

**A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS**  
**XVI. Israel's Preparation For The Messiah By His Forerunner**  
**A. The Corrective Ministry Of Messiah's Forerunner**  
**(Matthew 3:1-10; Mark 1:1-6; Luke 3:1-14)**

**I. Introduction**

- A. Israel's last Old Testament prophet was John the Baptist, and God gave him the ministry of preparing Israel for her Messiah. That preparatory ministry is presented in Matthew 3:1-12, Mark 1:1-8 and Luke 3:1-18.
- B. As that forerunner, John began by denouncing Israel's sins, a corrective ministry designed to prepare the way for God's righteous Messiah, so we view these passages for our insight and application (as follows):

**II. The Corrective Ministry Of Messiah's Forerunner, Matthew 3:1-10; Mark 1:1-6; Luke 3:1-14.**

- A. When God led John the Baptist begin his ministry as Messiah's forerunner, the spiritual state of the Roman empire and the nation Israel which was subject to Roman rule was very wicked and in social decline:
  - 1. Luke 3:1-3 states that John began to minister in the fifteenth year of the Roman Emperor Caesar Tiberius, what would be A. D. 29. (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 79-80)
  - 2. At that time, Rome was beginning its moral decline in which the sacredness of marriage had been replaced with vast immorality, cruel slavery abounded, the emperor entertained Rome's populace with the butcher of thousands of people in the arena and honest labor was viewed with contempt by Romans, *Ibid.*, p. 78.
  - 3. Tiberius ruled Israel with harshness, Jews were persecuted in Rome, Pontius Pilate ruled locally with great wickedness and cruelty and though there were religious leaders in Israel, they were full of self-centeredness and pride, and abusive legalism, *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- B. John thus lived apart from all this sin like Elijah did in evil king Ahab's day: John lived in the Jordan River wilderness that was associated with Elijah, and John's clothes and diet also recalled Elijah's lifestyle to fulfill Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6 that Messiah's forerunner would be like Elijah, Lk. 3:3-6; Mk. 1:1-3, 6; Matt. 3:1-4.
- C. The message John proclaimed was one of repentance associated with water baptism: (1) This baptism was performed in expectation of the arrival of the Messiah (Matthew 3:2), (2) it was promoted in view of the spiritual uncleanness of the people (Mark 1:5), it was based on confession and repentance (Mark 1:5), and it was practiced with a view to receiving God's forgiveness for sins (Mark 1:4), *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- D. John's preaching carried a sense of urgency, that repentance was necessary because the Kingdom of God was "near," implying "that the only thing preventing the institution of the kingdom announced by John was the repentance of the nation," *Ibid.*, p 86.
- E. The ministry of John given in the power of the Holy Spirit elicited an immediate and great response: Matthew 3:5-6 reports that the people of Jerusalem, all Judaea and all the region around the Jordan River went out to the Jordan River wilderness area to be baptized by John, confessing their sins.
- F. In calling for repentance, John was very practical, calling for specific actions that exhibited true repentance:
  - 1. He critiqued the self-righteous religious leaders in the Pharisees and Sadducees, and he told them to exhibit true repentance by works that gave evidence of a departure from their self-righteousness and pride, Matthew 3:7-9. John warned them that God's figurative ax of judgment was already laid at the root of the trees, that every tree – meaning every person, including the religious leaders themselves – who did not bear fruit would be cut down and cast into the fire of God's punishment, Matthew 3:10.
  - 2. John also critiqued the sins of the other classes of people in Israel, and when they asked him what they should do to exhibit true repentance, John gave practical directives for each group: (a) The common people were to share their material bounty with others in need instead of being materialistic (Luke 3:10-11). (b) The tax collectors were to require no more taxes from people than what they were appointed to levy by the government in showing their departure from deeds of greedy extortion (Luke 3:12-13). (c) The soldiers were not to do violence or accuse people falsely to demonstrate their departure from an abuse of their power, and they were to be content with their wages in departing from greed themselves (Luke 3:14).
  - 3. Thus, repentance "was the requirement for acceptance into Messiah's kingdom, whether a self-righteous leader or an outcast within the Jewish community were involved," *Ibid.*, p. 90.

***Lesson:*** *As the Messiah's forerunner, John the Baptist both exemplified in his life and preached in his ministry for the people of Israel to depart from their sins in their lives to prepare for Messiah's righteous kingdom.*

***Application:*** *As in the era of John the Baptist, may we also practice true separation from sin to please the Lord.*