

the expression, "the wilderness," is not used to denote a region utterly desolate, as we are apt to imagine. St. Luke informs us that Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John, resided in the hill-country of Judea, which designates the district, which is here called the wilderness. In this hill-country, we learn from Joshua xxi. 11, was situated the city of Hebron, one of the forty-eight collegiate towns set apart throughout the land of Israel, as residences for the priests and their families: among the names of the places thus set apart, we read, "they gave them the city of Arba the father of Anak, which city is Hebron, in the hill-country of Judah, with the suburbs thereof round about." Now, as Zechariah was a priest, it is probable that it was here that John passed his youth; and that this is all that is intended, when it is said that he "was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel." Luke i. 80.—This region was rich in solemn historical associations: here was the plain of Mamre, where Abraham had built an altar, and dwelt. Genesis xiii. 18. Here was the cave of Machpelah, the burying-place of Abraham, of Sarah, and the patriarchs. Genesis xiii. 2. And here David was anointed king, and reigned seven years, before Jerusalem was made the capital city of the land of Israel. 2 Sam. ii. 3.

Ver. 2. *Repent ye.*] This was the substance of his preaching. From the very degenerate condition into which the mass of the Jewish people had fallen, a great mental revolution was necessary, before they would be able to understand the Messiah and His teaching: the habit of their thoughts would have to be very much changed. How difficult it was for this revolution to be brought about, was proved by the sequel,—by the fewness of those that really became Christians, when our Lord Himself delivered His Message.

—*the kingdom of heaven.*] A visible system of government, under a Divine king,—viz., the Messiah—was about to be set up among men. The prophet Daniel had predicted this event: "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed:

and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Dan. ii. 44. This kingdom means the Church, or Association of men, which our Saviour founded, as the depository and vehicle of His doctrine, and organized with officers and rites, providing for its succession in perpetuity, and constant outspread into all lands, without any breach of identity, even to the end of the world.—The fulfilment of this prophecy is a great fact in history. The Association of men, with its peculiar officers, its peculiar rites, and its peculiar deposit of doctrines, founded by our Saviour, has been always visible in every nation of Christendom, and well known, and easily distinguishable from counterfeits.

Ver. 3. *For this is he that was spoken of]* i. e. "this is the Messiah that was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, when he said." The place referred to is Isaiah xl. 2, 3, 4:—"Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hands double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

The word here translated LORD, is in the Hebrew JEHOVAH: therefore, our Lord was JEHOVAH, the eternal Son, manifest in the flesh.

Ver. 4. *John had his raiment of camel's hair.*] In the Scripture way of speaking, John the Baptist was Elijah: i. e. he resembled Elijah. In 2 Kings, i., we find Elijah thus introduced to our notice: Ahaziah, king of Israel, being sick, sends to inquire of Baal-zebub as to whether he shall recover. The messengers are met in their way by a prophet of the true God, who declares to them that he shall not recover. Then Ahaziah inquires of the messengers, "What manner of man was he which came up to