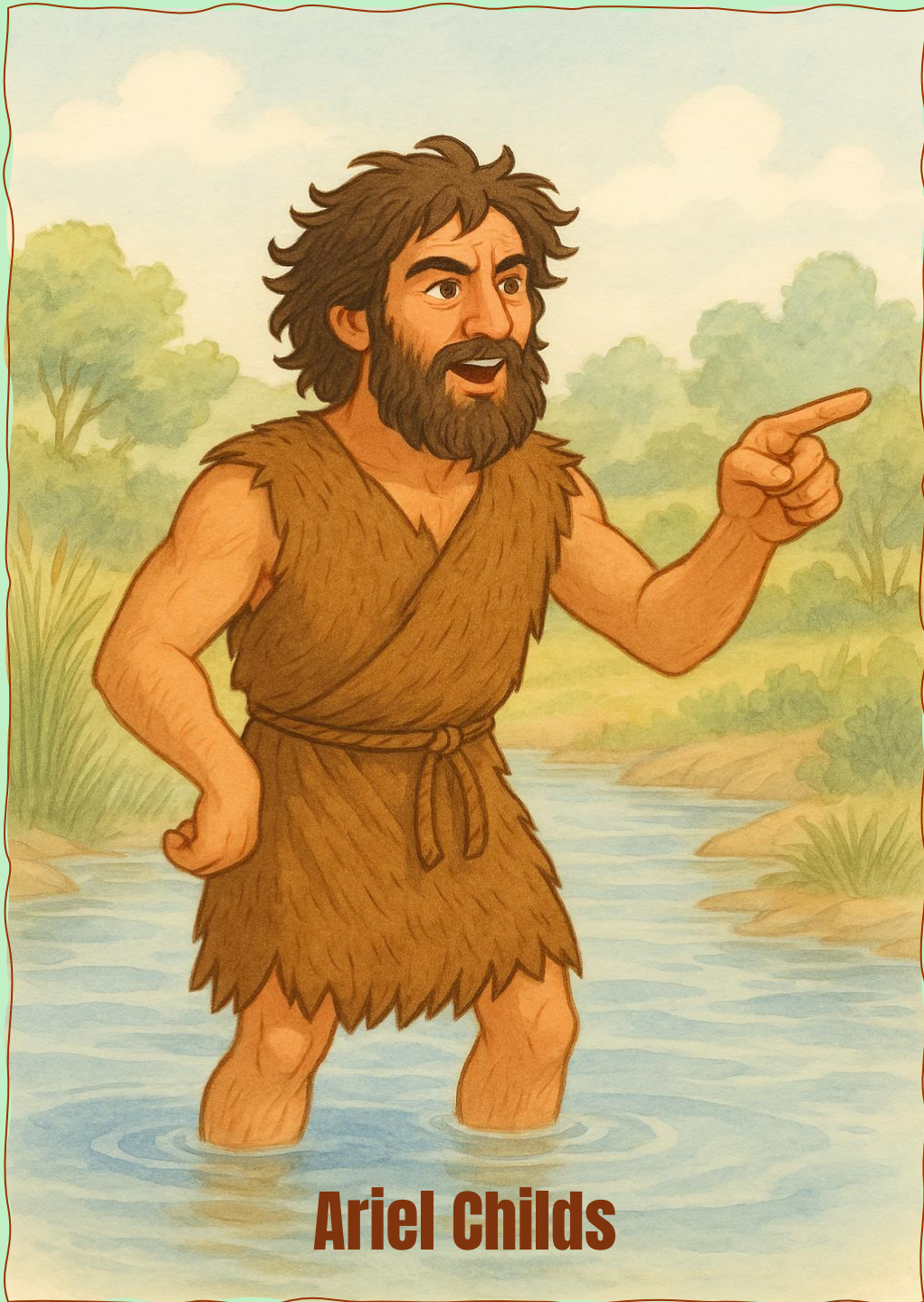


Prepare the Way: John the Baptist



Ariel Childs

A Note Before You Begin

This story is about John the Baptist, who talked a lot about washing and being made clean. In Bible times, washing wasn't just about getting dirt off your hands—it had a special meaning. It was a way people showed they wanted to start fresh with God.

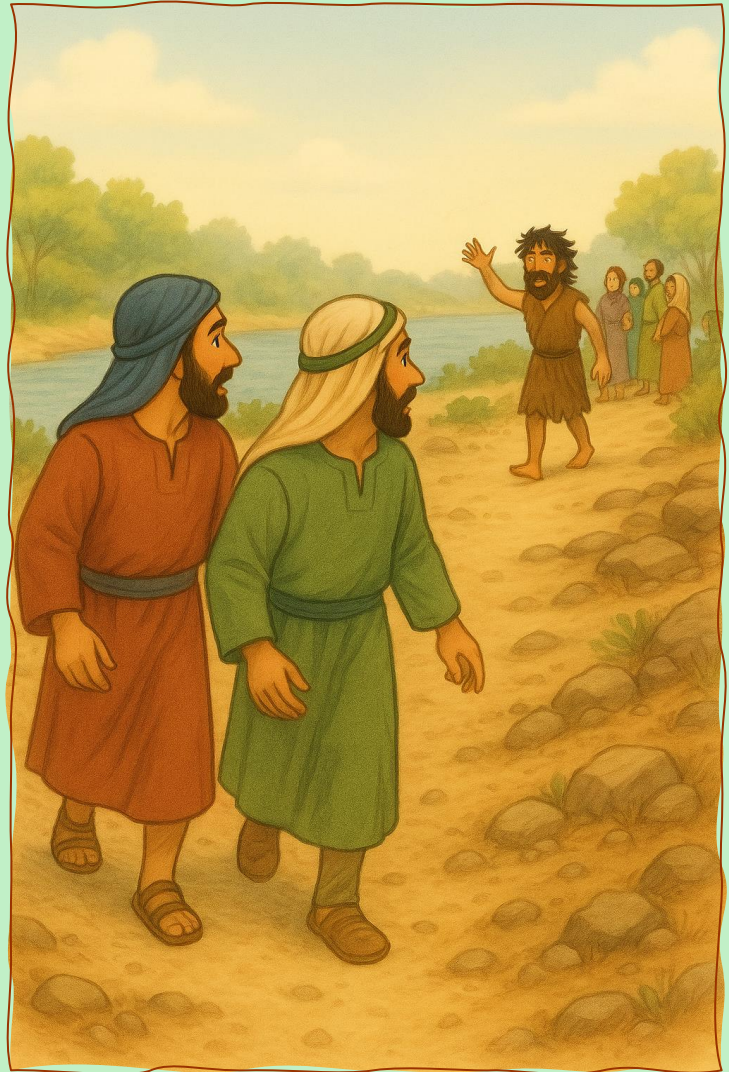
You'll also hear about animal sacrifices. Back then, people brought animals to say sorry to God. But John's message was new: God wanted people to turn from their mistakes and be baptized instead.

Andrew and his friend were walking along the dusty path near the Jordan River. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a thin man appeared. His feet were dusty from wandering, and his hair was wild and tangled like he hadn't combed it in days. His eyes were strange—deep and bright, like he was seeing things others couldn't. People nearby stopped and stared. The man's voice was loud, almost shouting, but there was power in his words. He called out about repentance and baptism, his voice ringing over the river.

“Do you believe this man, Andrew?” his friend asked quietly.

Andrew paused, watching the man's fiery eyes. “I don't know... but something about what he says feels real.”

“But where did he come from? It's like he just appeared out of nowhere!” his friend whispered.



When the man finished speaking, Andrew and his friend edged closer.

“Excuse me,” Andrew said, trying to sound brave. “Where do you come from? Where do you stay?”

The man’s eyes softened a little. “I live in the wilderness. I’ve been out here for years, praying and waiting.”

“Waiting for what?” Andrew’s friend asked, tilting his head.



“For God’s instructions,” the man replied. “God told me to tell people they don’t have to keep offering animals to be forgiven anymore. Now, they must repent and be baptized.”

Andrew’s eyes widened. “But what about Moses’ law?”

The man smiled kindly. “I know the law well. But God is doing something new. Something better. No more animal sacrifices,” the man said, his voice steady. “Now, God wants people to turn away from sin and be baptized—to wash away their sins and be made clean.”

Andrew frowned. “So, how many times do we have to wash our hands to be baptized?”

The man laughed softly. “It’s not like washing your hands. It’s more like when a woman cleans herself completely after having a baby—a fresh start, a new beginning.”

Andrew’s friend half-laughed, “You want us to do what the women do?”

“I want you to do what God says,” the man said, eyes serious. “Repent, be baptized to get ready when the Messiah comes.”

The man's name was John. Some people didn't like what he said, but they couldn't stop thinking about it. They kept coming back to listen, and soon, John became their teacher.

Crowds gathered every day to hear John. Some people wept quietly.



Others shouted "Amen!" Many repented and stepped into the water to be baptized. One day, John's eyes caught sight of a group of Pharisees and Sadducees walking toward the river. His voice dropped, heavy with anger.

"You brood of vipers!" he shouted, his face blazing like fire.

Andrew jumped, his heart pounding. Was John yelling at him? He hadn't noticed the stern Sadducee standing just behind him. Nervously, Andrew pointed at himself and mouthed, "Me?" But John didn't even glance at him. He pushed past Andrew and marched straight toward the religious leaders.

The crowd murmured, growing concerned after John's bold words.

"Then what should we do?" a

voice called out from the crowd.

John looked around, his eyes steady and calm. "If you have two shirts, give one to someone who has none. If you have extra food, share it with the hungry."

Some tax collectors stepped forward, their faces uneasy. "Teacher, what about us? What should we do?"

“Don’t cheat people by taking more than you should,” John said simply.

Then some soldiers asked, “And what about us?”

“Don’t use your power to take money from others,” John warned. “Don’t lie or hurt anyone. Be happy with your pay.”

The people listened carefully. John wasn’t just shouting; he was teaching them how to change their hearts and lives. Excitement buzzed through the crowd. Some wondered if John himself might be the promised Savior.

“I baptize with water,” John said, “but someone is coming who is greater than I am. I’m not even worthy to untie His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

That night, alone in the quiet wilderness, John lay down to sleep. Suddenly, a voice whispered in his heart.

“The Messiah is here.”

John sat up, startled. “Who is He, Lord? How will I know?”

“You will see My Spirit come down like a dove when He arrives,” the voice replied.

A few days later, Jesus came to the river.

John’s heart pounded as he saw Him approach—calm and strong, yet full of power. Filled with the Holy Spirit, John knew this was the one he had been waiting for.

“This is Him,” John whispered.

But then louder, he cried out, “Wait! I need to be baptized by You! Why are You coming to me?”

Jesus smiled gently. “We must do everything God wants. This is the right time.”

So John agreed and baptized Jesus in the cool river water. As Jesus rose from the water, the sky suddenly opened wide. John watched breathless as God’s Spirit came down like a dove and rested on Jesus.



Then a voice boomed from heaven, like thunder rolling across the hills: “This is My Son. I love Him. He makes Me very happy.”

“Did you hear that, Andrew?” his friend asked.

“Yeah,” Andrew said slowly, “it sounded like thunder.”

“But the thunder spoke words,” his friend said in wonder.

“It was God’s voice,” Andrew whispered. “Like thunder that talks.”



Later, standing by the riverbank, John pointed toward a man walking nearby.

“Look! There is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

“That’s Jesus,” Andrew told his friend. “The One God spoke about. The One we’ve been waiting for.”

“But what about John?” his friend wondered.

Andrew smiled. “John wouldn’t want

us to follow him. He’d want us to follow the Messiah.”

So they turned and began walking after Jesus.

Even as John kept preaching about repentance, he wasn’t afraid to speak out against Herod, the ruler of Galilee.

One day, John spoke boldly to Herod.



“You and your people—the sons of Esau—have become Jews,” he said, his voice sharp and clear. “But you live against God’s law. The Law of Moses says a man must not

marry his brother’s wife while his brother is still alive. Yet here you are—married to your brother’s wife!”

He pointed straight at Herodias. She glared back at him with eyes full of hatred. Herod didn’t like what John said. For Herodias’ sake, he arrested John and threw him into a dark prison. But even behind bars, Herod often listened to John’s powerful words. From his cold cell, John kept preaching about the coming Messiah. Still, after some time, a shadow of doubt crossed John’s heart.

“I’m getting closer to death,” John said quietly to his followers. “And Jesus still hasn’t made Israel’s kingdom strong again. Did I misunderstand?”

John sent his followers to Jesus with a question: “Are You really the one we’ve waited for, or should we expect someone else?”

When they returned, they said, “Jesus is healing the sick. The blind can see again. The poor are hearing good news.”

A calm peace spread through John's heart. He knew he had done what God asked—he had prepared the way. Not long after, Herod had John put to death. But John's message—Repent! Prepare the way for the Lord!—would never be forgotten.

Understanding Washing and Sacrifices in Bible Times

Washing Rituals for Women

In Bible times, when a woman gave birth, she was considered unclean for a time. This didn't mean she was bad — it was just part of God's special rules about being pure before Him. After the baby was born, the woman would wash her whole body carefully to be clean again and return to the community. This washing was a way to show she was ready for a new start.

In the story, this idea was used to explain baptism. Baptism isn't just washing hands or a quick splash — it's a symbol of a fresh start, washing away sins and making someone ready to live a new life with God.

Animal Sacrifices

Long ago, before Jesus came, people couldn't just ask God to forgive their mistakes. Instead, they brought animals to the temple to be sacrificed. The animals, like lambs or goats, were offered to God as a way to say sorry and show that they wanted to follow Him. This was part of the Law Moses gave to the people.

But these sacrifices didn't take away all sin forever. They had to keep doing them again and again. John's message was new and powerful: now, people could be truly forgiven by turning from their sins and being baptized as symbol of repentance — no more animals needed. This was a sign that something greater was coming: Jesus, who would give all men who believed on him forgiveness.

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