

JOHN THE BAPTIST, FORERUNNER OF CHRIST

BIBLE TEXT: Luke 1:1-25, 57-80; Matthew 3:1-12;
11:2-14; 14:1-12

LESSON 16 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matthew 3:10).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Luke 1:1-25,

¹ Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,

² Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;

³ It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,

⁴ That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

⁵ ¶ There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth.

⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

⁷ And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were *now* well stricken in years.

⁸ And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,

⁹ According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

NOTES:

John's Part in God's Plan

John the Baptist had a very important place in God's plan of redemption. God inspired the prophets of the Old Testament to write that He would send a messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah Who was to come to redeem the world.

All the Old Testament prophets were dead when John the Baptist was born. For four hundred years, from the time of Malachi, who wrote the last book of the Old Testament, no new promises had been given. However, there were faithful men of God who were waiting for the promises of God to be fulfilled.

John's parents were holy people, and his father was a priest in the Temple. One day when he was burning incense unto God, an angel stood beside him and told him he was going to have a son "and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost. . . . And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias," -- just as Malachi had said of him hundreds of years before (Malachi 4:5, 6). The angel told Zacharias (John's father), that the baby would be holy from the time he was born, and would bring great joy to many people. Zacharias and Elisabeth were very happy that they were going to have such a wonderful son. The angel also said that the baby's name was to be John.

"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel" (Luke 1:80). That is all we are told about the childhood of John He lived in the desert and ate only the wild things he could find -- locusts and wild honey. He didn't care about having fine houses and good clothes. He wore only rough raiment of camel's hair with a leather belt.

John's Ministry

We studied last Sunday about the years of preparation it took to make David ready to be a king; and Samuel was trained from the time he was a child to fill the office of prophet. Now we read that John the Baptist was thirty years old before he preached his first sermon, and all that time he was preparing for the tremendous work God had sent him to do. God had given him a great commission, and he must not fail! His ministry lasted only six months, but what a story he had to tell!

For many hundreds of years the Jews had been waiting for the Messiah to come Whom God had promised. They were in Roman captivity, waiting for a day of deliverance. Sometimes it seemed like that day would never come. Suddenly John came forth with the electrifying news that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand! How excited the people were! Their day of release had finally come! They thought Jesus was going to be an earthly king who would overthrow the Roman rulers and make them free men again.

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," was the message John proclaimed. He took no glory to himself, but told the people he was the "voice of one crying in the wilderness," of whom Isaiah had prophesied (**Isaiah 40:3**; 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.). God's people had wandered away from His teachings and were not living good lives. John told them they must

10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

12 And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

18 And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.

20 And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

repent so they would be ready when Jesus came. That is what he meant when he said, "Prepare ye the way."

We know Jesus is coming again; and God's true children are telling sinners to repent so they will be ready to meet Him when He comes. Those who love the Lord are preparing themselves for the day when Jesus will come to take His people Home.

Many people obeyed the message of John and came to him to be baptised in water, confessing their sins. They wanted to be ready for Christ's Kingdom and asked what they should do to prepare themselves. John told them that if they had more clothes and food than they needed they should divide with those who did not have enough. (God's children are always ready to help the poor who are not so fortunate as they.) Jesus said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). The publicans wanted to know what they should do, and John answered that they should take no more tax money from the people than they were supposed to. He told the soldiers they should be violent with no man, and they should be content with their wages. Do you notice that John taught men to live just like Jesus wanted them to live? Every true minister will tell his congregation that they have to live without sin, as Jesus said. When He forgave men's sins He told men to go "and sin no more."

Repentance and Salvation

The Pharisees and Sadducees also came to be baptised of John, but they did not repent. They thought they were good enough because they made a great pretence of keeping the Law. But John was a real man of God, and he could see that they were just plain sinners. And he wasn't afraid to tell them so. He said, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Vipers are poisonous snakes, so you can see what John thought about hypocrites. John let them know they could not get into Christ's kingdom by baptism, without repentance.

Some people believe today that all one needs to do to be ready for Heaven is to be baptised in water; they think that baptism will wash away their sins. But Jesus and John both taught us that we must first repent and be saved from our sins. Then Jesus wants us to be baptised by immersion, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19).

"Mightier than I"

It did not make John proud that he had such an important commission to fulfil, and that so many people were responding to his call. He told the people that another was coming Who was much greater than he. In fact, the Lord about Whom he talked was so great that John didn't feel he was worthy to carry His shoes or help Him unfasten them. John said he had baptised the people in water, but Jesus was going to baptise them with the Holy Ghost.

So far as we know, John had never seen Jesus, but his heart longed for the day when the Messiah would come. One day while John was baptizing in Jordan, the One long - awaited appeared. John made the greatest announcement of his ministry: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." All the hopes of generations were fulfilled in that statement! A new era was born; the dispensation of grace was launched.

John Beheaded

John had enjoyed great success in his six months of ministry, but not everyone liked his preaching. The king of that country was married to a woman who had been married before and whose husband was still living, and John was not afraid to tell him that it was a sin. That displeased the king, so he put John in prison. The queen was very angry with John; and when she had the opportunity, she had him killed. John had to die for being true to God, but we know he went to

21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple.

22 And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

24 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,

25 Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among men.

Luke 1:57-80;

57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

58 And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

Heaven to receive his reward. Many martyrs have been willing to die rather than give up their faith in God. That is what it means to be a real Christian.

QUESTIONS

1. What relation was John the Baptist to Christ?
2. How much older than Jesus was John?
3. Why was John sent to the world?
4. What was John's food and his clothing?
5. Were people saved under John's preaching?
6. What were some things John taught the people?
7. Why was John beheaded?

⁶⁵ And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judæa.

⁶⁶ And all they that heard *them* laid *them* up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

⁶⁷ And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

⁶⁸ Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

⁶⁹ And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

⁷⁰ As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

⁷¹ That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

⁷² To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

⁷³ The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

⁷⁴ That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,

⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

⁷⁶ And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

⁷⁷ To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

⁷⁸ Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

⁷⁹ To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

⁸⁰ And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

Matthew 3:1-12;

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.

⁴ And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

⁵ Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,

⁶ And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷ ¶ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

⁸ Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

⁹ And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

¹⁰ And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire:

¹² Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Matthew 11:2-14;

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 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.

Matthew 14:1-12.

¹ At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus,

² And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

³ ¶ For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put *him* in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.

⁴ For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.

⁵ And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

⁶ But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.

⁷ Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.

⁸ And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.

⁹ And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded *it* to be given *her*.

¹⁰ And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

¹¹ And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought *it* to her mother.

¹² And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.