

LESSON 4

The Ministry of John the Baptist

MATTHEW 3:1-12



BIBLE TRUTH

JOHN ANNOUNCED THE MINISTRY OF JESUS WITH A CALL TO REPENT

LESSON SNAPSHOT

1. OPENING REVIEW 5 MIN

Use last week’s lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

2. BIBLE STORY 10 MIN

Read Matthew 3:1–12 from the Scriptures or read story 82, “The Ministry of John the Baptist,” from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

3. OBJECT LESSON 1 10 MIN

Filling the Valleys and Making the Mountains Low

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ whiteboard and dry-erase markers

4. TEACHING/DISCUSSION 10 MIN

Using the teaching points, teach through the lesson for today.

5. OBJECT LESSON 2 10 MIN

Repent!

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ a big sign that says “SIN”
- ✓ guest familiar with marching commands (optional)

6. SWORD BIBLE MEMORY 5 MIN

7. ACTIVITY TIME 10 MIN

Color a Picture

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ coloring page for NT Lesson 4—one copy for each child
- ✓ markers or crayons

8. CLOSING PRAYER 5 MIN

9. BONUS OBJECT LESSON 10 MIN

Baptize with Fire

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ fire extinguisher

TOTAL 75 MIN

PREPARING TO TEACH

TEACHING POINTS

Isaiah foretold John’s ministry—In Isaiah 40:3 we read, “A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD.’” Isaiah was speaking of a day when a voice would cry out in the wilderness to the people. John the Baptist was that voice. John ministered outside of the city, and his voice cried out to a people hopelessly lost apart from the grace of God through Jesus. John spoke of the coming of the kingdom of God. This was the very theme of Jesus’ ministry. Soon the King was revealed. Jesus once spoke to the crowd about John the Baptist. He said that John was a prophet, but more than a prophet; Jesus said that among those born of women there was no one greater than John. He also said that from the days of John the Baptist, the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing (see Matthew 11:7–12 NIV).

John’s baptism called for repentance—John called the Jews to repent of their sins and be baptized. John brought them a prophetic message of repentance. The fact that they could trace their lineage back to Abraham was no guarantee of faith or obedience in their hearts. John told the religious leaders that God could raise up children of Abraham from the rocks (Matthew 3:9). No one can receive salvation simply by virtue of being born a Jew or by being born into a Christian family. Salvation comes to each person by God’s grace, through individual faith and repentance.

Malachi had prophesied the return of Elijah, who would turn the hearts of the fathers and children back to one another (Malachi 4:5–6). This prophecy was first attributed to John by the angel who visited John’s father, Zechariah (see Luke 1:17). Jesus confirmed that John the Baptist represented Elijah (Matthew 11:14), for he came in the spirit and power of Elijah. Finally, four centuries after Malachi, God had sent another prophet to Israel.

The ministry of Jesus is greater—John’s teaching came with authority. Many thought he might be the Messiah himself. John was quick to correct them, saying he was unfit even to untie the sandals of the Messiah (Luke 3:16). John said that he baptized with water, but the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit. John was a forerunner of Jesus, whose ministry would be greater. John’s baptism could not change hearts. When Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit on a person’s heart, that person is made alive again, transformed, and changed. God’s law is written upon the person’s heart and their sins are forgiven.

Where Is the Gospel?

How does today's Bible story fit into God's greater plan of redemption?

John the Baptist clearly portrayed men as sinful, in need of a Savior. In Luke 3:6 John the Baptist quotes the prophet Isaiah who said: "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." John was not merely introducing a great prophet; he was introducing the Lord himself, who would bring salvation to all people. This would come through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

THE LESSON

OPENING REVIEW 5 MIN

Use last week's lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

BIBLE STORY 10 MIN

Read Matthew 3:1–12 from the Scriptures or read story 82, "The Ministry of John the Baptist," from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

OBJECT LESSON 1 10 MIN

Filling the Valleys and Making the Mountains Low

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ whiteboard and dry-erase markers

Across the whiteboard draw a line that shows high mountains and then comes back down into valleys. Ask the children what construction workers do when they want to make a road.

Help them understand that when roads are built in hilly areas, special crews come and fill in the valleys and cut down the hills before paving can begin. This makes the road smooth and easy to travel. Read Luke 3:1–6 and explain that God was using the idea of making a

road to explain what John the Baptist was doing. John was helping the Jews realize they were sinners in need of a Savior. That way they would be prepared to receive Jesus as their Savior. Unfortunately most of the Jews rejected Jesus.

TEACHING/DISCUSSION **10 MIN**

Using the teaching points, teach through the lesson for today.

OBJECT LESSON 2 **10 MIN**

Repent!

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ a big sign that says “SIN”
- ✓ guest familiar with marching commands (optional)

Explain to the class that you want them to understand what the word “repent” means and to show them you are going to do a little marching exercise. (If you know someone familiar with marching commands ask them to help with this exercise.)

Prior to class, hang the SIN sign in the middle of the longest wall and clear the chairs to allow for a marching drill. Have all the children line up facing the wall with the sign on it. Tell them that you want them to march (left, right, left) toward sin. When you shout the command “repent,” they should immediately do an about face and turn away from sin. Then give them the command to “sin left” (turn left) and then “sin left” again (turn left again). This will leave them facing the SIN sign again. Once again shout the command “repent.” Repeat this marching drill until they can make two left turns together smoothly as a team, to face the SIN sign, followed by a “repent” command to turn away from the SIN sign. Then ask the following questions:

- **In light of our marching, what do you think the word repent means?**
(Turn away from sin.)
- **When we turn away from sin, who should we be moving towards?**
(Jesus. Hebrews 12:2 tells us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.)

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY **5 MIN**

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.

ACTIVITY TIME **10 MIN**

Color a Picture

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ coloring page for NT Lesson 4—one copy for each child
- ✓ markers or crayons

While the children are coloring, engage them by asking the following questions:

- **Why is the man in the water?**
(The man in the picture is John the Baptist and he is baptizing people who want to turn away from their sin. Baptizing means he is dunking them in the river.)
- **Who did John tell the people about?**
(John told the people about Jesus, the Lamb of God, who God sent to take away our sin.)
- **A viper is a type of poisonous snake. Who did John call vipers?**
(John called the religious leaders vipers. He knew that they wanted to appear holy and dedicated to God on the outside but they did not love God with their hearts. Later, Jesus also called the Pharisees vipers.)
- **John baptized with water. What did he say Jesus would baptize with?**
(John said that another would come who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, tongues of fire appeared above them.)

CLOSING PRAYER **5 MIN**

Pick several children to pray prayers based on the day's Scripture passages.

✓ BONUS OBJECT LESSON 10 MIN

Baptize with Fire

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ fire extinguisher

This is a silly skit to teach the children that Jesus' baptism with fire is a reference to the judgment of God, which Christians do not need to fear.

Teacher 1 walks in with a fire extinguisher, very anxious about everything, constantly turning and getting ready to use the extinguisher.

After watching teacher 1 for a few minutes, teacher 2 finally asks teacher 1 what he is doing.

Teacher 1 explains that he read Luke 3:16 last night that Jesus was going to baptize with fire, and he just wants to be prepared so he doesn't get burned. (Ham it up a bit and see if you can't get the kids laughing.)

Resolve the skit by explaining that fire stands for God's judgment.

Have teacher 1 respond with even greater fear, giving teacher 2 a chance to share the gospel and how Christians do not need to fear God's judgment because Jesus already took it for us.

LESSON 4 - THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

