



Matthew 3
MESSIAH ON A MISSION - Part 4

The King has a... Kingdom of Heaven

INTRODUCTION

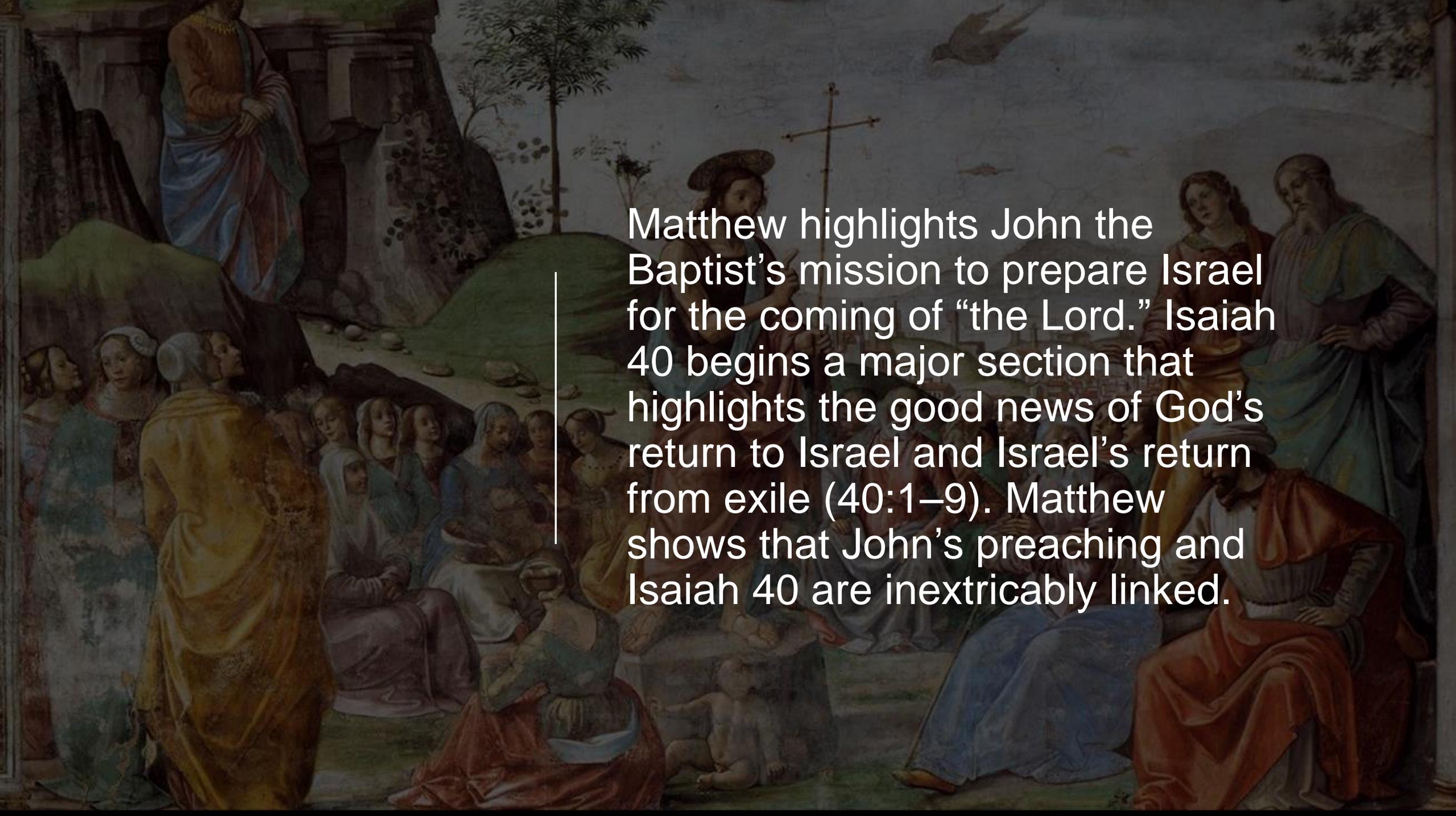
Matthew rushes ahead in anticipation of the true revelation of the ages- “The Kingdom of Heaven” as the focal point of all of human history. Matthew skips thousands of anecdotal stories and points of interest in jumping over approximately 28 years of our Lord’s life. There were stories of obedience, acts of kindness, feats of wisdom and triumphs of human communication and interaction. There is much that could be learned from his business practices. We wish to hear the way his honesty and work ethic won people to him. His personal discipline would have been exemplary from this period of his life and yet Matthew skips them all to rush into the ***Mission of the Messiah.***





“The Kingdom of Heaven”

Matthew introduces his central concept for communicating God’s restoration work with this phrase, “The Kingdom of Heaven.” The expectation is clearly seen by the prophets, that a time is coming when God will absolutely reign over all creation (e.g., Isa. 24:21–23; Mic. 4:1–8). For Matthew, the arrival of God’s kingdom is signaled by the arrival of Jesus the Messiah.



Matthew highlights John the Baptist's mission to prepare Israel for the coming of "the Lord." Isaiah 40 begins a major section that highlights the good news of God's return to Israel and Israel's return from exile (40:1–9). Matthew shows that John's preaching and Isaiah 40 are inextricably linked.

(3:5) While the Greek verb "baptizein" is obviously the source of the English words "baptize" and "Baptist," its root meaning is "to dip, soak, immerse" into a liquid, so that what is dipped takes on qualities of what it has been dipped in—for example, cloth in dye or leather in tanning solution.

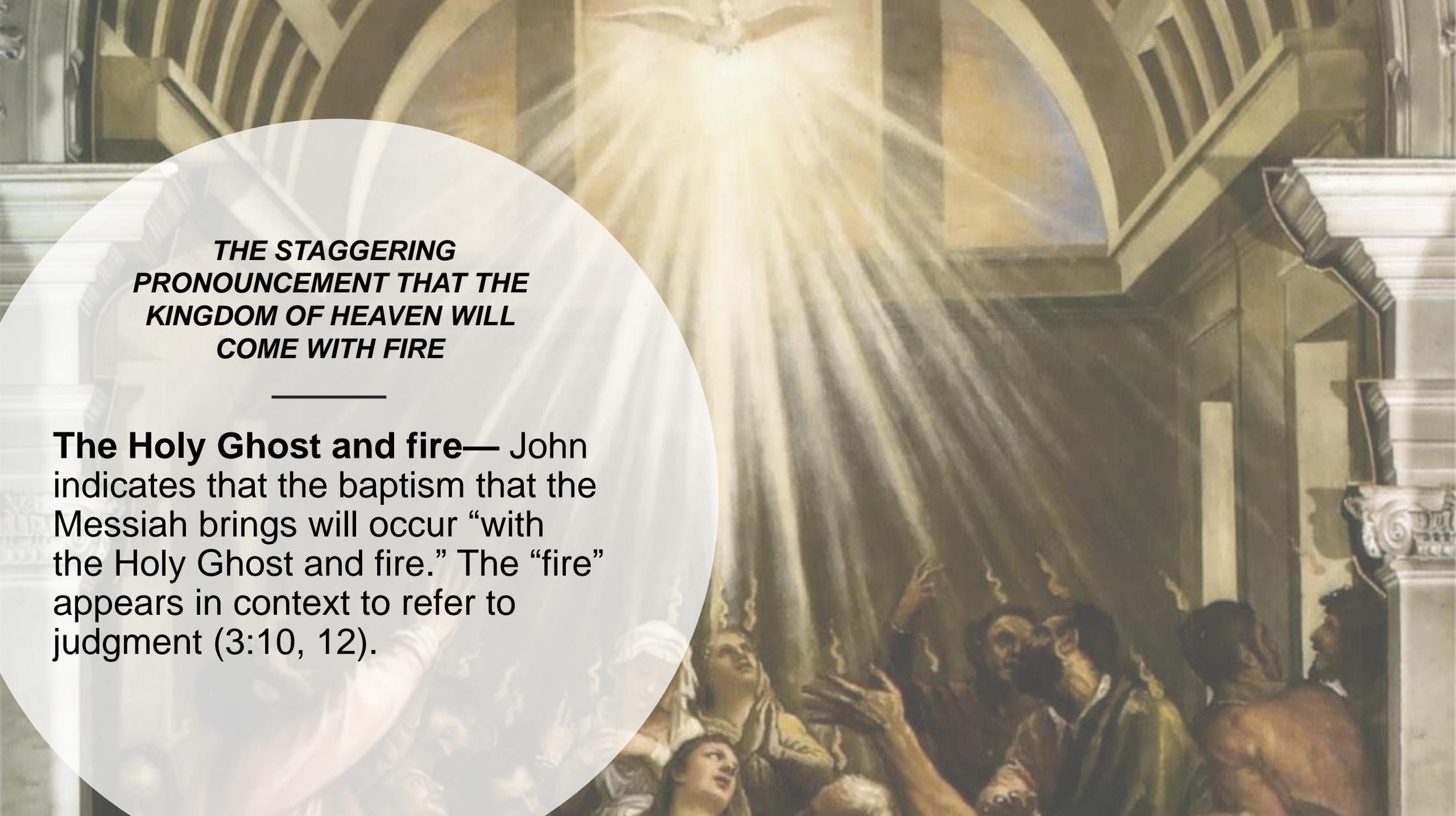
But to understand what "baptizein" means here one needs the Jewish background. According to the Torah one had to be ritually pure before entering the Tabernacle or Temple. Ritual purity could be lost in many ways; the preeminent means of restoring it was through washing. A quick review of Leviticus shows how frequently the matter is mentioned, and one of the six major divisions of the Talmud (Taharot, "Cleansings") is devoted to it. Even though there is no longer a Temple, observant Jewish women immerse themselves in a mikveh (ritual bath) after each menstrual period, in obedience to Leviticus 15; see MJ 13:4 N. (Keener, Kaiser, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, Matthew 3:5)



The Kingdom of Heaven is the Root that Produces and Demands Fruits of Righteousness

Matthew introduces a theme that characterizes his Gospel: the importance of doing God's will or, as in the metaphor here, producing good fruit (see 7:16–23; 12:33–37, 48–50; 21:43). If there is no fruit forthcoming it says much about the ineffectiveness of the root. Matthew never wearies of presenting the kingdom of Heaven as the root of all fruit-bearing virtue. There is a plethora of practical application in the book of Matthew but it all stems from the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven.





***THE STAGGERING
PRONOUNCEMENT THAT THE
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN WILL
COME WITH FIRE***

The Holy Ghost and fire— John indicates that the baptism that the Messiah brings will occur “with the Holy Ghost and fire.” The “fire” appears in context to refer to judgment (3:10, 12).

The Messiah shall *gather His wheat ... burn up the chaff*

After harvest farmers had to separate the edible wheat from the inedible chaff. They would toss the grain into the air so that the wind could blow out the chaff, which was lighter. Scripture often used “chaff” (or “stubble”) as an image for the worthless that God would destroy (e.g., Ex. 15:7; Ps. 1:4; Is. 17:13; 29:5; Hos. 13:3). Indeed, “Elijah’s” mission (see note on 3:4) was to prevent the nation from becoming like burned chaff (Mal. 4:1,5). Real chaff burns too quickly to be good fuel; the chaff here, however, burns with “unquenchable” fire (cf. Is. 66:24).

(Archeological Study Bible)

MAIN THEME: The Kingdom of Heaven is doing *already* in those who are participants what is *Not Yet* done in all others

The coming kingdom ushers in the beginning of the final judgment of all humanity and so invites people to repent and allow the Holy Ghost and fire to consume the chaff of one's life.

Matthew's use of Isaiah 40:3 to interpret the ministry of John the Baptist highlights Jesus as the inaugurator of the eschatological time of redemption. Baptism "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:11) indicates that the final day is coming near in Jesus (3:2). The Jewish concept of the outpouring of God's Spirit was a sign in the Old Testament of the eschatological time of God's restored presence (e.g., Ezek. 39:25–29; Joel 2:28–32).

FOOTNOTES:

A first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, also reports that John baptized people in the wilderness, inviting them to spiritual transformation. Josephus, however, adapts his description of John to appeal to Greek readers, as he depicts the “sects” of Judea—Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes—along the lines of Greek philosophic sects. The Gospels, however, portray John in a way more in keeping with authentic Judean prophets: a preacher of the imminent new era of God’s reign. “Kingdom of heaven” was an accepted Jewish way of speaking about God’s reign (cf. Dan. 2:44; 4:26). The wilderness was one of the few places where prophetic figures could safely draw crowds, but of course it lacked the amenities of civilization. (Keener, Craig, Dr., *Cultural Backgrounds Study*, Matthew 3:1-2)