

Lesson II. **THE PREACHING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST** January 10, 1904

Matt. 3: 1-12: Commit to memory vs. 4-6. Compare Mark 1: 1-8; Luke 3: 1-18.

GOLDEN TEXT—Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.—Matt. 3: 2.

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa,
 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

5 Then went out to him Jeru'salem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jor'dan,

6 And were baptized of him in Jor'dan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned

you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

10 And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Revised Version—1 And in those days cometh, 2 Omit And; 3 Isaiah the prophet; 4 Make ye ready; 5 Now John himself had; 6 food; 7 unto; 8 And they; 9 the river Jordan; 10 coming; 11 Ye offspring of vipers; 12 warned; 13 fruit worthy of; 14 even now is the axe; 15 every tree therefore that; 16 cleanse his threshing-floor; 17 he will gather.

THE LESSON EXPLAINED

Time and Place—Summer, 26 A.D.; See v. 1.

Connection—Malachi had foretold (ch. 3: see also Isa. 40: 3) the sending of a messenger to prepare the way for the coming Saviour. The prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist. The story of his birth is told in Luke, ch. 1. He is now 30 years old—six months older than Jesus.

I. THE PREACHER.—1, 2. In those days; at the time when Jesus was still dwelling in Nazareth, ch. 2: 23. Luke (ch. 3: 1, 2) gives the date of John's ministry in relation to the general history of the world. Came; Rev. Ver., "cometh"—as suddenly as Elijah of old, 1 Kgs. 17: 1. John the Baptist; so-called because one of his chief offices was to baptize. Preaching; literally, "heralding," a word used to describe the proclamation of a king. Wilderness of Judæa; a wild, uncultivated and almost treeless region, thinly settled, in the eastern part of Judæa. Repent; not only be sorry for and confess sin, but change the mind and reform the life; John's great word. Jesus' also; but His special watchword was "Believe." The kingdom of heaven; God's reign in the hearts of men. This title is found in Matthew alone of the four gospels. The others, and Matthew elsewhere, have "the kingdom of God." Is at hand. The King had come, and was ready to receive men into the kingdom.

3, 4. This is he; Matthew's words. Esaias. See Connection. The voice; that is, the message uttered by the voice. The message is so important, that the messenger is lost sight of. Prepare. "As royal travellers sent messengers on beforehand to clear the roads from obstruction, and even to make roads

where none existed. . . John was to open a way for the coming King." (Century Bible.) Camel's hair; a coarse cloth made from the long, shaggy hair shed by these animals, a common dress of the prophets, 2 Kgs. 1: 8; Zech. 13: 4. Locusts; winged insects resembling grasshoppers. Food used only by the poorest. Wild honey; either honey made by wild bees or tree honey, a liquid oozing from palm and fig trees.

II. THE HEARERS.—5-7. Went out; at first in small numbers, growing gradually into an immense multitude. All; meaning that many people came from the places named. Baptized; a common religious practice among the Jews. For example, Gentiles who joined the Jewish church were baptized. John's baptism was a sign of cleansing from sin. Pharisees; a sect of the Jews noted for their strict observance of all the forms of the ceremonial law and of the traditions of their fathers, Matt. 5: 20; Luke 11: 39-44; 13: 12. Sadducees; a sect opposed to the Pharisees, less strict in observing ceremonies and did not believe in a resurrection or future life, Acts 23: 8. Generation of vipers; viper-brood, hurtful as poisonous vipers. Who hath warned you; the emphasis on "you." John suspected they had come because the movement was popular, not because they felt their sins. Flee; like serpents hidden in the stubble, when fired to prepare for the next crop. The wrath to come; God's hatred and punishment of sin.

III. THE MESSAGE.—8, 9. Fruits meet; actions showing they were in earnest about escaping. Abraham. The Jewish rabbis taught that no descendant of Abraham could be lost. Of these



Using the "Fan" or Winnowing Shovel