

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 . . . . . 20 MIN**

**John the Baptist Contest**

**SUPPLIES:**

- ✓ one or two yards of brown burlap with a hole cut in the center to form a costume
- ✓ index cards and pens—four of each
- ✓ candy for prize

**4. TEACHING/DISCUSSION**

Select one of the object lessons to use to cover the teaching points.

**5. OBJECT LESSON 2 . . . . . 15 MIN**

**Compare the Rebukes**

**SUPPLIES:**

- ✓ paper and pens for the class

**6. SWORD BIBLE MEMORY . . . . . 5 MIN**

**7. ACTIVITY TIME . . . . . 10 MIN**

**John Preaching**

**SUPPLIES:**

- ✓ pencil and paper
- ✓ burlap
- ✓ scissors
- ✓ white glue

**8. CLOSING PRAYER . . . . . 5 MIN**

**9. BONUS OBJECT LESSON . . . . . 10 MIN**

**Baptize with Fire**

**SUPPLIES:**

- ✓ fire extinguisher

**TOTAL 80 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.

**A LITTLE BIT MORE**

*Jewish Baptism*

In Jesus' day, it was customary for the Jews to baptize Gentiles who wanted to join the worship of God and become a part of the community of Israel. In our story today, John called the Jews to humble themselves and participate in the same baptism of repentance normally given to the Gentiles. John recognized the sin rampant in Israel and understood that the good works of the people could never remove the sin in their hearts. All of Israel needed a Savior. John's baptism prepared the way for Jesus by helping the people see they were sinners who didn't keep God's law. This was true of the common man and this was true of the religious leaders as well.

**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 ..... 20 MIN

**John the Baptist Contest****SUPPLIES:**

- ✓ one or two yards of brown burlap with a hole cut in the center to form a costume
- ✓ index cards and pens—four of each
- ✓ candy for prize

Explain to the class that you want to see who can get the role of John the Baptist correct. After reading the Scripture, ask for four volunteers who would like a chance to play the role of John the Baptist. Give them a few minutes to prepare by reading Matthew 3:1–11 and jotting a few notes down for themselves on an index card. Then send all but one of the contestants into another classroom, to be called back one by one.

Give the first contestant the costume and then count down to start. See how many of the following points they cover in their impersonation:

- He called people to repent.
- He used the words “brood of vipers.”
- He said that every tree that does not bear good fruit will be thrown into the fire.
- He told the people they could not assume they were children of Abraham.
- He said he baptized with water but another was coming who was mightier than he.
- He told them the one coming would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Let the children know how well each contestant held to the message and then ask them to give each person a score from one to one hundred. Try to help the class in this so that their scoring is consistent. After all your contestants have finished, announce the winner. The repetition will reinforce the story details in the class’s memory.

## TEACHING/DISCUSSION

Select one of the object lessons to use to cover the teaching points.

### OBJECT LESSON 2 ..... 15 MIN

#### Compare the Rebukes

**SUPPLIES:**

- ✓ paper and pens for the class

Have the children compare the rebuke of John the Baptist in Luke 3:7–9 with the rebuke of Jesus in Matthew 12:33–37 and write down the ways they are similar. Then ask them to write down the message John and Jesus were trying to communicate to the Jews and their religious leaders.

The Jews trusted in their heritage. They thought they would be saved just because they were Abraham’s children. Both John and Jesus tried to point out that this was not the case.

Calling a group a brood of vipers was a serious insult in Jesus’ day. Baby vipers were believed to bite their way out of their mother, killing her. So Jesus and John were comparing the Jews to poisonous snakes that killed their mothers. This was likely a reference to how they killed God’s messengers, the prophets (see Matthew 23:33–34).

### WORD BIBLE MEMORY ..... 5 MIN

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

### ACTIVITY TIME ..... 10 MIN

#### John Preaching

**SUPPLIES:**

- ✓ pencil and paper
- ✓ burlap
- ✓ scissors
- ✓ white glue

Have the children draw a picture John the Baptist preaching. Then give each child a piece of burlap and scissors and have them cut out a garment from the burlap for their John the Baptist. Have them glue it on top of their drawing.

**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.