

The Pharisees represented hypocritical superstition, the Sadducees carnal unbelief. (Alford.) Although they were bitterly opposed to each other they are often found working together to obstruct Christ and the gospel. **Offspring of vipers:** The viper is the most wide-spread of all poisonous serpents and is the most dangerous and treacherous of the snakes of Syria. The term is applied very generally to a crafty, venomous, malignant person. It fitted John's enemies well. Perhaps there is an allusion to Gen. 3: 15. **Who hath warned you:** John knew their contemptuous insincerity and used strong and apparently sarcastic language to rouse them to a sense of their peril. **The wrath to come:** The anger of God against sin, expressed in the judgments which the Jews expected on the heathen at the coming of the Messiah. This expectation was founded on such passages as Is. 13: 9; Joel 2: 31; Mal. 3: 2; 4: 5-6. John implies that this wrath hangs over Jew and Gentile alike, if they harden their hearts and reject the Messiah; for his salvation is only for those who receive him.

8. Bring forth therefore fruit.—If you are really in earnest you will show it not only in attention to rites but in character and conduct. **Worthy of repentance.** Repentance is a complete change of mind which issues in a turning from sin to God in faith and obedience. The R. V. shows that the repentance must precede the fruit. As these men were saying by their attendance on his ministry that they repented, John exhorts them to seal this profession by a course of life worthy of such a change of mind.

9. Think not to say.—The many promises of blessing made in the Old Testament to Abraham and his seed led the Jews to suppose that no matter what the character of a Jew might be, he would enjoy all the blessings of the Kingdom of the Messiah whenever it should be set up, and an entrance into heaven should he die before the Messiah came. The Rabbis represented Abraham as seated at the gate of hell to see that none of his posterity were carried thither. John emphatically contradicts all this. **For I say unto you.** Do not continue to nourish your self conceit with the thought that God is bound to fulfil to you his promises to Abraham's seed. Jehovah, who gave a large posterity to one as good as dead, may reject you as spurious children of Abraham, and is able, were it

necessary, to raise from the pebbles on the bank a true, spiritual Israel to inherit the promises. This is prophetic of the admission of the Gentile Church, (Rom. 4: 16. Gal. 3: 7, 29.) (Alford.)

10. And even now.—The punishment for barrenness and wickedness which was always possible is now near. The instrument for the destruction of the unworthy children of Abraham has been prepared and is in position. Only fruit bearing can avert the doom from any. **Is hewn down:** Not "will be," the present tense represents a certain and immediate future action, on general law of the Kingdom which John heralded, (Schaff.) He condenses the whole series of events into a single scene and thus sees at a glance the doom of the persistently unholy. (Morison.) **Fire.**—Fruitless trees are good only for fuel.

11. I indeed baptize.—Read Luke 3: 10-15 here. The Baptist contrasts his own limitations with the power of Christ. His baptism was only a symbolic confession of sin, a profession of repentance and believing expectation of a coming deliverer. It could not confer salvation. It was not even equivalent to Christian baptism for that rite was afterwards administered to those who had received it. (Acts 19: 3-5.) **Whose shoes:** In the homes of wealthy Jews this was the duty of the lowest menial, who was generally a Gentile. The thought is, "I am further removed from my successor than the meanest Gentile slave is from his Jewish master. (Williams.) **With the Holy Ghost and fire.**—The operation of the Holy Spirit whom the coming Christ confers, truly regenerates the heart and makes sincere repentance possible. There are not two agencies mentioned here but only one. Most interpreters understand fire to refer to the illuminating, kindling, and purifying, power of the grace given by the Messiah's baptism, (Is. 4: 4; Jer. 5: 14; Mal. 3: 2,) and will not allow that there is any reference to the fire of judgment. But it is possible to combine the two. The power of God which is manifested in the tremendous purifications of the Holy Spirit will burn sin out of the hearts of those who submit themselves to him and destroy those who resist his influences and cling to sin.

12. Whose fan is in his hand.—In the East in John's day the sheaves were spread on the hard threshing-floor and the grain separat-