

Connect360: The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

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- *Lesson 1 in the BaptistWay Press Connect360 unit "Living in the Spirit" focuses on Mark 1:1-8.*

Each of the Gospel writers begins the story of Jesus at a different place. Matthew began with Jesus' ancestry, Luke talked about John the Baptist, and John spoke of the Word (Jesus) becoming flesh and dwelling among His people (John 1:14). The writer Mark began with the ministry of John the Baptist, who often is called the forerunner of Jesus.

Mark used two prophecies from the Old Testament to describe the ministry of John the Baptist. Both, Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, foretold of a time when John would "prepare the way." In other words, through John's preaching, God was preparing the hearts of the people to receive the message of Jesus. John the Baptist's voice was the first to prophesy in more than 400 years (with the exception of Anna and Simeon at Jesus' birth). The people had not heard a prophet since Malachi had spoken to Judah around 430 B.C. No doubt, as time passed, the people wondered why God had been so silent. Maybe they doubted that God had anything more to say. Perhaps they thought God had forgotten them. John's arrival disproved both of those ideas. God still was very much at work. And today, He still is at work in the hearts of people, even though He may seem silent or absent.

Clearing the path

Mark also spoke of John's mission to "make paths straight for him" (1:3). When John the Baptist spoke of paths, the hearers likely thought of the

massive network of roads they traveled during that time, and some of those roads still exist today. John's role was to make paths flat and accessible. Instead of a physical road, though, John was preparing the hearts of the people. In today's language, John was the bulldozer leveling the ground so Jesus and humanity could be reconciled. All people—Jew and Gentile alike—would have access to God's Anointed. There would be nothing hindering the path to Jesus.

Like John the Baptist, believers can make the paths to God straight and clear. While we cannot change people's hearts, we can be the kind of winsome people who make a relationship with Jesus attractive. Instead of becoming a roadblock to Jesus, Christians can make God's grace and mercy desirable. We can live in such a way that we make people want to know more about God.

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