

## REV Bible Commentary for: Matthew 3:11

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I baptize you in water *as a symbol of your repentance*, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I *am*—I am not *even* worthy to carry his sandals! He will baptize you with holy spirit or *with fire*.

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**“as a symbol of your repentance.”** The Greek can be expressed that way, even if it is not the predominant way *eis* and the accusative is translated. D. A. Carson expresses the situation well:

The phrase “for repentance” (*eis metanoian*) is difficult: *eis* plus the accusative frequently suggests purpose (“I baptize you in order that you will repent”). Contextually (v. 6), this is unlikely, even in the telic sense suggested by Broadus: “I baptize you with a view to continued repentance.” But causal *eis*, or something very close to it, is not unknown in the NT (cf. Turner, *Syntax*, pp. 266-67): “I baptize you because of your repentance.”<sup>a</sup>

We assert the scope of Scripture shows that John did baptize people because of their repentance, and indeed, it was because of their repentance that the people came to John to be baptized by him. Indeed, [Luke 7:29-30](#) make it clear that the sinners came to John to be baptized while the religious leaders rejected God’s purpose for themselves by not allowing themselves to be baptized by John, which would have involved their publicly confessing their sins.

The water baptism was a symbol, an outward demonstration, of the inward repentance that had happened in the heart of the people who came to be baptized. Many scholars and translators recognize this, and Daniel Wallace expresses it well: “Water baptism is not a cause of salvation, but a *picture*; and as such it serves both as a public acknowledgment (by those present) and a public confession (by the convert)...”<sup>b</sup>

Scholars and translators express how water baptism is a symbol or picture of the inner work of God in different ways in their writings. For example, Charles Williams translates the [Matthew 3:11](#): “I am baptizing you in water to picture your repentance” (*The NT in the Language of the People*). Ann Nyland has: “I baptize you in water to show that you have changed your minds” (*The Source NT*). J. B. Phillips says: “I baptize you with water as a sign of your repentance” (*NT in Modern English*). Goodspeed’s New Testament reads: “I am baptizing you in water in token of your repentance.” Davies and Allison, after examining other possible interpretations, conclude: “It is, however, better to endorse a more nuanced position: baptism presupposes and expresses repentance.”<sup>c</sup> Robert Mounce writes as if John is speaking in the first person: “My baptism’ he might say, ‘indicates you have repented.’”<sup>d</sup> See [commentary on Mark 1:4](#).

**“I am not *even* worthy to carry his sandals!”** That John would compare himself to Jesus in this way is very important in showing the humble and obedient heart of John, who was God’s

loyal servant. John’s comparison occurs in all four Gospels ([Matt. 3:11](#); [Mark 1:7](#); [Luke 3:16](#), and [John 1:27](#)). Matthew is slightly different but the heart is the same.

**“with holy spirit or *with* fire.”** This is the gift of holy spirit. The Messiah will baptize every person with either the gift of holy spirit or the fire of God’s judgment.

[For more information on “holy spirit or fire,” see [commentary on Luke 3:16](#). For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see [Appendix 6](#): Usages of ‘Spirit’.]

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F. Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 8:104.

Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 371.

Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7* [ICC].

Mounce [NIBCNT].

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c)

d)