

JULY 21.—The Ministry of John the Baptist.—Luke 3: 1-22. A. D. 26.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"For He shall be great, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink."—Luke 1: 15.

IN THE STUDY.

"Thirty years have passed since the birth in Bethlehem, when 'all Jerusalem was troubled by the enquiries of the Wise Men from the East, and eighteen years since the Galilean started the Rabbis in the Temple by his youthful wisdom, old men have died, young men have become old, and children have grown up.'—*Stock*. The kingdom has departed. For upwards of twenty years the country has been a Roman province, and six Roman officers have governed Judea since Herod the Great and his son Archelaus sat on the throne. Pontius Pilate, more hated than all the rest, now rules, and the people wearied with foreign domination and remembering the promise, and that the time is fulfilled for the coming of the Messiah, are now anxiously looking for the Deliverer who is to restore the throne of David. A warrior king is expected, and an earthly kingdom.

The prophetic references to John the Baptist intimately associate him with the coming of Christ.—*Isa.* 40: 3; *Mal.* 4: 5. He was to come in the spirit and power of Elijah, and he was to prepare the way of the Lord. The Jewish people thought that Elijah himself would come.—*John* 1: 21.

The deep impression made by the appearance of a man with the habits and in the garb of prophets like Elijah, preaching with Elijah's spirit and power, and that too after a prophetic silence of 400 years, or since Malachi predicted the appearance of Elijah before the Lord's coming, is evident from the crowd that gathered on the Jordan valley from all parts of the country, especially when we remember that John did no miracle.—*John* 10: 41. It has been calculated that it was a Sabbatic year; and as these years were now observed with some strictness by the Jews, the people would not be detained from their ordinary avocations. According to Stanley and others, an expedition was then passing down the Ghor, or Jordan valley, against Petra in Idumaea, the capital of Aretas, king of Arabia Petraea, 2 *Cor.* 12: 28, and some of these troops were doubtless the soldiers spoken of in *Luke* 3: 14.—*Stock*.

"The wilderness of Judea" is a term applied to a strip of uninhabited country between the hill country of Hebron and Bethlehem and the Dead Sea, consisting of the wild ravines which descend abruptly into the deep hollow in which the lake lies, and of the precipitous rocks which divide them. The district extends from Engedi on the south to Jericho on the north. John probably moved northward from the wilderness as he preached; for his first baptisms seem to have taken place at the lower ford of the Jordan, opposite Jericho; while a little later we find him at Bethabara, probably the 'upper fords' where the Jabok runs into the Jordan (*John* 1: 28), and afterwards at Enon, near Salim, which has been identified still higher up the stream towards Bethshan or Scythopolis.

Dr. Thomson, in "The Land and the Book," speaking of Eastern roads, says: "These mountain roads are positively barbarous; and a whole class of Biblical figures rests on this state of things." Isaiah says: "Separate the way of the Lord, cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones." And not only do modern ways prove the need of such preparation, but modern customs show how, when, and why it is done. When Ibrahim Pasha proposed to visit certain places on Lebanon, the Piers and Sheikha sent forth a general proclamation to all the inhabitants to assemble along the proposed route, and to prepare the way. The same was done on a grand scale in 1845, when the Sultan visited Prusa. The

stones were gathered out, crooked places straightened, and rough ones made level and smooth. The exhortation to gather out the stones is peculiarly appropriate. These farmers do the exact reverse—gather up the stones from the fields and cast them into the highway, and it is this barbarous custom, which in many instances renders the roads so uncomfortable, and even dangerous.

Theribus was for three years joint emperor with Augustus; so this date would be the twelfth of his sole rule. Judea had been for over twenty years a Roman province. Archelaus having been deposed for his cruelties, and banished to Gaul. A Tetrarch was strictly a governor of a fourth part, but eventually came to be applied to any ruler of a small province. The Herod here spoken was the son of Herod the Great.

Philip was the half brother of the Philip who married Herodias.

Itranea was the north-eastern district of Palestine. Abilene lay still farther north and received its name from its chief city, Abila, 18 miles north of Damascus.

Annas had been high priest of the fifteen years, was his father-in-law of Caiaphas, and still retained the name and much of the authority of the High Priest, although Caiaphas actually held the office.

Esaias is the Greek form of Isaiah, as found in the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Old Testament.

There are two words in the New Testament for repentance, the one signifies regret, not so much for the thing itself as the consequences, and the other a change of mind and feeling, towards the thing, arising from change of views. This latter word is by far the stronger one, and is here used: For the first, see *Matt.* 27: 3, and for the latter, *Mark* 7: 15; *Luke* 10: 13; 2 *Cor.* 7: 10. True repentance, the repentance preached by John, and so much insisted upon throughout the New Testament, by our Lord and His Apostles, is not simply sorrow for sin arising from a view of its consequences, as a turning from it and against it, and is produced by the enlightenment of the mind as to its true nature and tendencies. True repentance is a *change of heart*, not simply sorrow of heart. It changes the heart from the love of sin to the hatred of it, and to the love of Christ and to holiness.

IN THE CLASS.

Questions. How many years have passed since the date of our last lesson? What changes have taken place? What was the state of people in reference to coming of the promised Messiah? What was the appearance of John as he came out of the wilderness preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand? What impression did his preaching make? When men asked him who he was, what was his answer? Did he magnify himself or the one who was to come? What was his message to everybody?

We have in our lesson: 1st. The Mission of John; 2nd. The Message of John; 3rd. The Baptism of John; 4th. The Results of His Ministry.

THE MISSION OF JOHN.

It was that of a fore-runner to announce the coming of Christ and to prepare the people for him. *Isa.* 40: 3; *Luke* 3: 13-17; *John* 1: 23. As a pioneer in the back woods clearing out the brush, rooting up the stumps and making a road through the wilderness. As pioneers before an advancing army clearing the way along which it is to march.

The preparation John demanded was in men's hearts, which were hard, proud, selfish, sinful. So is every one's heart by nature to-day.

THE MESSAGE OF JOHN.

Repentance. To turn away from their sins, give them up, confess them, and to stand ready to receive the Lord when He should come. This message was to every one, for all needed it. Some

of them thought that they were already prepared for the Lord. The Pharisees, because they were descendants of Abraham, very strict and religious in their way supposed that, therefore, they were righteous, having no sins to confess; no evil hearts to be changed. But John called them "a generation of vipers." He told them that all their covenant privileges, and all their outward forms, and not even their being children of pious Abraham would avail them, that the axe was already laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that brought not forth good fruit should be cut down—v. 7-9. And then he told them how true repentance would manifest itself—in a changed life—v. 10-14. So is it with us—nothing, not even pious parents, church membership, outward observance of the forms of religion will fit us for the kingdom of Christ. We must repent by turning from our sins to Christ to trust Him, and follow Him.—*Matt.* 18: 3; *John* 3: 3; *Acts* 3: 18.

THE BAPTISM OF JOHN.

Those who received his message and believed in the Saviour that was to come, in Him who was to baptize them with the Holy Ghost, were baptized—that is, they were buried in the water and raised again. That John baptized by immersion may be clearly seen, not only from the meaning of the word used, which is to dip, under, but also from the place where he baptized. He kept along the river, first opposite Jericho at the "lower fords" there, then at Bethabara, the "upper fords," then at Enon near Salim.—*John* 1: 28; 3: 23.

He baptized in the river, and those who were baptized came up out of the water.—*Matt.* 3: 16.

THE RESULTS OF JOHN'S MINISTRY.

John was beheaded. He said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease."—*John* 3: 30. We read that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John.—*John* 4: 1. Was John's ministry a success or a failure as to *lasting results*? Let us see. The first disciples of our Lord were from among John's and the result of his test ministry.—*John* 1: 35-42. When John was beheaded his disciples came to Jesus.—*Matt.* 14: 12. When Christ went among the people they remembered the testimony of John.—*John* 10: 40-42. The disciples that John made were ready to receive the gospel when it was brought to them.—*Acts* 18: 24-28; 19: 1-6. He prepared the way for Jesus. "And when his work was done, like the morning star, he faded away from our sight on the rising of the sun, he gradually passed away, and Christ, as on the mount, was left alone. So ought it to be with our teaching, to so point to Jesus that we shall fade from view in the greater light, and Christ fill the vision with His surpassing glory."—*John* 3: 29.

JULY 28.—Jesus at Nazareth.—Luke 4: 16-30. A. D. 28.

GOLDEN TEXT.

And they were astonished at His doctrine, for His word was with power.—*V. 22.*

IN THE STUDY.

Since the baptism of our Lord, with an account of which our last lesson closed, and the return of Jesus to Nazareth, as recorded in our lesson for to-day, the following events have, according to Robinson's Harmony of the Gospels, taken place. The temptation in the wilderness.—*Matt.* 4: 1; *Mark* 1: 12-13; *Luke* 4: 1-13. The testimony of John to Jesus at Bethabara.—*John* 1: 19-34. The first disciples made by our Lord: Andrew, John, Peter, Philip and Nathanael.—*John* 1: 35-51. The first Passover, at which Jesus drives out the traders from the Temple.—*John* 2: 13-25. His discourse with Nicodemus.—*John* 3: 1-21. His sojourn, preaching and baptizing in Judea.—*John* 3: 22-36. His departure