

Jan 20, 2008 (LS)

**PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD
MATTHEW 3.1-12**

Israel's husband is coming to secure his bride. John the Baptist has the responsibility to make the bride ready and prepare the current leaders to relinquish their trust and make way for the true husband.

YHWH = Israel's husband (Hebrew = *baal*); cf. Isa 54.5; Jer 3.14; 31.32; Hosea; Ezek 16. Israel pursuing baals = Israel pursuing other husbands.

YHWH's representatives, the shepherds, were to represent him as husband to his bride. Some faithful. Some unfaithful.

Matthew has est. that Jesus = YHWH. He has come for his bride. The bride must be prepared (cf. e.g., Esther 2).

A. PREPARATION OF THE LORD'S WAY (3.1-3)

John the Baptist (1): John is a *baptizer*. Baptisms in the OC: flood (cf. 1Pt 3.20-21); crossing Red Sea (cf. 1 Cor 10.1f.); crossing Jordan like the Red Sea (Josh 4.23). Also ritual baptisms for worship: getting cleaned up to go eat with YHWH. Also the making of priests (Lev 8). This is not new; new application but not completely new.

Water and wives: Adam in the Garden (Gen 2); Isaac's wife (Gen 24); Jacob and Rachel (Gen 29); Moses (Ex 2.16ff.)

YHWH took Israel to be his bride at Sinai. But before he did Israel had to wash in water—go through baptism—in order to be made ready. God sent Moses down to the people to prepare them to meet with YHWH (Ex 19). John the Baptist is preparing the bride.

John the Baptist came preaching (1): Word and washing go together. Cp Ex 19, 20.

Cf. also Num 5, the “jealousy test” for the husband who believes his wife has been unfaithful. Holy water is prepared in which the words of curse are scraped off into it. She drinks it. If she has been unfaithful, the words will inflict the curse. If she has been faithful, she will be all right.

John is coming with water and words. He is a priest himself, the son of Zechariah, who is coming to cause the bride to drink the water that causes the curse. The faithfulness of Israel will be measured by the words John is now speaking.

The wilderness (1): John is at the Jordan River where the people of God long ago crossed over into the promised land from the wilderness wanderings. The people of God are in the wilderness and need to have the faith to cross over into the Promised Land.

The wilderness is also the place where God makes Israel his bride (remember Sinai).

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (2): Individual repentance is called for, but it is called for within a larger community context.

The kingdom of heaven is the place of God's throne. Where is God's throne? Well, in one respect, it is in the Holy of Holies above the cherubim. “Heaven,” is the firmament (Gen 1). And God's throne sits atop the firmament (Ezekiel 1).

God's throne is coming near. God is drawing near to his people for judgment; for blessing and curse.

Israel is to realize that the promises of God are coming to their fulfillment, and now they must order their lives accordingly. They are going the wrong way. They need to turn back and have their lives shaped by YHWH's word, which will be realized in Jesus.

The voice (3): quote from Isa 40.3. Passage of comfort. Hezekiah (son of David) has been told his sons will go into captivity and become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (ch 39). Comfort is announced that the warfare has ended because she has received from YHWH's hand double for all of her sins. Her iniquity has been pardoned.

YHWH's glory will come and be seen (reminiscent of Sinai). People must make preparation.

Points us again to the reality of who Jesus is. For whom is preparation made? YHWH. For whom is John making preparation? Jesus. Jesus = YHWH.

B. BAPTIZING WITH WATER (3.4-6)

Clothes and diet (4): Mal 4.5 - God promises to send Elijah. 2 Kgs 1.8, Elijah is a *ba'al of hair* wearing a leather belt. Elijah was Nazarite-like. Proper representative of YHWH, the husband.

John = the culmination of all of the prophets up to the time of Jesus (Matt 11.13), is also a representative of YHWH. Culmination of all the previous prophets.

Camel's hair - unclean animal (Lev 11.4). Representative of Gentiles (cp. Act 10).

Locusts - also representatives of Gentiles (Jdg 6.3ff. 7.12); allowed to eat (Lev 11.22). (Not a type of fruit; the bug!)

Wild honey - ? Promised Land and wilderness imagery. Manna is like honey. Canaan flows with milk and honey. "Wild" = uncultivated. Best shot: Gentiles who are not a people but are a part of the promise of God.

John as a representative of Israel is taking the Gentiles into himself, just as Israel was to incorporate the Gentiles as she had done some throughout her history. Now, since the kingdom of heaven has drawn near, the Gentiles will be incorporated in mass.

Baptizing in the Jordan River (5-6): Jerusalem, Judea, all that region; cp. ch. 2. Afraid of the announcement of the birth of the King. The serpent reigns. Now they are coming in repentance confessing their sins, making preparation for the king.

The Jordan River - the River that is crossed in order to enter into the Promised Land. John is telling them that the time of wilderness wandering is over. God is about to bring them to the place that he has promised.

C. COMING WRATH ON ISRAEL'S LEADERS (7-10)

Unfaithful guardians (7-8): The guardians of Israel represented by the Pharisees and Sadducees were unfaithful husbands.

Why are these two groups coming for baptism? Well, if the kingdom was being ushered in as this prophet was saying, they wanted their rightful place in it.

"brood of vipers" - in the family of the serpent. These are those upon the wrath of God will come. They are the ones who ravish and abuse the bride.

Their ways must change. The current structures and lives of the leaders of Israel have become corrupt. If they are going to participate in this kingdom, they will have to bear the fruit of this kingdom.

Raising up children from the stones (9): 'these stones' - cp. Josh 4 and the memorial stones set up at the crossing representing the 12 tribes; God is making a new Israel through the waters of the Jordan in accord with the promise of his covenant.

The old generation ('the firstborn') must be cut off in the wilderness, falling under the wrath of God. Then God will make a new Israel who will inherit the Promised Land.

Cutting down unfruitful trees (10): ax = Assyria (Isa 10.15-19). God will do it again like he did 750 years earlier.

D. BAPTIZING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND FIRE (11-12)

Water, Spirit, Fire: distinction between OC and NC; not water and non-water (cp. coming of the Spirit at Pentecost in Ac 2). Distinction in ages and what goes on in those ages. This is the ushering in of a new age, a new creation formed by the Spirit.

Sandals and threshing floor: Cp. Ruth. Near-kinsman; the nearest kin cannot redeem; Boaz does and receives the sandal of the near kinsman. John the Baptist cannot be the husband. Jesus is the true Boaz.

Threshing floor - the place of marriage/Temple (cf. 2 Chr 3.1). This is where YHWH will purify and marry his bride.

(1) Our perspectives on Jesus and his relationship with us as his people need to be conformed to the way the Bible speaks.

(2) Repentance looks like something.