

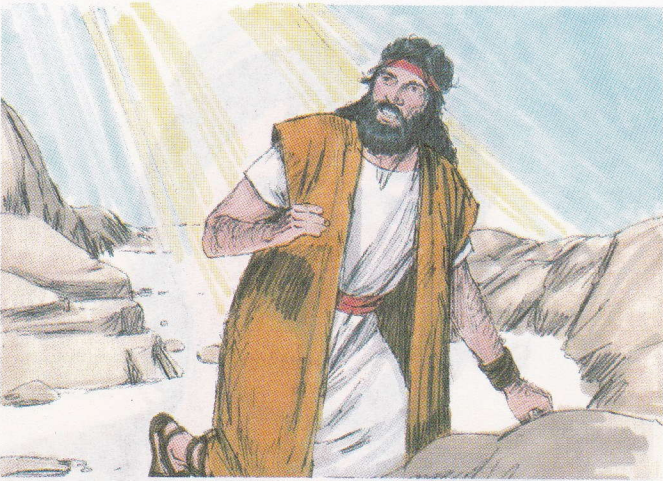
John Prepares the Way



1 John, the child born to Zechariah and Elizabeth a few months before Jesus was born, grew and became strong in both body and spirit.



2 He lived in the desert and wore clothes made from camel's hair. He had a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.



3 There in the desert, the Word of God came to John. This happened in the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius, when Pilate was governor of Judea and Herod was ruler of Galilee.



4 Then John began to preach to the Jewish people. He went throughout the whole area around the Jordan River, saying, "Turn away from your sins and be baptized, and God will forgive you."



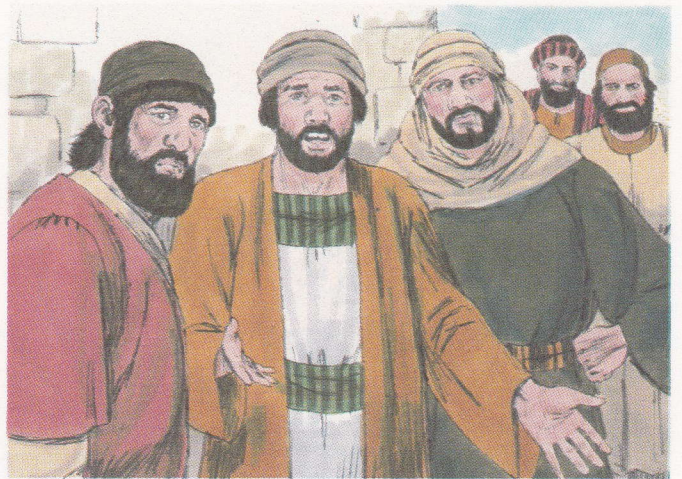
5 Crowds came from Jerusalem and all of Judea to the Jordan River where John was baptizing. When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he spoke sharply to them.



6 "You bunch of snakes! Don't think you can escape punishment just because you are descendants of Abraham! God could take these rocks and make them into descendants of Abraham!"



7 The people said, "Then what are we to do?" And John replied, "Whoever has two garments must give one to the man who has none, and whoever has food must share it."



8 Some tax collectors came to John to be baptized and they asked him, "Teacher, what are we to do?" John replied, "Don't collect more tax money than you are supposed to."



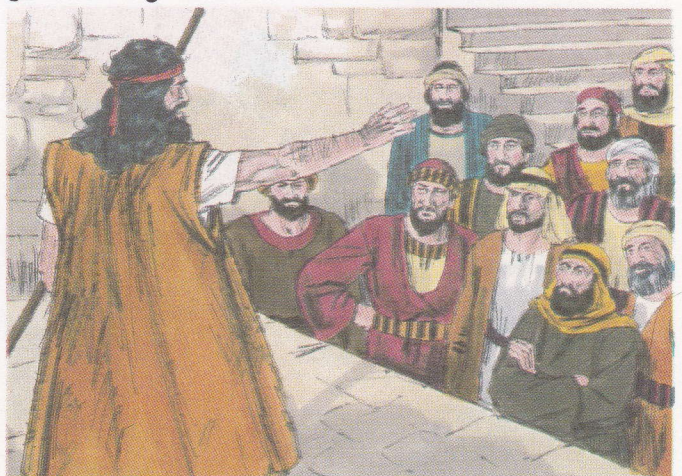
9 Some soldiers asked John what they should do. He answered, "Don't take money from anyone by force or make false accusations. Be happy with the pay you get."



10 People began to wonder whether John might be the Messiah. John denied it. "Someone is coming who is greater than I am," he said. "I am not good enough even to untie his sandals."



11 "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He will thresh out the grain and gather the wheat into his barn—but the chaff he will burn."



12 This John was indeed the man Isaiah meant when he said, "Someone is shouting in the desert: 'Get the road ready for the Lord.'"