous verse, John spoke directly to Israel's religious leaders who had come to see and hear him. He called them a brood of vipers and asked who had warned them to flee from God's coming wrath. Now he tells them what it will take to be spared: They must repent in their actions and not just their words.

John tells the Pharisees and Sadducees that their repentance must bear fruit. In other words, it will not be enough to be seen publicly agreeing with John and



being baptized by him in the Jordan River. Repentance means to change your mind and turn around, to head in a new direction. They must change their teaching and practice in leading the religious lives of the people of Israel. If the change is genuine, it will produce measurable results. It will bear fruit.

In the following verse, John will describe one error in their thinking and teaching.

Matthew 3:9, NIV: And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

### **What does Matthew 3:9 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Israel's religious leaders are hearing a warning: God's coming judgment is coming against them. John the Baptist now adds that they have made a wrong assumption about how God will deal with His people Israel. They had been operating under the idea that God would not focus His wrath on Israelites, the children of Abraham.

Israel's religious leaders, of all people, should have known better. Throughout Israel's history, God had brought judgment on His chosen people for their unfaithfulness to Him. He had always saved a remnant: a small proportion of the people. He had never broken any of His eternal promises to the nation, but that did not keep God from bringing judgment on most of the Israelites living at any specific time.

John's warning, though, goes beyond that simple truth. He tells the Pharisees and Sadducees not to presume that the arrival of the kingdom of heaven means they will not be judged. While it is true that God will save a remnant of Abraham's seed, John adds a curious statement: God is able to raise up new children of Abraham even from these stones. He may have been pointing to the stones in the Jordan River. This is wordplay. In both Greek and Aramaic, the word for stones is very close to the word for children.

John's statement goes beyond suggesting that God will spare a remnant of the biological children of Abraham from His judgment as He sets up His kingdom. In truth, through the coming of Jesus as King, God will add those who trust in Christ

to Abraham's line even though they are not directly descended from him. This parallels Jesus' statement in a later argument with the Pharisees (John 8:31–38).

Matthew 3:10, NIV: The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

### **What does Matthew 3:10 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]**

As prophesied (Isaiah 40:3), John the Baptist had been declaring his message to Israel in the wilderness: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. Perhaps surprisingly, some of Israel's religious leaders had come to the wilderness to see and hear John for themselves. They were likely shocked at his public response to them.

John called them a brood of vipers and asked who had warned them to run away from God's wrath (Matthew 3:7–9). If they truly repent, John said, they will produce different results by their changed actions. Now he describes just how close God's judgment is. The coming of Messiah's kingdom is accompanied by the arrival of God's wrath against the unfaithful. John describes the axe of God's judgment as being "even now" at the root of the trees. The religious leaders may have recognized John's reference to Scriptures like Isaiah 10:33–34 and Jeremiah 46:22.

John has already told them not to expect to be spared merely because they are descended from Abraham. God will always keep His promises to Israel, but He is not bound to spare every Israelite from His wrath. Those who do not bear good fruit—by leading holy, faithful lives—will be pruned from the tree. They will be cut down and thrown into the fire as dead branches from a tree are removed and used for fuel.

Matthew 3:11, NIV: I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

**What does Matthew 3:11 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Isaiah 40:3 was meant, in part, to predict the coming of John the Baptist. His primary role was to prepare the way for the coming of the long-promised Messiah, the one he has said would bring God's kingdom to earth. In prophesying the arrival of that kingdom, John has urged his listeners to repent of their sins and be publicly baptized by him in the Jordan River as part of their commitment to live faithfully to God (Matthew 3:1–2).

Now John makes clear again that he is not the Messiah. His baptism is not the same as that of the One who is coming after him (Acts 18:25; 19:3–6). John says his baptism is for repentance, turning from sin to live in faithfulness to God. All who want to be spared from God's wrath must repent, but eternal salvation requires that change of heart be tied to faith in Christ (John 3:16–18).

John describes the One to come as mightier than he is. John knows he was sent by God to proclaim God's message, but he does not believe himself in any way equal to the Messiah. In fact, John says he is not even worthy of carrying the Messiah's sandals (Mark 1:7). This was quite a statement at this time in history, when sandal-clad feet were especially filthy and thought to be dishonorable. Only the lowliest servant would be asked to carry sandals, and John understands himself to be unworthy of even that position in service to Jesus.

The baptism ushered in by Christ will be different from John's baptism of repentance. John declares the Messiah will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. This would likely have been exciting news to John's Jewish listeners. In Jewish minds, the Holy Spirit had been absent from Israel for generations. The fact that the coming Messiah would baptize those who had repented with the Holy Spirit would have been a promise of great power to come. It would also have been a mysterious statement.

Jesus, of course, did send the Holy Spirit to baptize believers after His resurrection on the day of Pentecost. The evidence of the Holy Spirit on that day included "tongues of fire" that rested above each person (Acts 2). John's reference to fire here may have referred to a purification that would come with Messiah's baptism.

Matthew 3:12, NIV: His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

### **What does Matthew 3:12 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]**

John the Baptist, like the prophets of Israel's history, called the people to repent of sin and live in faithfulness to God. Unlike those others, his message was that the Messiah, who would bring the kingdom of heaven to earth, was near. The Messiah would baptize those who followed Him with the Holy Spirit and fire, but He would also bring judgment on those who did not follow Him (Matthew 3:1–2, 11).

John here declares that the one to come after him, the Messiah, will come with His winnowing fork in His hand. A winnowing fork was used to toss freshly harvested wheat into the air, where the useless chaff could be blown clear by the wind. The heavier wheat would fall back to the ground and be gathered up. In John's metaphor, the wheat represents those who repent and follow the Christ, while the chaff symbolizes those who reject Him. John declares the unbelievers will burn with unquenchable fire, referring to the eternal judgment of God's wrath mentioned by the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 34:10; Jeremiah 7:20), as well as by Jesus (Matthew 5:29).