

LESSON III—January 19th, 1896.

The Ministry of John the Baptist. LUKE 3: 15-22.

(Commit to memory verses 21 and 22).

GOLDEN TEXT: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."
John 1: 29.

PROVE THAT—We should point others to Christ. John 1: 41.

SHORTER CATECHISM. Quest. 41. *Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?* A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments.

LESSON HYMNS. *Children's Hymnal*. Nos. 23, 62, 63, 64.

DAILY PORTIONS. *Monday*. The Ministry of John the Baptist. Luke 3: 1-14. *Tuesday*. The Ministry of John the Baptist. Luke 3: 15-22. *Wednesday*. A witness-bearer. John 1: 6-18. *Thursday*. Sent before. John 8: 22-30. *Friday*. John's submission to Jesus. Matt. 3: 7-17. *Saturday*. Suffering for faithfulness. Mark 6: 14-20. *Sabbath*. The Preacher and his message. Mark 1: 1-11. (*The I. B. R. A. Selections*).

HELPS IN STUDYING.

INTRODUCTORY. John began his ministry in A. D. 26, about 17 years after the date of the events in our last lesson. The baptism of Jesus was in January, A. D. 27, and the imprisonment of John in March, A. D. 28. John's ministry began in the Wilderness of Judea, a thinly inhabited region west of the Dead Sea. The baptism of Jesus took place at the fords of the Jordan near Jericho.

LESSON PLAN. I. The Message Proclaimed. vs. 15-19. II. The Messenger Persecuted. vs. 19, 20. III. The Messiah Pointed out. vs. 21-22.

I. There was a general expectation amongst the Jews at this time, that the Messiah would shortly appear, and the preaching of John was so earnest and did so much good that some were beginning to think that perhaps he was the Christ. So the priests and others came to him¹ and asked him "Who art thou?" He replied that he was but "a Voice crying in the wilderness" bidding men prepare for Christ's coming. He baptized with water² as a symbol of the cleansing away of the sin of every penitent one, but Christ would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire.³ He would really cleanse their hearts by his Spirit and inspire them with love and zeal. He would separate between the good and the bad as the farmer separates between the wheat and the chaff. The one he would save and bless, the other he would punish with terrible destruction.⁴ His ministry lasted nearly two years so that the Bible gives us but a few specimens of his teaching.⁵ He was really the first preacher of "the gospel," the glad tidings of salvation through Christ.

II. John did not fear to rebuke all whose wickedness called for his censure. The self-righteous pharisees, the dishonest publicans, the cruel soldiers, all fell under his sharp reproof. Herod himself did not escape. John told him that he was living in sin,⁶ that he was guilty of tyranny, murder and many other

crimes and excesses. So Herod thought to silence the fearless preacher by shutting him up in the lonely fortress prison of Machaerus at the east side of the Dead Sea in the land of Moab. Here he remained until he was beheaded.⁷

III. When John was preaching and baptizing at Bethabara (probably *Bethany*) across the Jordan from Jericho great multitudes flocked to him from all quarters so that it seemed as if everybody was there. Amongst the rest came Jesus from Nazareth. He was now about thirty years of age and ready to enter upon the work of his ministry. He drew near to John, after the crowd had gone away, but knowing his holy, blameless life John humbly hesitated to baptize one so much better than himself.⁸ Yielding, however, to the wishes of Jesus he poured on his head too the symbolic water. As Jesus returned from the river, praying as he went along,⁹ both he and John saw what seemed to be the opening of the sky above them and something, dove-like, fluttering down and resting on his head. Then they heard a voice from above saying "This is my beloved Son; in thee I am well-pleased." By this sign John knew that Jesus was the Messiah whom he had been sent to foretell.¹⁰ On two other occasions afterwards the same voice spoke to Jesus.¹¹

¹ John 1: 19-25. ² Matt. 3: 11. ³ Acts 11: 16; 1: 5. ⁴ Matt. 13: 20. ⁵ John 1: 29, 34; 3: 27-36. ⁶ Matt. 14: 3; Mark 6: 17. ⁷ Matt. 14: 7-11. ⁸ Matt. 3: 13-15. ⁹ Matt. 3: 16. ¹⁰ John 1: 32-34; Ps. 2: 7; 2 Pet. 1: 7. ¹¹ Matt. 17: 5; John 12: 28-30.

LESSONS. 1. We should prepare our hearts to receive Christ. 2. The Holy Spirit cleanses the heart from sin. 3. There must be an everlasting separation between those who believe in Christ and those who refuse to accept him as their Saviour. 4. We cannot escape the penalty of sin by getting angry with God, or his ministers. 5. Jesus "fulfilled all righteousness" on our behalf.