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We hope to have all present subscribers remain with us for another year. The Sabbath-School INTERNATIONAL LESSON. First Quarter, Lesson 3, Jan. 21, 1900. THE PREACHING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.—Luke 3: 1-17. (May be used as a Temperance Lesson.) Read Malachi 3: 1-7; 4: 1-6. Commit Verses 3-6. GOLDEN TEXT.—'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.—Lu ke 3: 4. HISTORICAL SETTING. Time.—John began to preach in the summer of A. D. 26; preached nearly two years. He was imprisoned March, A. D. 28, and martyred March, A. D. 30. Place.—John preached in the wild, thinly inhabited region lying west of the Jordan and the Dead Sea as far north as Enon, two thirds of the way to the Sea of Galilee, and on both sides of the lower Jordan. Rulers.—Tiberius Caesar, emperor of Rome, fifteenth year, but only thirteen as sole ruler; Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, first year; Herod Antipas, of Galilee and Peraea. Jesus was between 29 and 30 years old when John began to preach. He still lived at Nazareth. THE HIDDEN YEARS OF JOHN.—John the Baptist was born about six months before Jesus. His parents were the priest Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary; so that Jesus and John were second cousins. John was the child of prayer and of prophecy. The history of the first thirty years is recorded in one verse (Luke 1: 80). He waxed (grew) strong in spirit, in character, in knowledge, in devotion, in spiritual insight, in firmness of will. All this time he was in the deserts, the sparsely inhabited, uncultivated regions. Compare the forty years which Moses spent in the desert before he entered upon his great work; and the long period of Elijah's youth before he appeared to King Ahab. The object of this long period of retirement seems to have been (1) to prevent John from being under the influence of the prevailing false idea in reference to the Messiah. (2) That he might have long and deep communion with God. (3) From without he could best see the condition of the nation, and learn the way by which alone it could be saved. These thoughts burned within his soul, till when the hour came they suddenly burst forth as a stream of fire. THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS. Vs. 1-6. In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar It is generally thought that the appearance of John was in the thirteenth year of Tiberius as sole ruler, but the fifteenth from his beginning to reign in conjunction with Augustus Caesar. Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, his first year. And Herod. Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who slew the children of Bethlehem. Being tetrarch. Originally a governor of a fourth part of what had been a kingdom; now it designated a petty monarch of a small country dependent on the general dominion of Rome. His brother Philip. This Philip married Salome, the daughter of Herodias, by whose request John the Baptist was beheaded. He was the best of Herods and ruled for thirty-seven years. Ituraea and Trachonitis. A poor region northeast of Palestine. Abilena. So named from Abila, its capital eighteen or twenty miles northwest of Damascus. Annas, deposed by the Romans, but regarded by the Jews as the lawful high priest, and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, the high priest appointed by the Romans. The word of God came. A sudden overpowering influence that possessed John, made him realize his mission and impelled him to go forth as God's messenger. In the wilderness of Judea. The barren, wild, thinly populated regions west of the Dead Sea and the lower Jordan. The appearance of John was like that of the great prophet Elijah in the popular mind. He was clothed in the coarse, rough cloth called sackcloth in the Scriptures. This mantle was girded around him with a leather girdle of undressed hide. His food consisted of locust, closely resembling our grasshoppers, and of wild honey. A. This was a natural as well as single mode of living in these days in the wilderness. His Mission. The country about Jordan. Note that the population went out to John. There are two methods of evangelization, both of which are good. One is to go out to men; the other is to attract men to you. Preaching Proclaiming, heralding. He was the herald of the Messiah and of the new kingdom. The baptism of repentance. Repentance openly confessed and pledged by baptism.

Baptism was the method by which this change was confessed. Public confession confirms the resolve, helps to undo the evil example of the past, is an aid to others to change their lives, is one proof that the repentance is real. For the remission of sins. Remission of sins is more than taking away of the punishment due for our sins. It is the being received back into the family of God, as his true children. Book... of Esaias. (Isa. 40: 3-5.) The voice. John is called "a voice" because: (1) He was the utterer of God's thought; (2) the whole man was a sermon; (3) because the emphasis and importance lay chiefly in the message, not in the messenger; (4) he produced a mighty effect on the souls of men. Of one crying. Herald, proclaiming. In the wilderness. The world was, indeed, a moral wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Every valley, Ravines, Mountain and hill. All obstacles that made the road difficult or dangerous. Crooked... be made straight. New and shorter roads shall be built. Rough ways... smooth. By repairing the old roads. And all flesh. All persons. The work is for the old race. The Need. The way for the coming of the kingdom of God was full of obstacles of every kind,—the military power of the Romans which had conquered the world; the throne of the emperor who was worshipped as God; the crimes and sins entrenched in customs, fashion, wealth, and the very structure of society; the pride, the learning, the prejudices of the whole Jewish nation; all the sins, all evils, and selfishness of the human heart. And still every unregenerate human heart is a wilderness abounding in obstacles to the coming of its king. HOW JOHN PREPARED THE WAY. —Vs. 3, 7-14. To the multitude that came forth. This multitude included all classes,—the people of all grades, the unbelieving Sadducees, the formal Pharisees, the respectable publicans, and soldiers. To be baptized of him. Some of them apparently as a substitute for repentance. O generation, offspring, brood, of vipers. Their actions sprang from the viper nature of sin in their hearts. Who hath warned you to this. They had come to be baptized, not to repent, to go through a form, not to change their natures. What had made them think that there was any danger, since they claimed to belong to the people of God? From the wrath to come. The punishment that must come upon the guilty nation, and the sinful individual, unless they forsook their sins. This was not denunciation, but warning. It was the cry of love. Its object was to keep them from suffering the wrath to come. Bring forth therefore. Prove by your lives that your repentance is sincere. Begin not to say within yourselves, as your secret hope and confidence. We have Abraham to (as) our father. We must be saved because we belong to the race of Abraham and the kingdom he founded, and are inheritors of the promises to him and his children. Such hopes, says John, are absolutely vain. You must inherit Abraham's faith and character if you would inherit the promises to Abraham. God is able of these stones. Doubtless pointing to the stones that lay on the shore of Jordan. To raise up children unto Abraham. God can as easily make sons of stones. Indeed he did change the stony hearts of publicans and sinners. The ax is laid (is lying) unto (at) the root of trees, all ready to cut them down when the time came. Yet there was a brief respite, with the possibility of such a change that the ax need not be used. The Jewish church was this tree. The ax laid at the root was perhaps the force already in operation which led to the destruction of the Jewish nation forty-four years later. Bringeth not forth good fruit: it is hewn down. Because it takes the place of something better. What shall we do then? To show that they truly repented. He... saith unto them. To the multitudes in general as distinct from the particular classes mentioned in the next verses. He that hath two coats. Tunics; the under and less necessary garment, distinguished from the upper and almost indispensable cloak. The principle set forth is that of self-denying love, manifesting itself in acts. He that hath meat (food) let him do likewise. Because if one truly repents of sin, and if changed from selfishness to the love of God, these deeds of love will flow from him as natural as pure water flows from a pure fountain. Came also publicans. Tax gatherers, collectors of the revenue. Thus there was abundant opportunity for extortion and oppression. Exact (extort) no more than that which is appointed you. Do not give up your business, but do it in the right and just way, no matter what losses come from your honesty. Such action at such cost would prove a change of heart and character. For it would cost a

great deal, not only in giving up their opportunities for wealth, but in bringing down upon them the hatred of all the other publicans who wished to continue their evil practices. And the soldiers. Omit the. Probably not Roman soldiers, but armed men acting as police in Judea,—a perfectly legitimate business. Demanded. Too strong a word, rather "asked." Do violence to no man. They had large opportunity for robbery, violence, harassing, and blackmail. Neither accuse any falsely; i. e. in order to extort from him his property. And be content with your wages. So as not to be tempted to make gain in unjust ways. Note they were not to leave the world, to become monks, or hermits, but to live honestly and purely in it. They were not to shut themselves away from business, but to do it on holy and generous principles. Note that such preaching was costly. Men did not then, any more than now, like to have their favorite and profit-giving sins denounced. Those who did not repent became enemies. It was such boldness that led to John's imprisonment and death. JOHN POINTS TO THE MESSIAH.—Vs. 15-17. This was the mission of John, and all he did and said had this aim. Were in expectation. All excitement and interest. Mused. Re-asoned, questioned, argued. Whether he be the Christ. The Messiah. John was such a great prophet, with such noble and kingly qualities, that they questioned whether he were not actually the expected Messiah. John answered. Showing that he was far from being the Messiah. I indeed baptize... with water. I administer the outward ordinance and sign. The latchet. The lace or thong by which the sandals were fastened. Of whose shoes I am not worthy to untie. When persons entered a house the sandals were taken off and laid aside, so that the feet might be washed. The work belonged to the lowest servants. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. ("Ghost" is old English for "spirit.") The mightiest power in the universe for renewing the heart and bringing in the kingdom of God. It would be as easy to bring springtime without the sun as the kingdom of God without the Holy Spirit. And with fire. The symbol of the Holy Spirit. The fire visibly manifested on the day of Pentecost as a symbol of the perpetual but invisible operation of the Holy Spirit. Whose fan is in his hand. The fan is not a fan in our sense; it is a broad, light, wooden shovel, with which the grain is thrown up to the breeze, so that the wind may carry off the lighter chaff while the heavy grain sinks down clean. And he will thoroughly purge. Cleanse, separate the good from the bad. His gospel is forever testing men, separating the chaff from the wheat, the sheep from the goats. His floor. Threshing-floor, which is usually a circular area of beaten earth, surrounded by a low bank. It represents the world of men into which Jesus has come. The wheat. The good, the true members of his kingdom. Into his garner. Granary; the kingdom of heaven. But the chaff. The refuse, the useless, pentant, harmful. Those who refuse to be converted, and thus to be made into good wheat. He will burn with fire unquenchable, that no power can put out or enable them to escape. Something New. Young folks crave change and variety. When a superintendent finds himself doing things in a certain way because they have always been done that way, he ought to wake up and right about face. If he is to be a leader of young folks he must look forward and not backward. He must yield to the demands for something new, not grudgingly, but willingly. The lesson helps give a fresh order of service every quarter. But the superintendent may find it profitable to make slight variations more frequently. No matter how good a thing may have been, it is not good enough to be continued always. Of course this plea for new things has its limitations. The fundamental elements are necessarily old; they can only be given in new combinations. You have bread on your table three times a day every day of your life. You would never enjoy a meal without bread. But it may be varied. It need not always be wheat bread. Sometimes it may be rye or corn. You may have biscuit and rolls and crackers. The wise housekeeper studies variety for her table. She does not always have roast beef, nor indeed beef of any kind. She has lamb and pork, chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys, fish, salt and fresh. One reason why in some families meals become monotonous and are not relished is because there is scant variety. The housekeeper ought to realize that even though her family does not ask for a change of food, variety would be good for them.

The food for the mind and spirit is substantially the same, and yet of infinite variety. The fixed elements are the law of God and the bread of life given through Christ. But the variety of the Bible is wonderful; it gives history, prophecy, poetry, parable, gospel, epistle, revelation; and our Sunday-school lessons are selected from one portion and another, covering the whole Bible in outline in six years. The Scripture lesson need not always be read in exactly the same way. A common method is for the superintendent to read a verse and the school another, alternately. Variety and interest may be secured by having the boys read a verse and the girls a verse; the teachers a verse and the scholars a verse; those on one side of the room a verse, and those on the other side a verse. There may be variety, too, in the singing. The leader may sing alone, and then have the boys, the girls, the people in the gallery, the infant class, the Bible classes, and others sing in turn at his call. Some superintendents think these variations are trivial; but they break up the monotony, and therefore quicken the interest—and to awaken interest is not a trivial advantage. The blackboard is one of the valuable helps for variety. Occasionally a man may make it a hobby, and be too persistent in its use; but more often it is neglected. Many schools have no blackboard. Others are well equipped with apparatus, but nobody takes the trouble to use it. Superintendents and teachers must keep their minds alert. They ought to read books of method, and attend Sunday-school institutes and conventions, and thus get a view of the best things that are being done. They need not imitate or copy without adaptation to their own needs. Their own minds, if kept alive, will bring out variety; and no child need say, grumblingly, There is never anything new in our school. —Sunday-School World. A Needed Reform. Tom came in last week for the first time in months. Nell is a brick of a girl, he began; she's taken to doing a lot of things for me. Why, she has made my old room as pretty as her own. Then, almost every day when I get home from school I find she has put up a lunch for me. She's a dear girl! I hope you've told her so. Tom flushed. That's just it! I want to, but—I declare, Aunt Hope, why is a fellow ashamed of being sweet on his own sister? We're all as polite as possible to the other girls! Suppose you start a reform, said I. I will. There's to be a social Wednesday evening; I'll invite Nell to go, and give her some flowers. I felt pretty certain Nell would call soon after the social, and had not long to wait. Thursday she came wearing some pink carnations. O auntie, I've so much to tell you! Who do you think gave me the flowers! But you'd never guess. My own dear brother Tom. He invited me to go to the social with him and treated me splendidly. We grew really confidential as we walked home, and I told him how I loved him. In the evening Tom appeared with his version. Aunt Hope, he began, you should have seen Nell. She was so sweet, and Jack Davis wanted to take her home. Another time, my boy, I said, I'm her escort to-night. A lot of boys heard me, and one or two laughed, but Hal Rhodes told me to-day that he thought we boys were fools not to make more fuss over our own sisters; do you see, the reform is started.—Epworth Herald. When the tide has been coming in, I have often seen how it chafed and fretted, running into some narrow mouthed bay, filling it, swirling round and lapping on the shores till by-and-by, still flowing and flowing and flowing, it filled the bay full. The tide had spent itself; there ran a smoothing ripple all over the surface, and the whole bay at last was at rest. And so the soul, while yet it is being filled is disturbed by ripples and eddies; but by-and-by, when it shall have been filled full of the power and presence of God, it will be satisfied, and will be perfectly at peace, and will be full of joy.—Ex. GENERAL DEBILITY AND A "RUN DOWN" STAT: call for a general tonic to the system. Such is D. & L. Emulsion. Builds you up, increases your weight, gives health. Made by D. & L. Lawrence Co., Ltd. Suffer no More.—There are thousands who live miserable lives because dyspepsia dulls the faculties and shadows existence with the cloud of depression. One way to dispel the vapors that beset the victims of this disorder is to order them a course of Parmelee's Vegetable Pills, which are among the best vegetable pills known, being easy to take and are most efficacious in their action. A trial of them will prove this.

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