

יוֹחָנָן הַמַּטְבִּיל

Yochanan the Baptizer

Some years after Yoseph and Miriam travelled to Egypt to escape the murderous plot against Yeshua, the wicked ruler Herod died. God told Yoseph in a dream that they should return to the Land. Yoseph and Miriam were probably very happy to be going home! They journeyed back to the Land, and most likely were on their way to Jerusalem. But when Yoseph heard that Herod's son, Archelaus, had become ruler in the place of his father, Yoseph was afraid. If Herod had tried to kill Yeshua, then most likely his son, Archelaus, would also try to harm Him. Once again, God told Yoseph what he was to do by talking to him in a dream. He told Yoseph to travel north in the Land of Israel, and to settle in the Galil (Galilee). So Yoseph and Miriam, along with their toddler son Yeshua, settled in the city of Nazareth.



In Matthew's story of the life of Yeshua, he is giving us the most important events, and often skips over long periods of time.

After telling us the story about Yeshua's family finding a home in the city of Nazareth, he skips forward in time to when Yeshua was a grown man. He begins the story of Yeshua's adulthood by introducing us to a man named Yochanan. Yochanan was a kind of prophet who was going about the Land of Israel, calling the people to turn away from their sinful lives, and to come back to a true worship of Israel's God. He was also telling the people that the Promised Messiah was coming, and that they should make themselves ready to receive Him and following His teachings. In ancient Israel, immersing oneself in water was a way of demonstrating that a person was seeking to draw close to God. As Yochanan was telling the people that they needed to ask God to forgive them of their sins, and to live holy lives, he was encouraging them to go down to the river Jordan, and to immerse themselves in the water for a *mikveh*. In English we call this a "baptism." This *mikveh* would tell everyone that they were turning back to God.

Yochanan even dressed like the prophets of old. His outer coat was made of camel's hide, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. He also ate the food that was common in the desert: wild honey and locust. Locust are like large grasshoppers. Being seen as a prophet, the people realized that Yochanan was a man sent from God to call them back to true worship and holy living.

Many people were coming to the Jordan river where Yochanan was teaching and encouraging the people to do a *mikveh*. But some of the people were just coming because they were curious about what everyone else was doing. When they saw everyone doing a *mikveh* in the Jordan, they just went along with the crowd, even though they had no intention of asking God to forgive their sins, and to change the way they were living. When Yochanan realized this, he told these people that they should not just do a *mikveh* because everyone else was, but that they should honestly seek repentance and forgiveness from God.

It was at this time that Yeshua, now a grown man, also came to the Jordan where Yochanan was. When Yochanan saw Yeshua, he said: "Look, here is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!" Then Yeshua also ask Yochanan to help Him do a *mikveh*. But Yochanan had a question: why should Yeshua do a *mikveh* since He did not need to be forgiven of sin—He was the very Son of God! Yeshua told him that it was important for Him to do a *mikveh*, because although He had not sinned Himself, He was making Himself ready to bear the sins of others. Just as a lamb that is sacrificed must be without any defect, so Yeshua too would be the spotless Lamb of God.

When Yeshua came up out of the water of the *mikveh*, something miraculous happened: a dove flew down and perched on His shoulder. God was demonstrating that His Spirit was upon Yeshua to help Him accomplish His work as the Father's Messiah.