

THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL FORETOLD

BIBLE TEXT : Isaiah 40:1-31; 52:7-10; Matthew 3:1-3; 11:2-15

LESSON 352 **Junior Course**

MEMORY VERSE: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Isaiah 40:1-31

¹ Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

² 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 hand double for all her sins.

³ 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.

⁴ 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:

⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

⁶ The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh *is* grass, and all the goodness thereof *is* as the flower of the field:

⁷ The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people *is* grass.

⁸ The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

⁹ O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift *it* up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong *hand*, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward *is* with him, and his work

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

In the barren, rocky, hill country of Judæa along the west coast of the Dead Sea, John the Baptist was born to humble parents. Perhaps from his home he could see Mount Nebo and the Jordan River, and beyond them the city of Jericho. Near by was the brook Cherith where Elijah had been fed by ravens during the famine. John may have visited some of these places made sacred by the prophets of God. The same power, authority, and zeal manifested by Elijah were found in the heart of John. His habits of life and manner of dress, too, resembled those of Elijah. His food was wild honey and locusts (Matthew 3:4), which perhaps were sun-dried and may have tasted something like shrimp.

His Message

John was the privileged one to announce Jesus' coming. Like a loud megaphone, his voice must have re-echoed in the hills; and the people of Jerusalem, Judæa, and those living along the Jordan River banks thronged out into the country to hear John preach. Eastern monarchs always send out a herald to clear away obstacles and make way before them. So John's duty was to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus to the earth. "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" (Isaiah 40:3, 4). His duties did not include the construction of six-lane freeways and levelling off hills, but he was bringing people back to obedience, teaching them to remove pride and hypocrisy from their lives and to repent of their sins.

A ten-word sermon brought conviction to the people who confessed their sins and were baptised of John in Jordan. What was the important message that John preached? "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

Object Lessons

What was meant by "the kingdom of heaven"? Much is spoken in the Bible concerning this, and it is important that we understand it. Jesus used the following illustration to try to describe it: (1) a grain of mustard seed; (2) leaven hidden in meal; (3) a merchant man; (4) a net cast into the sea; (5) good seed; (6) treasure hid in a field (**Matthew 13:31-47**) ³¹ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: ³² Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. ³³ Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. ³⁴ All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: ³⁵ That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. ³⁶ Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him,

before him.

¹¹ He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom, *and* shall gently lead those that are with young.

¹² Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

¹³ Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or *being* his counsellor hath taught him?

¹⁴ With whom took he counsel, and *who* instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?

¹⁵ Behold, the nations *are* as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.

¹⁶ And Lebanon *is* not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.

¹⁷ All nations before him *are* as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

¹⁸ To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?

¹⁹ The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains.

²⁰ He that *is* so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree *that* will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, *that* shall not be moved.

²¹ Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye

saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. ³⁷ He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; ³⁸ The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; ³⁹ The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰

As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. ⁴¹ The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; ⁴² And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. ⁴⁴

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. ⁴⁵ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: ⁴⁶ Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. ⁴⁷ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:); (7) a householder (**Matthew 20:1** ¹

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.); (8) a king who made a marriage for his son (**Matthew 22:2** ² The kingdom of heaven is like unto a

certain king, which made a marriage for his son.); (9) ten virgins who went to meet the bridegroom (**Matthew 25:1** ¹ Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.). Daniel described it as a great stone (**Daniel 2:31-45** ³¹ Thou, O king,

sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness *was* excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof *was* terrible. ³² This image's head *was* of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, ³³ His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. ³⁴ Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet *that were* of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. ³⁵

Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. ³⁶ This *is* the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. ³⁷ Thou, O king, *art* a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. ³⁸

And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou *art* this head of gold. ³⁹

And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. ⁴⁰ And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all *things*: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. ⁴¹ And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. ⁴² And *as* the toes of the feet *were* part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. ⁴³ And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. ⁴⁴ And 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. ⁴⁵ Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in

not understood from the foundations of the earth?

²² *It is* he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof *are* as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

²³ That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.

²⁴ Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.

²⁵ To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these *things*, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that *he is* strong in power; not one faileth.

²⁷ Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

²⁸ Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, *that* the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? *there is* no searching of his understanding.

²⁹ He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth strength.

³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

³¹ But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and

pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.); and other Old Testament writers also refer to it.

To some boys and girls this may seem confusing, but we want to open our eyes, our ears, and our heart's door and learn what it means. We do not want to be like the blind men in the fable who tried to find out what an elephant looked like. One felt of his tusk and said he now could understand that an elephant looked like a spear; another felt of the leg and he said that he must be like a tree; still another fell against the elephant's broad side and said that the elephant must be like a wall. But we are not blind; our vision is not so narrow that we can read only part of the Bible – we have the whole Word of God and there we can find the answer to the question: What is meant by the Kingdom of Heaven?

Jesus often used "object lessons" to teach the people what He meant. He spoke of the mustard seed which, He said, is the least of all seeds, but it grows into the greatest of herbs and becomes a tree, and the birds of the air lodge in its branches. Jesus said this is like the Kingdom of Heaven.

Travellers who have visited the Holy Land tell us that the species of mustard to which, no doubt, Jesus referred is still growing abundantly in Palestine and sometimes reaches to great heights. It is not hard to understand that when the "curse" shall be lifted from the earth and when the plants and trees shall grow more freely and more beautifully, that even the mustard tree will grow and grow until it reaches an immense size.

The King and the Kingdom

A kingdom is a dominion or realm with a king, a palace, a throne, the royal family, the officers, and the people or subjects who obey the king. When Christ the King comes back to reign upon the earth, His Kingdom shall be established in Jerusalem and "the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it" (Isaiah 40:5). The saints who come back with Christ shall rule with Him (**Revelation 2:26-27** ²⁶ And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: ²⁷ And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. **Revelation 5:10** ¹⁰ And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.), as we learned in Lesson 342. This righteous government with Christ as King will cover the whole earth. Isn't that like a tree that grows and grows until it fills the whole earth? or like the stone, told of by Daniel, that filled the earth?

Its Growth

The Gospel Dispensation, which includes the days in which we now live, is the first stage of His Kingdom. First the voice of a lone preacher, clad in a crude clothing of camel's hair (Matthew 3:4), was heard in the wilderness. THEN JESUS CAME! Many people were delivered from sin and twelve Apostles were chosen to preach the Gospel. They went out, and the news spread fast by word of mouth. Down through the years, faithful ministers, workers, and missionaries have ever been found who have proclaimed to souls in darkness the good news of salvation from sin. "The gospel must first be published among all nations" (Mark 13:10), before Jesus comes, and this is being accomplished in these last days. Every truly born-again Christian has a desire to tell others of Jesus; and in these days, with modern equipment, the Gospel is going forth speedily.

not faint.

Isaiah 52:7-10

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

⁸ Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.

⁹ Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰ The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Matthew 3:1-3

¹ In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

² And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

³ For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Matthew 11:2-15

² Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

³ And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

⁴ Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:

⁵ The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor

The automobiles, ships at sea, and planes in the sky are used to help carry the good news of salvation. Although John's voice has long since ceased to echo out in the Judean hills, yet the voice of the true preacher of righteousness is still heard. The Apostolic Faith church has a part in spreading the Gospel through the open-air meetings held on city streets. Prisons, hospitals, and homes for shut-ins are visited; isolated people upon remote islands have the Gospel carried to them by ship; ships in harbours are visited and seamen brought to church; children are brought to Sunday School where the Word of God is taught. Gospel literature is sent free of charge to many foreign lands as well as to every state in the Union. Thousands of people are receiving these papers and tracts and finding deliverance from sin and healing for sick bodies. Many other means are employed in an intensive effort to carry out the command of Jesus: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

Good Tidings

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation" (Isaiah 52:7). Those who spread the Gospel are carrying good tidings, because the word "gospel" means "good news." Are you a bearer of good news? If not, why don't you begin today and sow seeds of kindness, love, and salvation, and see how quickly the little seed will spring up. You may help the "mustard tree" to grow and grow, until Jesus comes to catch away those who are ready to meet Him. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). We believe the end is very near!

QUESTIONS

1. Whose voice was heard in the wilderness of Judæa?
2. Why was he sent? What was his message?
3. What was his food? his clothing?
4. What Old Testament character did he resemble?
5. Give three illustrations given by Jesus to describe the Kingdom of Heaven.
6. To whom was the Gospel to be published?
7. How may we help to spread the Gospel? Are you doing it?
8. What did Jesus say of John the Baptist?
9. How do we know that the end is very near?

have the gospel preached to them.

⁶ And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

⁷ And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

⁸ But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft *clothing* are in kings' houses.

⁹ But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

¹⁰ For this is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

¹¹ Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

¹² And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

¹³ For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

¹⁴ And if ye will receive *it*, this is Elias, which was for to come.

¹⁵ He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.