

The Sunday-School.

FIRST QUARTER.
LESSON II.—January 10.

The Preaching of John the Baptist.

MATTHEW 3:1-12.

The lesson includes the whole account of the ministry of John the Baptist in Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18.)

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Matt. 3:2.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—*Time.*—John began to preach in the summer of A. D. 26. He preached six months alone, then a year and three months coincident with Christ till March, A. D. 28.

Place.—The wilderness of Judea.

Rulers.—Tiberius Cæsar, emperor of Rome. Pilate, governor of Judea (first year). Herod Antipas, governor of Galilee and Perea.

Persons.—John, about thirty years old, still at Nazareth.

Jesus, between 29 and 30 years old, still at Nazareth.

THE CONDITIONS IN JUDEA WHEN JOHN ENTERED UPON THE SCENE.—The people were restless under the Roman dominion. They longed to break the yoke. They were looking for the promised Deliverer, and the Messianic times so gloriously foretold by Isaiah. It was a time of general awakening, not only among the Jews, but among the heathen populations dwelling among them and ruling over them. Morals were very low. The religion of the Jewish leaders was formal. Worldliness prevailed, and the hopes of the nation dwelt on the outward deliverance from the Roman yoke rather than on spiritual deliverance from the tyranny of sin; on times of outward prosperity rather than on the kingdom of righteousness, holiness and heaven.

JOHN THE BAPTIST, THE REFORMER AND FORERUNNER OF CHRIST.—Vs. 1, 4. *In those days.* When Jesus was living in Nazareth. *Came* (cometh) *John the Baptist.* Suddenly, like Elijah of old, John appeared, "a burning and shining light." *Preaching.* Proclaiming, as a herald, announcing the coming of the King. *In the wilderness of Judea.* The wild, uncultivated, rocky hills and pasture lands of Judea.

John the Baptist was born in the summer of B. C. 5, about six months before Jesus. Jesus and John were second cousins. John was the child of prayer and of prophecy.

HIS MESSAGE.—*REPENTANCE, THE DOOR OF HOPE.*—Vs. 2-5. *And saying, repent.* This is the essential condition by which a sinner can enter the kingdom of heaven, that condition of things where God is the real King. It is the rule of God on earth as he rules in heaven. *Is at hand.* In the person of Christ the King, who was soon to come. *For he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias* (the Greek form of Isaiah), in Isa. 40:3-5. *The voice of one crying in the wilderness.* John is called a voice, because he was the utterer of God's thought. *Prepare ye the way of the Lord.* In many parts of the East the ancient roads were prepared or repaired only at the special call of the king, for his special service. *Make his paths straight.* So that the King may travel easily over them. *Raiment of camel's hair.* A coarse fabric. It is the sackcloth so often mentioned in the Old Testament. *A leathern girdle.* The simplest girdle of untanned leather.

His meat was locusts. The common brown locust, the general form is that of a grasshopper. They are still used as food. *And wild honey,* which abounds in Palestine, stored in hollow trees or clefts in the rocks. Then went out to him the inhabitants of Jerusalem, practically the whole city, and all Judea. Not only the common people, but also soldiers, Pharisees, Sadducees, and leaders of the nation.

What attracted such crowds? Plainly there was something there which they needed. They went as the hungry go for food.

(1) John spoke to the hearts and needs and hopes of the people. They were hoping for a deliverer from the Roman yoke. They were awakening to a religious hope of the better Messianic times. (2) The terrible denunciations of sin touched their moral nature. (3) John pointed out a way of escape. (4) The earnestness of the preacher who thoroughly believed in what he said. (5) What he preached was true, and they knew it. (6) His courage was sublime, for he condemned to their face the very leaders, the Jewish authorities; and even Herod himself, who by his conduct was ruining the nation, was warned to his face. John was no respecter of persons.

HOW JOHN PREPARED THE WAY FOR CHRIST.—Vs. 6-12. *By the call to repentance.* There is no possibility of entering the kingdom of the good, but by turning away from, and renouncing sin.

By Baptism and Confession. *And were baptized of him in Jordan.* Baptism was the visible, public act of renouncing the old life of sin, and entering upon the new and holy life of the kingdom of God. *Confessing their sins.* No one truly repents who does not also confess,—to God the sins against God, to man the sins against man, also making restitution as far as possible.

By Warnings. *The Pharisees.* A leading religious sect who gloried in keeping the forms of religion, without its spirit or its holiness. *Sadducees.* The smaller but influential sect who denied the future life and its motives, and were the embodiment of worldliness. *Come to his baptism.* Drawn by the general interest and excitement. Perhaps to watch what was going on, so as to hinder the work if need be. *O generation* (offspring, brood) *of vipers.* The most venomous and dangerous of the many poisonous snakes of Syria. It darts upon its victim unawares. *Who hath warned you?* What made you think that there is danger, since you claim to be so good! *The wrath to come.* The punishment that must come upon the guilty.

This was not denunciation, but warning. It was the cry of love. Its object was to keep them from suffering the wrath.

By Requiring the Fruits Meet for Repentance. Bring forth therefore, if you really wish to be saved. *Fruits meet for repentance.* The fruits that grow out of true repentance, and prove it true.

By Sweeping away False Excuses. And think not to say within yourselves, as a reason for not seeing the necessity of repentance. *We have Abraham to (for) our father.* We are the direct descendants of Abraham. Therefore, belong to the kingdom, and do not need repentance in order to enter. *God is able of these stones, pointing to the*

stones on the shore of Jordan. *To raise up children unto Abraham.* God can have his kingdom filled without them.

The ax is laid unto (at) the root of the trees, all ready to cut them down when the time came. The Jewish church was this tree. The forces were already in operation, which led to the destruction of the Jewish nation forty-four years later. The same is true of each individual sinner. *Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down.* Because it takes the place of something better. In Palestine the fruit trees are all taxed. So that a fruitless tree brings its owner into debt. *And cast into the fire.* It was all they were good for.

By Pointing to the Redeemer. I indeed baptize you with water. I call you to repentance, but I cannot give you the new life. But I point you to one that cometh after me, whose forerunner I am, but who is so much greater, that his shoes I am not worthy to bear, nor to unloose. *He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.* 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.

By Declaring the Certainty of the Day of Judgment. Whose fan (winnowing fan) is in his hand. It is a broad, light, wooden shovel, with which the grain is thrown up to the breeze. *He will thoroughly.* Old form of thoroughly. *Purge.* Cleanse the chaff and dirt from the good grain. *His floor.* Threshing floor, representing the world with its mingled good and bad. *His wheat.* The good, the true members of his kingdom. *Into the garner.* Granary; the right place for the wheat; the kingdom of heaven. *But . . . the chaff.* The refuse; the useless, representing all who continue in sin. *He will burn up . . . with unquenchable fire.* That no power can put out or enable them to escape. The only possible hope of wicked men is in ceasing to be wicked.

THE HEART OF THE LESSON.

1. The greatest need in the life of the individual, the nation, or the world is the coming of the kingdom of God.
2. Both for the individual and for the community there is need of seasons of reformation and revival, which stir them to their very depths.
3. The conditions necessary for entering the kingdom of God are repentance, and the decisive choice of the better life through Jesus.

Catarrhal Deafness Is Caused

By a thickening of the lining membrane of the middle ear owing to prolonged inflammation from catarrhal germs. The only cure is fragrant, healing Catarrhazone which is carried by the air you breathe to the remotest parts of the throat and ear; it reaches the source of the trouble and cures deafness permanently. Every sufferer from impaired hearing should use Catarrhazone which has effected many wonderful cures. You simply breathe its healing medicated vapor, very easy and pleasant. Do this and your hearing will be restored. Catarrhazone never fails; it is guaranteed. Two months' treatment for \$1.00 at druggists.

It may be to your discredit that you cannot feel like doing what you ought to do, but it is never an excuse for you not doing.

'Tis a Marvellous Thing.—When the cures effected by Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil are considered, the speedy and permanent relief it has brought to the suffering wherever it has been used, it must be regarded as a marvellous thing that so potent a medicine should result from the six simple ingredients which enter into its composition. A trial will convince the most sceptical of its healing virtues.

Ayer's

Losing your hair? Coming out by the comb? And doing nothing? No sense in that! Why don't you use Ayer's Hair Vigor and

Hair Vigor

promptly stop the falling? Your hair will begin to grow, too, and all dandruff will disappear. Could you reasonably expect anything better?

"Ayer's Hair Vigor is a great success with me. My hair was falling out very badly, but the Hair Vigor stopped it and now my hair is all right."—W. C. LOGSDON, Lindsay, Cal.

\$1.00 a bottle. All druggists. J. C. AYER CO. Lowell, Mass.

Thin Hair

The scholarly-looking man with the big eye-glasses had been invited to address the Sunday-school, and was making a few remarks concerning the lesson. "I see the word 'line' occurs here," he said. "Will somebody give a definition of 'line'?" Nobody answered. "It is very easy," he proceeded, encouragingly. "The ordinary signification of the word is longitudinal extension, but here it denotes a pre-determined boundary. I am sure, my young friends, that you can remember that."

Joints Swollen.—My little boy, eight years old, had a bad attack of rheumatism. His joints were swollen, and he couldn't sleep with the pain. One box of Milburn's Rheumatic Pills completely cured him. F. Bissonette, Port Hope, Ont.

Putting off an easy thing makes it hard, and putting off a hard thing makes it impossible.

There are so many cough medicines in the market, that it is sometimes difficult to tell which to buy; but if we had a cough, a cold, or any affliction of the throat or lungs, we would try Bickle's Anti-Consumptive Syrup. Those who have used it think it is far ahead of all other preparations recommended for such complaints. The little folks like it, as it is as pleasant as syrup.

Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.

That tormenting cold that made you wretched last winter will not come back if you take Allen's Lung Balsam when your throat is raw and sore. This admirable remedy is free from opium. Take it in time.

He only who acts conscientiously towards himself will act so towards others.

Mild in their Action.—Parnellee's Vegetable Pills are very mild in their action. They do not cause griping in the stomach or cause disturbances there as so many pills do. Therefore, the most delicate can take them without fear of unpleasant results. They can, too, be administered to children without imposing the penalties which follow the use of pills not so carefully prepared.