

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

THIRD QUARTER: STUDIES IN LUKE'S GOSPEL.

A. D. 26. LESSON III. MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST: or, Witnessing of the Son. Luke 3, 15-22. July 21.

EXPLANATORY.

VERSE 15. EXPECTATION. Or suspense. They were uncertain whether this prophet on the bank of Jordan, whose weird aspect and rough garb reminded them of the ancient Elijah, could be their promised and expected Messiah. The wonderful portents which announced his coming, and the bold originality of his message, stamped him as a divinely commissioned messenger. Mused in their hearts. Or, reasoned, debated. John, John the Baptist, the last and greatest of the prophets in the Old Testament dispensation. He was the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth, both of whom were Levites of the priestly line. His birth and name: "John, grace of the Lord," were foretold to his father by the angel Gabriel in the temple. He was born either at Hebron or Juttah, in the south of Judah, and brought up secluded in the wilderness until the age of thirty years. His inspired ministry lasted less than two years, though it aroused all the land of Palestine, and sent its echoes throughout the Jewish world. He denounced sin and self righteousness, exhorted to repentance and reform, and proclaimed the near approach of the Messiah. Whether he were the Christ. The Jewish people had ever cherished a hope and belief in Christ's coming, as their deliverer and prince. The time, "seventy weeks," foretold by Daniel (Dan. 9, 24) was now completed, and the "scepter departed from Judah," (Gen. 42, 10) and throughout the land and the world there was an expectation of his immediate appearing. It is not wonderful that when the clarion-voices of John's preaching aroused the people, they should begin to question whether this was not the promised Messiah. [Teacher, apply the thought of looking for, and expecting Christ as our Saviour and Redeemer.] Or not. If there were strong reasons for supposing John to be the Messiah, there were stronger against the supposition, especially the fact that he came of the family of Levi, and not of Judah, as was the prophecy concerning Christ.

16. SAYING UNTO THEM ALL. He would not for a moment receive the honor which he felt belonged to another, and was content to be the herald of the coming King. Said Scotland's greatest preacher, "Let Chalmers' name be forgotten, and Christ's alone be remembered." (1) The greatest men on earth have been the most unselfish and humble. Baptism was known among the Jews as a part of the rite for receiving proselytes into the church. John adopted it as the token of renunciation of sin and a cleansing by divine power. Latchet. To stoop down and loosen the thongs which fastened the sandals to the feet was the duty of a slave, or of one greatly inferior in rank. In Oriental countries sandals are generally removed on entering a house, and left in charge of a servant, who brings them again when needed. Thus John, the most prominent public man of his day, and honored by the acclamations of all the multitude, announces himself as not worthy to perform the humblest services for Jesus. [Teacher, show how Christ honours us by calling us to be his friends and followers.] Baptize you with the Holy Ghost. The promise of a baptism from on high, the direct manifestation of divine power upon men, fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2 14.) (2) Still is it the endowment of the church, a privilege of which we are heirs. With fire. On Pentecost the tongues of fire fell on the heads of the disciples, purifying and inspiring them, burning away the dross from their hearts, and brightening the gold. Some commentators suggest that the "baptism of the Holy Ghost" refers to the church, and the "baptism of fire" to the godless world—the wheat purified, the chaff burned up. (3) "He sits in the hearts of his people as a refiner's fire: he is among his enemies as a consuming fire."—Burkitt.

17. IS WHOSE FAN. In the East the wheat and chaff are separated by the simple process of casting them up in the air against the wind, when the chaff and straw are blown away, and the wheat falls on the floor. Sometimes, however, one man throws up the wheat, while another waves a large fan to create a draft of air. Purge his floor. The prophet realized that there was a defect in the thoroughness of his own work; that, of the masses who flocked to his baptism, many were merely "following the crowd," many were formal and not hearty in their repentance, and many were only superficial and fickle in their feelings. He could not discern the precious from the vile; but he warns his

hearers that the coming One will draw the lines sharply and distinctly between saint and sinner. (4) In our churches the good and the evil may be mingled, notwithstanding our care; but in Christ's true invisible church every member is holy. Fire unquenchable. While we may not comprehend the full meaning of these symbolic words, yet from the tenor of all Scripture we can infer that they point to a terrible hereafter. (5) Our unbelief will not quench the fire which God's law and "the nature of things" kindles. Many other things. While many of the words of the bold preacher are unwritten and lost to the world, their influence remains in a current which still flows over the earth. (6) Words may be forgotten, but are not, therefore, powerless.

19. BUT. This and the following verse are not placed in chronological order, as John's imprisonment did not take place until some months after Jesus' baptism. They are inserted here in order to complete the record of John's ministry. Herod, Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great and Malthace of Samaria. He received by his father's will the government of Galilee and Perea, and reigned over those provinces until dethroned and banished by the Roman Emperor Caligula to Lugdunum, on the border between France and Spain, in which latter province he died. On a small scale he was a true Oriental despot, sensual, unscrupulous, and tyrannical. He met Jesus at Jerusalem, on the night before the crucifixion, mocked him, and sent him back to Plate. Tetrach. "The ruler of a fourth part," a title bestowed upon a monarch whose dominions were not large enough for a kingdom. Reproved by him. He who had rebuked the sins of the people did not spare those of the king. (6) Those who deliver God's message need courage. When John Knox lay in his open grave, the regent of Scotland pointed to his grave and said, "There lies one who never feared the face of his fellow man." Herodias. The granddaughter of Herod the Great being daughter of his son Aristobulus. She was first married to her uncle, Herod Philip, who was living as a private citizen; but forsook him to live with another uncle, Herod Antipas, the tetrach, whose lawful wife was still living. Thus in every respect their connection was wicked and abominable. Through her influence John the Baptist was thrust into prison and afterward murdered. (Matt. 14, 3-12.) She persuaded Herod to go to Rome and seek the title of king, and on his failure and dethronement she voluntarily accompanied him to his place of exile. She was ambitious, cruel, revengeful, and utterly devoid of principle. Shut up John. At Macherus, a gloomy castle overlooking the southern end of the Dead Sea, where after a few months his noble head fell under the sword, to satisfy the whim of a dancing girl. His life seemed a failure, but only seemed, for it was a glorious success in awakening the land and preparing the path for the Gospel.

21. WHEN ALL. Not meaning that all had been baptized before Jesus. Literally, "During the baptism of all the people." Jesus also being baptized. The scene of Christ's baptism was Bethabara, on the eastern bank of Jordan, a few miles north of the Dead Sea. Christ received baptism 1. To take his place among men; though sinless, making himself one with sinners. 2. To honor by his divine commendation the Baptist and his mission. 3. To receive a public and solemn induction to his office, as priests were anointed under the old dispensation. Praying. (7) Prayer should accompany every public act of consecration. (8) He who was sinless prayed, how much more should we who are sinful! He who needed nothing communed with the Father; let us who need all things go to him. Heaven was opened. There was an appearance of opening in the arch of the sky, in the midst of which the light gathered in the form of a dove.

22. THE HOLY GHOST DESCENDED. Thus all the three persons in the Godhead were represented—the Father in the voice, the Son in the prayer, and the Spirit in the dove-like appearance. Dove. An appropriate form for his appearance, who comes to usher in peace on the earth. Well pleased. A message which may yet come to us, honored by brotherhood with Christ, if we are found faithful. GOLDEN TEXT: For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. Luke 1, 15.

DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION: The personality of the Holy Ghost. The next lesson is Luke 4, 16-30.

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