

CHAPTER THREE

Section 5

THE PREACHING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

(Parallels: Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18)

TEXT: 3:1-12

1. And in those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, saying,
2. Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
3. For this is he that was spoken of through Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord, Make his paths straight.
4. Now John himself had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his food was locusts and wild honey.
5. Then went out unto him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about the Jordan;
6. and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.
7. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said unto them, Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
8. Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of 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 even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
11. I indeed baptize you in 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 in the Holy Spirit and *in* fire:
12. whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why did John locate his ministry in the wilderness? Why not go where the people live?

- b. How does this ministry of John prepare "the way of the Lord"?
- c. Why do you think John preached the way he did? Dressed the way he did?
- d. What is the difference or similarity between John's baptism and the baptism which Christ commanded His apostles to perform after the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost? (Ac. 2)
- e. Why do you think John spoke so disrespectfully to the "reverend doctors of the Law"? Because he used such harsh language, is he not partly to blame for their rejection of him and consequently "the counsel of God" (Lk. 7:30), or not?
- f. Did the earthly ministry of Jesus fulfill John's predictions made in this section?
- g. What is the meaning of the following allusions:
- (1) "Make ye ready the way of the Lord; make straight paths"?
 - (2) "Offspring of vipers"?
 - (3) "The axe lies at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire"?
 - (4) "His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the garner, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire"?
- h. Did John expect the people to show the genuineness of their repentance before he would baptize them, or did he expect such fruits of repentance to be seen in their lives after baptism as the natural result of their repentance?
- i. What is the demonstration in your life that you too have genuinely repented?
- j. If it be wrong for Paul to "speak evil of a ruler of the people" (Ac. 23:5; Ex. 22:28), why is it not wrong for John the Baptist to do the same? Or do circumstances alter cases? Paul's high priest was just as wicked as these Pharisees and Sadducees, and his judgment just as righteous as John's, but what makes the difference?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod Antipas being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Herod Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, there was a man sent from God

whose name was John. He came for testimony to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The word of God came to this John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."

In those days John "the baptizer" went throughout all the region about the Jordan where it flows through the wilderness of Judea, preaching an immersion of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, saying, "Repent! The kingdom of heaven has come!"

This is he of whom Malachi the prophet spoke (3:1), "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way." Also in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet (40:3ff), it says:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

Prepare the way of the Lord: make His paths straight!

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall
be brought low,

The crooked shall be made straight,

The rough ways shall be made smooth,

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

John's clothing was a rough coat of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. His food was a diet of dried locusts and wild honey. The people of Jerusalem and of all Judaea and the Jordan district flocked to him and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them and to the multitudes, "You sons of snakes! Who has stirred you to seek refuge from the coming judgment and God's wrath? Let your life prove your repentance! Show that your hearts are really changed! And do not even begin to presume that you can simply say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for God can raise up descendents from Abraham, even if He has to use these very stones to do it! Already God's axe of judgment stands ready to sever the tap root of the Jewish nation. Every individual Jew who does not bear fruit to the honor of God's mercy will serve as fuel to the honor of His justice!"

The people cried out, "What are we to do?"

He replied, "The man with two coats must share with him who has none, and anyone who has food, let him do likewise."

Among those who came to be immersed were some tax-collectors, who also inquired, "Teacher, what are we to do?"

"Exact no more than the assessment!"

Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?"

"No bullying, no false accusations! Make do with your pay!"

As the people in expectation, questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he might himself be the Messiah, John spoke out, answering their expectations, "I immerse you in water for repentance. There is One who is mightier than I, who is coming after me. I am neither fit to unfasten nor carry His sandals. Yes, I have submerged you in water; but he will immerse you in the Holy Spirit and fire! It is His ministry which will prove the worth of the people. He will separate those of real worth to Him from the worthless: He will take the former home with Him but destroy the others as by inextinguishable fire."

So, exhorting with many other words, he preached good news to the people.

SUMMARY

The prophetically promised precursor of the Christ, John the Baptist, preached repentance, confession of sin, baptism for the remission of sins, in view of the coming Messiah's kingdom. Thundering God's judgment upon an unrepentant nation, he promised the glories of the messianic kingdom to those who prepared their hearts for the Christ's arrival.

NOTES

I. THE MISSION OF THE MAN

3:1 **In those days.** See PARAPHRASE/HARMONY for Luke's precise statement as to what days are meant. Some have mistakenly regarded Matthew as supposing by these words that John's ministry began during the time contemporaneous with the events narrated in his second chapter immediately preceding this. By this expression Matthew does not mean the return to Nazareth, which took place about 28 years before, although he could refer to the whole time Jesus dwelt at Nazareth, and may well indicate "in that age" or "in that era," thus contrasting the era when John began his ministry with the later period when Matthew wrote his Gospel. Therefore, according to Luke's notations, John came preaching in the period from 26-29 A.D.

The fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (14-37 A.D.) alone, is 29 A.D., or 26 A.D. if Luke is reckoning from his co-regency with Augustus. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from 26-36 A.D. Herod was tetrarch of Galilee from 4 B.C. to 34 A.D. The high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, counting the actual influence of Annas after he was deposed until the end of the high-priesthood of Caiaphas, lasted from 6 to 36 A.D.

John the Baptist. Beyond this text may be known the following facts about him:

1. He was born under most unusual circumstances (Lk. 1:5-25, 57-80).
2. He was kin to Jesus (Lk. 1:36).
3. His message and baptism possessed the full divine authority (Mt. 21:25, 26, 32; Mk. 11:30-32; Lk. 3:2; 7:29, 30; Jn. 1:6), although his baptism possessed temporary validity (Ac. 18:24-26; 19:1-7).
4. John came to bear witness to the Christ, introducing Him to the Jewish nation (Jn. 1:6-8, 15, 19-36; 5:33-36).
5. He also baptized in Aenon near Salim (Jn. 3:23).
6. He and his disciples fasted (Mt. 9:14; 11:18; Mk. 2:18; Lk. 7:33).
7. He taught his disciples to pray (Lk. 11:1).
8. John was completely self-effacing (Jn. 3:25-30).
9. He was the great "Elijah" promised (Mal. 4:5; Mt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Lk. 1:17), who was to come to turn many of the children of Israel unto the Lord their God.
10. He was the last of the greatest prophets (Mt. 11:11, 13). The common people wondered if he might not be the Messiah (Lk. 3:15). They were sure he was a prophet (Lk. 20:6), although he performed no miracle. What he said about Jesus came to pass (Jn. 10:40, 41). He disclaimed any pretense to the Messiahship (Ac. 13:24, 25).
11. He was imprisoned and beheaded by Herod for his preaching (Mt. 4:12; 11:2-4; 14:2-10; Mk. 6:14-25). While in prison,

he wondered how Jesus was going to fulfill his (John's) predictions (Lk. 7:19-24).

12. Some of his disciples were Apollos (Ac. 18:24-26) and 12 others at Ephesus (Ac. 19:1-7), certainly Andrew (Jn. 1:40) and perhaps Simon Peter (Jn. 1:41-42). "The other disciple" or John the Evangelist (Jn. 1:37-40) and his "own" brother, James, are supposed by some to be also the Baptist's disciples. Maybe also were Philip and Nathanael (Jn. 1:43-49) because of their proximity to John's baptism when in reality they were Galileans of Bethsaida. Were Joseph Justus Barsabbas and Matthias also his disciples? (Cf. Ac. 1:21-23)

John the Baptist came preaching. The fact that he was called "the Baptizer" indicates the uniqueness of his work. Had there been other "baptists" or even "baptisms" on the scale or for the purposes practiced by John, it is assumed that he would not have been thus labelled. Though there were many washings under the Mosaic Law (Heb. 9:10; Lev. 14:9; 15; 16:28; Num. 19:7, 19), these were self-baptisms and were not required as an indication of personal commitment to the immediate advent of the Messiah. (See Ac. 19:1-4) Any comparison of the practice of John with the baptism of proselytes must reckon with the divine origin of John's baptism as contrasted to the doubtful origins of the other. (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 273) Again, John is called "the Baptist" and not "John the Essene," apparently because his contemporaries could mark a clear distinction between this intensely evangelistic preacher who appealed to the entire Jewish nation to repent and prepare themselves for the immediate appearance of the Messiah by a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as contrasted with exclusive sect of Qumranites, the Essenes, who manifested no such discernible program of missionary activity, and who apparently knew of no personal Messiah immediately to appear.

Other evidences that John the Baptist was no Essene:

1. His food and dress were not Essenic. While he ate "locusts," the Essenes abstained from animal food (Edersheim, *Life*, Vol. I, p. 264, Philo, *Quod Omnis Probus Liber*). Usually, the public dress of the Essenes, which became almost their insignia, was a white linen garment (ISBE, 1000, citing Hyppolytus, *Refutations*).
2. The Essene doctrine of God's absolute preordination of every-

thing would logically deny John's doctrine of personal responsibility.

3. John was intensely missionary and evangelistic in the proclamation of his messianic message, whereas the Qumranites (if they may be identified with the Essenes) had no discernible message or program for winning new adherents except by adopting the children of others to train in their ways. John's concern was national, while Essenic concern was self-development (at the expense of national revival) which never brought its adherents to real, outgoing love for their fellow Jews.
4. John actually prepared the way for the Messiah, whereas the members of the Qumran community, despite their messianic fervor and piety, never apparently recognized the Messiah when He came, insofar as their relationship to Jesus is known.
5. Although the messages of the Essenes and John are both apocalyptic in their messianic hopes, the predictions of the Essenes are general and visionary, hence, not truly prophetic, whereas John's predictions were specific and immediately verified in the coming of the Messiah.

(See ISBE article, p. 997f; Unger, *Archeology and the NT*, 88ff.)

In the wilderness of Judea. This barren region of rugged gorges and desolate badlands extended along the western side of the Dead Sea to approximately five miles north of the sea up the Jordan Valley. It is located in the eastern part of Judah where the land plunges into that valley and is usually arid, thus inhabitable, except by some wild life. (Cf. Mk. 1:13) The Jordan River flows past the northern end of this wilderness before entering the Dead Sea. It was probably at the point where the eastern trade route crossed the Jordan that John began his preaching, for the location afforded an audience among the travellers compelled to pause at the ford, and it afforded a place suitable for baptizing. Evidently, John did not remain here exclusively (cf. Jn. 10:40), because later he was baptizing "in Bethany beyond the Jordan" (Jn. 1:28) and still later "at Aenon near Salim" (Jn. 3:23). Luke specifically declares that John made his message known "in all the region round about the Jordan." (3:3)

This wild country not only formed the background for John's preaching, but undoubtedly wrought the steel which was his character: His life-long habitual home in the desert (Lk. 1:80). He was away

from the luxuries, the comforts of society and the outward prosperity but corrupted morals. This must have prepared John in such a manner as to equip him to leap fully matured upon the stage of human events and call the nation to repent. He would need to have been thoroughly tested and proven before he would face a people indifferent to religion and a religious leadership outwardly orthodox but really corrupt.

By the calculations of men (cf. Jn. 7:3, 4) the wilderness would seem a strangely inappropriate, barren field of labor, as there were no great cities where men could be reached with so important a message. However, it was an ideal location for the very fact that it was away from the distractions of city life, and, at the same time, close to water for baptism. John was such a preacher that once he had fired the interest and imagination of the first few contacted with a message of the Messiah soon to appear, the news raced throughout the surrounding region and the people came to him!

3:2 Repent! The first word from God uttered in nearly 400 years brings clearly into focus all that would restore that perfect fellowship with God, which was lost since the first sin. It strikes the keynote for the entire kingdom of God. None may enter this kingdom with his baggage of personal, willful sins, nor under his own terms. Repentance is that unconditional surrender to the will of God that lays down the arms of self-righteousness and self-justification and asks, "What must I do to accept the terms of pardon?" This demand of God that men repent possesses tremendous power for the transformation of the race. It clearly demands the renunciation of any and all cherished sins, for they ruptured fellowship with God from the very beginning and have continued to do so ever since. This command to repent cannot be substituted by claims of righteousness, or refused on the grounds of lineage, nor evaded by hiding among the masses who also do not wish to change their lives. It is personal, born of convictions; God would change men by teaching them to change their convictions. Jesus and John preached and appealed to these convictions to induce Israel to repent:

1. The conviction of God's authority over the sinner and of His perfect righteousness (cf. Ro. 2:1-16; Ezra 9:13, 15; Ps. 51:4b; Dan. 9:4, 7a);
2. The conviction of one's own guilt (cf. II Co. 5:21; Ro. 3:10-23; Ezra 9:6b, 7, 15; Ps. 32:5; 51:1-17; Prov. 28:13; Dan. 9:5-13);

3. A conviction of the fear of the Lord based upon what is known of His purity and our own iniquity. A man who never trembles in fear of his sin and God's punishment will never repent (cf. Lk. 13:3, 5; Ezra 9:14; Prov. 19:23; 14:27; 15:33; 16:6; Dan. 9:13);
4. A sense of shame regarding the manner of life lived out of connection and harmony with the character and will of God (cf. Ro. 6:21; Jer. 3:3; 8:12; Ezra 9:6; Dan. 9:7);
5. The certainty of the goodness, love and mercy of God (Ro. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9, 13; Psa. 103: all, but esp. vv. 3, 10). God has even granted man the opportunity to repent! (Ac. 5:31; 11:18; Heb. 12:17; Dan. 9:9);
6. The certain conviction of the reality of those precious treasures which God promises to those willing to surrender all to Him. If the changing of human nature is the changing of the desires of that nature, then, the changing power of repentance is in the desiring of different desires. There is purifying power in hope (II Pet. 1:3-11; I Jn. 3:1-3) which forces out of the picture all that does not agree with that new affection. If a man is obsessed with a great desire, or a great idea, such as that which God offers in the Kingdom of Christ, there are not enough obstacles to stop him from obtaining them!

The full process of repentance involves the complete change of the man (Ac. 26:18; II Co. 7:8-11)

The Kingdom of heaven is at hand. This is the positive, exciting reason for John's stern demand of the nation: not a mere negative rejection of certain past sins or even a habit of sinfulness, but rather a positive preparation for the sudden appearance of the King and the commencement of His rule. But what sort of kingdom will it be? It will be the long-awaited rule of God in the hearts of men empowered by their effective repentance. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 265) sums up the nature and importance of this central theme of John's preaching:

Concerning this 'Kingdom of Heaven,' which was the great message of John, and the great work of Christ Himself, we may here say, that it is the whole Old Testament *sublimated*, and the whole New Testament *realised*. The idea of it did not lie hidden in the Old, to be opened up in the New

Testament—as did the mystery of its realization. But this rule of heaven and Kingship of Jehovah was the very substance of the Old Testament; the object of the calling and mission of Israel; the meaning of all its ordinances, whether civil or religious; the underlying idea of all its institutions. It explained alike the history of the people, the dealings of God with them, and the prospects opened up by the prophets. Without it the Old Testament could not be understood; it gave perpetuity to its teaching, and dignity to its representations. This constituted alike the real contrast between Israel and the nations of antiquity, and Israel's real title to distinction. Thus the whole Old Testament was the preparatory presentation of the rule of heaven and of the Kingship of its Lord.

Study this concept as expressed in law, prophecy, and popular devotion: Ex. 19:6; I Sam. 12:12; II Sam. 7:8-16; Psa. 2:6; 5:2; 10:16; 22:28; 24:7-10; 29:10; 44:4; 45:6, 7; 47; 48:1, 2; 74:12; 84:3; 95:3; 98:6; 145:1, 11-13; Isa. 9:6, 7; 33:17-22; 37:16; 43:15; Jer. 10:6-10; 30:9; Dan. 2:44; 7:9-28; Zech. 14:9, 16, 17. John's hearers believed in God, at least formally, and were acquainted with God's revelations in the OT, but a people indifferent to its obligations to God under that revelation are certainly not prepared to receive additional revelation. They must repent before they can believe the gospel! Instead of calling the nation to military exercises to prepare for the restoration of national glory, a call which would have been perfectly in accord with the common expectation, John challenged Israel to a personal, immediate and drastic change of life, their conduct and their hopes.

3:3 **This is he.** John the Baptist is the God-sent fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, not merely history repeated: there is no other "voice." (Jn. 1:23; also Mk. 1:2; Mt. 11:10)

In the wilderness. Delitzsch (*Isaiah*, II, 141), following the parallelism in the Hebrew, construes this phrase, not with the crier, but as the place where the preparation was to be made for the Messiah's coming. Luke (3:5) gives the full quotation of this prophecy (Isa. 40:3ff), defining the heart of Israel as a spiritual wilderness containing hindrances and obstacles which would impede the progress of the kingdom of God in its forward advance. Sin and impenitence had raised mountains of obstruction; only repentance could

open the road to the Lord. God means that Israel is to prepare herself so that God who is coming to deliver shall find her in such a spiritual state as befits His glory and plan. John would need to encourage the down-cast, humiliate the self-righteous and self-secure, unmask the dishonest and reduce the unapproachably haughty into submission. The very reason for John's coming to prepare Israel was the all-too-obvious fact that Israel was not ready. Note in this connection the messages of all the prophets. With one accord, they all declare that there was hardly any period when Israel was "ready for the coming of her God." No study could be more fruitful than that of Malachi, the last voice of the OT, as he points to the specific instances in which Israel had need of thorough correction by repentance.

The way of the Lord. It is Jehovah for whose coming John must awaken the nation, not merely an angelic emanation of deity, if Isaiah's prophecy (ch. 40) is to be taken seriously. Malachi (2:17—4:6) also declares unequivocally that it is Jehovah whom Israel sought and would soon see come suddenly to His temple.

(The "angel of the covenant" is Jehovah, as is demanded both by the parallelism in Mal. 3:1 and the complaint of Israel in Mal. 2:17, as well as Israel's understanding of this "messenger:" Ex. 3:2, 4, 6, 14, 15; 13:21, 22; 14:19; 23:20-23; 33:14; Deut. 4:37; Isa. 63:9)

The longing cry of Isaiah (64:1), "O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down!" and the sobbed prayer, "How long, O Lord? Wilt thou hide thyself forever?" (Psa. 89:46), as well as the hypocritical taunt "Where is the God of justice?" (Mal. 2:17) are about to be answered by the personal appearance of Jehovah of hosts.

II. THE MAN'S MANNER

3:4 Everything John was, spoke so eloquently that everyone could hear clearly what he was saying! It was only the message that mattered to John and he subordinated everything to its propagation. Obviously a man of self-denial, he was a living illustration of how little man really needs for existence. Dried **locusts** were a "clean" food (Lev. 11:22) and were apparently as abundant as **honey** (Ex. 3:8, 17; Deut. 8:7-9; cf. Lk. 24:42). His mode of life was somewhat similar to that of the Nazarite (Lk. 1:15; cf. Num. 6:1-23); his dress typical of the ancient prophets (II Kgs. 1:8; Zech. 13:4). His appearance reenforced his preaching: he challenged all who made food and

drink, house and clothes their chief concern in life, to turn from such vanity and concern themselves with far more essential problems. Note carefully that John did not call them to asceticism, but to repentance. He did not offer his dress and diet as the norm of piety. Doubtless, even then as today, there were many ascetics who would offer their asceticism as their excuse for not repenting! John did not demand that those who had food and raiment should leave that (Lk. 3:11), or that those in particular occupations should cease those functions within the society (Lk. 3:12-14). He called the nation to leave its SIN.

Every movement for righteousness finds its scoffers standing on the sidelines, even this one (Mt. 11:18). However, Jesus had nothing but praise for John (Mt. 11:7-15).

III. THE MAN'S MESSAGE OF MORALITY

3:5, 6 **Then went out . . . and were baptized.** The two Greek verbs (*exeporeueto* and *ebaptizonto*: imperfect tense) vividly describe the constant flow of people who kept going out to hear John and were being baptized by him. **Unto him:** but what were they going out to see? Did they seek some novel spectacle? Did they find a fickle man, easily moved by popular opinion, or rather a molder of that opinion? Did they seek some one who pampered his body with rich foods and soft clothing? Even a great prophet? What was it that moved them to such repentance, such confession of sins and baptism? They were brought face-to-face with the greatest man who ever lived, the very herald of God and precursor of the Messiah! They were faced with their sins, both national and personal, the imminent judgment of God, and the sudden coming of the Christ. The message and the man were bound up in one indissoluble unity and they could see it. They could discern no way of escape from repentance without rejecting the counsel of God against themselves. (Cf. Mt. 11:2-19; Lk. 7:18-30) **All Judea, all the region** are common hyperboles meaning "many" or perhaps "most of the people of these regions came," as we say "everybody was there" when we actually mean that the major part of the populace came (Mt. 21:23-25; Lk. 7:30).

They were baptized, i.e., they were immersed in the Jordan, for that is the meaning of the word *baptizein* and all its cognates. There exists no linguistic evidence from the first century for any other meaning assigned to this word, other than "dip, submerge, plunge or overwhelm." On this point, see ISBE, articles on "Baptism" by Lutheran, Baptist and Pede-baptist authors, p. 385ff, which throw into

sharp contrast the speculation about the supposed meaning of the word when used to support their doctrines, as over against the simplicity and unity of meaning found in the Greek lexicons which must describe the word as it was actually used in the first century.

Confessing their sins. Whether the penitents confessed particular sins to John or their sinfulness in general is not so much the point as that they did confess sins they had kept hidden for years and had cherished as a way of life. The fear of God's wrath and their lack of preparation for the coming of the Messiah laid bare their sins and devastated their excuses. For heart-touching examples of such confessions, see Neh. 1:4-11; 9:2, 3; Ezra 9:5—10-1; Dan. 9:3-20; cf. Jas. 5:16; Ac. 19:8-19, esp. 18.

3:7 When he saw many. Though Luke (3:7) describes these words as addressed to the entire crowd, Matthew here is specifying what part of the crowd was thus addressed. However, any of the crowd who would tend to agree with the sentiments of the religious leaders are thus deprived of refuge against the command of John to repent personally.

The *Pharisees* were a Jewish religio-political party which laid extreme importance upon the strictest outward observance of the law and its traditional interpretations by the rabbis. Being gross legalists, they were self-righteous hypocrites, cultivating a hollow, ostentatious formalism. (Cf. Josephus *Antiquities*, XIII, 5, 9; 10:5; XVIII, 1, 3; Lk. 18:9; 12; Mt. 23; Ac. 23:8) The *Sadducees* rejected the rabbinical traditions as well as the doctrine of the resurrection, of angels, spirits, immortality and the judgment to come. They included in their number many of the richest and most influential Jews, such as the high priests' family. (Cf. *Ant.*, XVIII, 1, 4; *Wars*, II, 8, 14; Mt. 16:1-12; 22:23; Ac. 4:1; 5:17; 23:8)

Coming to his baptism (*epi to baptisma*). This English phrase does not convey the two possibilities which the Greek phrase offers: (1) The Pharisees and Sadducees were coming *to* or *toward* the vicinity where John was baptizing. In this case, they are pictured as merely being present to judge for themselves the nature of John's ministry, criticize where they might, or perhaps to seize control of the movement if possible, lest they lose their influence with the people. John's words that are addressed to them, in this case, would be taken as ironic, because they would have denied the necessity of their repentance or need for baptism. They rejected John's baptism (Mt. 21:25; Lk. 7:30), because of their dependence upon physical rela-

tion to Abraham. John may, then, be paraphrased thus: "You vipers' offspring (a metaphor true to fact), who prompted you to flee from the coming wrath (an ironic metaphor, contrary to fact, meaning: "Surely YOU are not fleeing from the coming wrath too? No!") (2) *epi to baptisma* may also mean that they were coming for the purpose of baptism. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 289) Thus, they were coming "to have themselves baptized." Compare the parallel in Luke 3:7 (*ekporeuменois baptisthenai hup'autou*). But why were they really coming?

Could it be that these Pharisees and Sadducees, being human, felt the weariness of their outward formalistic observances from which any semblance of reality and holiness had long since departed? Did they too have sorrows, achings and spiritual unrest that accused them of their own spiritual emptiness? Were they thus led to sigh and search for something real and nourishing? Could it be that they knew that formalism and sterile morality cannot satisfy man's conscience? Or that infidelity raises only doubts and cannot rest a troubled heart? If so, John knew that they needed to be shaken hard and brought beyond that point of hidden convictions masquerading under the guise of religious respectability. They were experts in the art of dodging repentance, but this time there was to be no dodging! But, lest we feel too secure, let us remember Hebrews 2:3.

Undoubtedly, they did not all feel their need. John immediately unmasks their insincerity and impenitence and challenges their fitness for baptism. The general situation may explain their real motivation: since the new movement had attained such proportions, they may have feared the loss of their leadership of the people, if they did not join it and attempt to seize the control of the movement. They could not really be fleeing from the coming wrath if they did not believe that THEY were in danger of it. Probably they merely pretended to fear God's judgment, as a cover for their real intent.

Offspring of vipers was a title justly deserved by the Jewish rulers inasmuch as they poisoned the religious principles of the nation and crucified God's Son. (Study also Gen. 3:1-15; Rev. 12:9, 14, 15; Mt. 12:34; 23:33; Jn. 8:44)

Who warned you? Who indeed but the father of lies could have prompted these hypocrites to believe they could actually escape the wrath of God by mere outwardly religious, hypocritical acts? Were they really so blind to fail to see that their manner of life could only run more directly into the path of that which they sought to escape?

Baptized hundreds of times, they would never be able to escape the wrath of God!

The **wrath of God** is no figure of speech, no mere expression attributing to God human emotions. It is the clear, necessary reaction of God's holy, righteous character, reacting to man's sin which is the persistent rejection of His love and mercy. (Cf. Zeph. 1:14-18; 2:2, 3; Mal. 3:2-18; 4:1, 5; Mt. 23:33; Lk. 21:20-24, esp. 23b; Jn. 3:36; Ro. 1:18ff; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; I Th. 1:10)

3:8 **Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance!** John is saying, "Do not bring to this movement of true repentance toward God that cunning hypocrisy for which you are well known! Do not merely profess to be repenting, but show that you mean it by forsaking your sins! Do not make this trip to the water but another sinful act of hypocrisy!" These Pharisees and Sadducees could not remain what they were: they too must repent without deception or evasion, and be prepared to face all the consequences that arise out of such a dramatic change. There are some "fruits" that are unworthy of the profession to repent: a passing regret, a few tears, an excuse or two, a wish to be different, a brief outward betterment, perhaps even a resolve to change that becomes forgotten with the passage of time. Others "pay their tithes," pray regularly, support religion in a flurry of "busy-ness" but they are unwilling to admit that they are trying to evade that death to self which is true repentance. Others dare to use all manner of other devices merely to justify themselves as they are and to keep them from doing their one duty to repent!

But the *fruits* that God seeks are the various acts which show a changed heart. Repentance must issue in a real change of life that no longer presumes upon the grace and mercy of God. Even if it is not always possible for men to recognize the truly repentant, God always does (Cf. Mt. 7:15-20 with Ac. 1:24; Rev. 2:23). True repentance is inward but it must affect all the issues of life. Luke (3:10-14) describes how this preaching cut into the conscience of the common people too, making them cry out, desiring to know specifically what they must do to manifest the genuineness of their repentance. John demands that the selfish person, or those who had been indifferent to the needs of others, should show their repentance by practical deeds of compassion and mercy. Those who had been guilty of crooked dealing by extortion should show their repentance by honest dealing. Those in the military should shun sins common to

soldiers; the greedy and overbearing must produce contentment and gentle courtesy. If we would produce such fruit (Acts 26:10 means us!) we must:

1. *Confess our sin*, for true repentance necessitates the humility to admit that we have sinned. (See Prov. 28:13; Psa. 32:5, 6; 51; Jer. 2:35; 3:13)
2. *Repair the damage of our sin* whereinsofar it can be done. (Cf. Num. 5:6, 7) Sadly, this is not always possible, for these Pharisees and Sadducees had taught others to disregard God's will (Cf. Mt. 5:19, 20; 15:1-20; 23), but they could not know how far their own former evil influence had reached, and thus could not repair all the damage wrought by their teaching.
3. *Refuse to repeat* any sin under any circumstance.

3:9 **Think not to say.** Probably very few Jews were not inclined to cherish secretly the reminder of their relationship to Abraham and all of the consequent blessings that that relationship was supposed to confer. Even those who were trying to live righteously in that age must have regarded John's statement as absolutely incredible, for to all of Judaism, Abraham was unique. (Cf. Jn. 8:30-59; Lk. 16:19-31) According to their view, his meritorious goodness and favor with God not only sufficed for himself, but was such a treasury of merit that all the claims and needs of his descendents could not exhaust! And yet, their pride in their Abrahamic lineage was all the more inexcusable, since they had been clearly warned by the prophets that theirs was not an exclusive relationship irrespective of their sins. They could by no means escape punishment for their sins. (Cf. Isa. 48:1, 2; Jer. 8:8; 7:3, 4, 8-10; Micah 3:11)

John's prophetic task was to turn "the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6; cf. Lk. 1:17). The "fathers" are those illustrious ancestors of the Israelite nation, the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and generally the pious forefathers such as David and the godly men of his time. (Cf. Jer. 15:1; Ezek. 14:14, 20) The "children" are their degenerate descendents of Malachi's own time and the succeeding ages. "Turning the heart of the fathers to the sons" does not mean merely directing the love of the fathers to the sons once more, but also restoring the heart of the fathers in the sons, or giving to the sons the father's disposition and affections. Then will the heart of the sons

also return to the faith of their fathers, so that they will be like-minded with their pious fathers. (Keil on *Malachi*, 472) In making their claim to the lineage of Abraham, these Jews were thinking wrongly about their father. They supposed that fleshly ties automatically carried with them all spiritual benefits and material blessings.

But John could have also said as well: "Do not think to plead special treatment by God on the basis of your genius, rank, beauty, wealth, power or splendid service to the nation! Divorced from your real character, they count for absolutely nothing in the supreme matter of eternal destiny. In fact, they may actually impede your entrance into the kingdom, inasmuch as they might hide from your very eyes your need to repent." Abraham's real children are those who express Abraham's faith and obedience to God's will. (Gal. 3:6, 7, 9, 26-29)

These stones. Does John mean by this expression, taken as a figure of speech, to indicate the Gentiles or perhaps the lower-class Jews who, in the eyes of the Pharisees and Sadducees, could make no claims to arrive at their "superior righteousness and rights to God's blessings"? Or does he mean literal stones, to show that the vital relation to Abraham, which counts with God, is not that which is based upon fleshly ties, but upon a real, inward character? Plummer (*Luke*, 90) notes: "It was God who made Abraham to be the rock whence the Jews were hewn (Isa. 51:1, 2); and out of the most unpromising material He can make genuine children of Abraham (Ro. 4; 9:6, 7; 11:13-24; Gal. 4:21-31)."

This passage may explain the stumbling-block in the mind of Nicodemus (cf. Jn. 3:3-9), for even personal self-righteousness, acquired position and blood-descent from Abraham would not avail for entrance into the Kingdom of God. Only a complete re-birth could accomplish this. (For other Christian teaching against trust in human relationships or relation by physical descent for salvation and blessing, see Jn. 1:12, 13; 3:3; 8:31-58; Mt. 8:11, 12; Lk. 16:24; Phil. 3:2-21; Col. 3:11.)

3:10 Even now the axe lies. Judgment is fast approaching! But, some would ask, is fear a proper religious motive? Yes, for God addresses His message to every sentiment of the human heart that "by all means He might save some." If love and grace do not reach the heart, the threat and terror of judgment must be given opportunity to try to stir the conscience. Even the threat of judgment on God's part demonstrates His long-suffering love and mercy. The conscience is one of God's gifts, and he who destroys it must answer for it.

The figure of the tree is clear: the trees represent the Jewish nation as a whole; every tree stands for each individual; the axe, God's judgment. The trees designated for felling have already been selected on the basis of failure to produce fruit worthy of God's continued grace. **The axe lies at the root:** the coming judgment will be complete and will involve the entire stand of trees. **The fire** is the punitive judgment of God. (Cf. Mal. 4:1; Jn. 15:6; Mt. 13:40; 18:8, 9; Tit. 3:14)

These predictions of judgment are revealed by inspiration of God to John for publication. However, John's personal interpretation of these prophecies was that Jesus would begin this fiery separation and judgment immediately upon the commencement of His ministry. Moreover, this might have seemed to John to be the meaning of Malachi 3:1, 2. However, this interpretation overly constricts the time element that lies between the Messiah's coming and His execution of world judgment. This mistaken interpretation by John later troubled him since Jesus was seemingly not fulfilling the prophecy of John as he thought He should. (See Mt. 11:2-6)

IV. THE MAN'S MASTER—THE MESSIAH

3:11 **I baptize you with water unto repentance.** On the phrase "with water" or "in water," see below on "in the Holy Spirit." The problem in John's words is to discover what is meant by "baptism UNTO repentance," for it would seem at first glance that John's baptism led to, or resulted in, repentance. However, the tenor of the whole passage seems to be just the reverse: John presumably refused to baptize any who did not demonstrate the genuineness of their repentance, although this cannot be clearly proven. On the other hand, he might have baptized all comers, while challenging the conscience of all, lest they mock the serious import of the baptism by reducing it to another act of sham religion. In this case, he would be leaving the decision to be baptized clearly up to each conscience and he proceeded to baptize all comers upon their confession of need, on the assumption that few hypocrites would risk exposure. The problem is not simply linguistic here, because the Greek preposition *eis*, usually translated in the figurative sense: "to, toward, so as to, in order to, for the purpose that, etc.," (as, for example, II Co. 7:9, 10; Ro. 10:10; 2:4; Mt. 26:28), seems to indicate that their repentance was the goal which John sought to accomplish by baptizing the people. Now, John preached a baptism that conferred the inestimable

blessing of remission of sins upon the truly repentant (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3) in order to cause the people to repent so as to be fit candidates for his baptism and its resulting forgiveness of sins. Therefore, it was not the baptism which John held before the people as the premium most desirable, so much as it was the remission of sins connected with it. Thus, the desire to obtain their soul's deep need of forgiveness would prompt the people to see their prior need to repent.

If it be true that the immediate goal of John's baptism was to cause the people to repent so that God could forgive them, was there no other purpose in John's ministry, other than calls to individual repentance in view of the coming Messiah? Or was he not also thus admitting those thus baptized to that group of repentant Israelites who, by bringing forth fruits worthy of their penitence, thus prepared themselves for the Kingdom of God and thus identified themselves with the soon-to-appear Messiah?

He who comes after me. "The coming one" (*ho erchomenos*) may have become a stereotyped phrase for "the expected Messiah." (Cf. Psa. 118:26 as cited in Mt. 21:9; 23:39; then, Hab. 2:3 as cited in Heb. 10:37; cf. Mal. 3:1; Jn. 1:15; 3:31; 6:14; 11:27; Ac. 19:4) In these NT passages, the above-cited Greek phrase appears with little modification, although it must be admitted that, in these same passages, the phrase may appertain to the wording of the sentences merely as the way in which each author wished to express himself without particular attempt to record a fixed phrase. However, Arndt-Gingrich (article: *erchomai*) cite more evidence that indicates that the Christ is meant. Again, there is particular point in John's anguished question, "Are you the coming one (*ho erchomenos*) or do we await another?" (Mt. 11:3)

The above-mentioned problem becomes important when it is observed how John seems to avoid directly using the word "Messiah," and uses instead a seemingly innocent circumlocution, "the coming One." "Messiah" was a term loaded with explosive, political implications in the Jewish mind. John never did call Jesus "the Christ," although he attributed to Him every other title of deity which leads to the same conclusion. Thus, he reduced the stimulus to merely excited nationalists and, at the same time, improved the understanding of his hearers.

He is mightier than I. Here, as later before the Jerusalem investigating committee (Jn. 1:19-27), John disclaims all pretenses to Messiahship. His stirring challenge to righteousness, call to re-

pentance, his good news of the approaching kingdom, and his threat of judgment to come, left the impression that he was the Messiah himself (Lk. 3:15). The necessity to clarify his own position led John to frame that memorable figure of the slave unworthy of his glorious Master. But it is no mere figure, for it is exactly what John felt! (cf. Jn. 3:27-30)

Feel the contrast: **I indeed . . . but he . . .** John is saying, "If you think that my small ministry has been great, if you suppose me to be the great Elijah or the promised prophet or even the Christ Himself, you have not seen anything yet! My baptism is in water leading you to repentance, but His shall be in the Holy Spirit!"

In the Holy Spirit. The long-awaited time when God's promised Spirit would come is about to arrive. (Cf. Ezek. 36:26—37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28f; Isa. 44:3) God kept His word (Ac. 1:5; 2:1-4; 10:44-48; 11:16) when His people were truly overwhelmed or submerged or immersed in God's Spirit.

Arguments based upon the presence or absence of the Greek preposition *en* here and in the parallel passages fail to establish their point, since Mark does not use it at all (1:8), while Matthew uses it in both phrases (3:11) and Luke uses it with the Holy Spirit (3:15), but not with water. The simple locative case, without the preposition *en* may still express the element in which the baptism takes place, be it water or the Holy Spirit. Or if the case be construed as instrumental, it expresses the instrument or thing with which the baptism is effected. The addition of *en* may express either the place *in* which, or the instrument *with* which the baptisms were to be effected. Whether the baptisms here mentioned are effected by immersion must be solved on other considerations than the use of *en*, "in, with." However, the Greek lexicons are clear on the meaning of the action involved in *baptize* and *baptism*.

But not only the joyful moment for the fulfillment of God's promise of the Holy Spirit, but also the "great and terrible day of the Lord" was drawing near in which God would come personally bringing judgment upon the house of Israel. (Cf. Mal. 3:1—4:6)

He shall baptize you . . . (in or with) fire. Various explanations of this "fire" are suggested:

1. That the "fiery" tongues at Pentecost are meant is improbable, since no fire ever appeared in connection with the coming of the Spirit on that day. (See Ac. 2:1-3)
2. Others suggest that only one baptism is meant under two terms: the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the kindling, illuminating and purifying which He brings into the life of the believer. (Cf. Mal. 3:2, 3) This suggestion is offered on the strength of the argument that the same persons will receive the Holy Spirit and the fire ("He will baptize YOU"). However, there is another "you" in verse 11, exactly parallel to this one, which cannot be taken in a specific sense, but must be taken only generally. It was not true that John was baptizing everyone with water, since the religious leaders rejected his baptism. Neither would it be true that Jesus should baptize indiscriminately everyone with the Holy Spirit and fire, for He will certainly separate the "you" (plural) into individuals.
3. Others suggest the fiery trials which Jesus' followers must undergo (Cf. Mk. 10:38, 39; Lk. 12:49, 50), although it may be doubted that John intended such trials as one of the glories of the Messianic Reign, which were to be contrasted with his own unworthy ministry.
4. Two baptisms are distinguished: the penitent with the Spirit, and the impenitent with penal fire. It should be noted that one of the features of OT prophecy is that it views great, widely-separated features of God's redemption and final judgment in small contexts without apparent regard to the great time intervals existing between them. John, like the old prophets, is seeing the future without the perspective of time. Thus, while the baptism of the Spirit occurred on Pentecost and on one other significant occasion thereafter, (Ac. 10:44ff; 11:15-17) the real baptism of fire is left until the end of the age. (Rev. 20:15; 21:8). Contextual limitations determine the meaning of this "fire:" the separation of good from bad both precedes and follows this verse and may be regarded as in John's mind as he mentions the blessings of the Holy Spirit upon the righteous and the condemnation of the wicked in this intervening verse.

3:12 **Whose fan.** Here John changes his figure of speech from the Mighty One who will baptize, to the Great Harvester. The picture is that of an ancient threshing floor which is a hard, level surface 40-80 feet in diameter. The grain, straw and all, was laid on its surface just as it was brought from the grainfields. After the grain was trodden out on the floor by oxen, it was then winnowed, or, separated from the chaff, by tossing the straw and grain repeatedly into the air with a large wooden shovel called "the fan." The wind blew the light chaff and dust to one side while the good heavy grain fell back onto the threshing floor. After two or three winnowings, the grain was washed, dried and passed through a sieve, and finally stored in granaries. The useless dusty chaff left over after the winnowing process was then burned.

John's meaning is simple and clear: the *threshing floor* stands for the world with its mixed population of saints and sinners. The great, final judgment, to be executed by Christ Himself, will demonstrate the true nature of every man whether he be *wheat* or *chaff*, all of which is seen in the *thorough cleaning of the threshing floor* by the farmer. Then, at the end, there will be the salvation of the righteous, represented by the *gathering of the wheat into the garner*, and the punishment of the wicked, by the *burning up of the chaff*. (Cf. Mt. 13:30, 36-43)

The idea that any mere man could be in a position to execute these judgments is unthinkable. Therefore, the deity of the Messiah stands directly behind these words which describe His power and right of judgment. And yet, the judgment is not all in His hands. When men are confronted with the Christ, they are faced with an unavoidable choice: they must either be for or against Him, accept Him or reject Him. It is precisely this choice that settles their destiny. The righteous are separated from the unrighteous by their reaction to Jesus.

Unquenchable fire. The figure of speech, taken from the threshing floor, is too limited to tell all the necessary truth, so John adds a word that seems to be contradictory in the nature of the case, but is quite clear in revealing a punishment beyond present human knowledge and experience. God is able to provide a fire that could not be extinguished for eternity, even if all the fire we have ever seen be extinguishable. Therefore, speculations as to the nature of such inextinguishable fire are valueless; those who experience it will have no doubt as to its nature or reality. (Cf. Isa. 5:24; 66:24;

Jer. 7:20; Zeph. 1:14-18; Mt. 25:41; Mk. 9:43) Other passages which teach this same final separation and effectively deny the popular doctrines of universalism ("God is too loving, too good-hearted to damn anyone"), ultimate restoration ("God will somehow purge the wicked of their sins, purifying them for ultimate salvation."), and total annihilation ("God will finally end their torment by utterly destroying the wicked."), are the following: II Th. 1:8-12; Mk. 9:48; Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43; 25:41; II Pet. 3:7-11.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Tell all you can about John the Baptist: his father, mother, birth, naming, youth, qualifications, manner of life, message, length of ministry, places of service, testimony to Jesus, prophecies about him, his similarity to the Essenes, the origin and nature of his baptism, and its relation to Christian baptism.
2. Since Matthew concluded his second chapter with the return of Jesus to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary, how could Matthew initiate his next section of Jesus' life by saying "in those days"? Are we to understand that John began his ministry while Jesus was yet a child? What other information helps us to correctly interpret Matthew's introductory phrase "in those days"?
3. Why is John called "the Baptist"? What does this appellation suggest about his unique ministry?
4. Give specific directions how to find the wilderness where John preached and describe its general nature. Locate the general scene of his baptizing.
5. What was the central theme of John's preaching?
6. What was the basic purpose for John's coming to preach the special message he brought? What was John to accomplish?
7. Who was "the Lord" (Isa. 40:3) for whom John prepared?
8. Why was not Israel ready for the Messiah's coming?
9. What does the word "repent" or "repentance" mean? How is John's baptism a "baptism unto repentance"?
10. What prophetic passages were brought to fulfillment in the message and ministry of John the Baptist?
11. What blessing did the response to the message of John bring upon those who were baptized?
12. How far-reaching was John's influence with the Jewish people?
13. Why did the multitudes respond so readily to John's preaching?

14. What response did John seek among the religious leaders of the day?
15. What religious parties sent representatives to hear John? Who were these parties (what did they officially believe)?
16. Why did John address the religious leaders with such a fearful warning?
17. What is "the wrath to come"? How could they flee from it?
18. What are "fruits worthy of repentance"?
19. What does John mean by bringing up Abraham? In what connection did he mention Abraham?
20. What is the terrible danger in claiming relationship to spiritual, God-fearing ancestors, that was inherent in the way that the religious leaders were implied as reasoning?
21. How does the figure of the axe and the trees correct this mistaken mode of reasoning?
22. What promise did John make regarding the coming of Jesus, and what is meant by the various terms of that promise? (What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit? When did it take place? Where? Upon whom? What is the baptism in fire? When did it take place? Where? Upon whom?)
23. Explain the figure of winnowing grain literally, and then show what use John made of the figure.
24. John was born of the tribe of Levi, dressed like the great, ancient prophets, preached a message of righteousness and repentance, but presented no supernatural credentials, such as miracles (Jn. 10:40, 41), and died before His predictions about Jesus could be verified. How could it be clear, then, to the religious leaders and multitudes alike, that he had the authority of God to thunder such a fiery message, initiate such a baptism, and make such exciting predictions about the coming of the Kingdom of God and the "One mightier than I"? Were not the learned doctors of the law justified in responding to Jesus' question regarding John's baptism, "We do not know whether his baptism is from heaven or from men," (Mt. 21:25-27), and were they not justified in not believing him (Mt. 21:32)?
25. What does the apostle Paul say about John and his ministry?
26. What is the judgment of Jesus upon John, as to his ministry, his personal greatness and his effectiveness?
27. How could so many people, as are indicated by the Evangelists' report of John's success, be free to come to hear John? Did not any of them work?

28. What is the relationship between the "forgiveness or remission of sins," enjoyed by those who accepted John's baptism, and that secured by Jesus' death on the cross? (Cf. Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3 with Heb. 9:22, 14, 15; Eph. 1:7) How could John's baptism be "for remission of sins"?
29. Were those who became disciples of John, thus preparing themselves for the commencement of the Kingdom, exempt from the sacrifices and service connected with the old Mosaic system?

Section 6

JESUS IS BAPTIZED BY JOHN

(Parallels: Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21, 22; cf. John 1:29-34)

TEXT: 3:13-17

13. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.
14. But John would have hindered him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?
15. But Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer *it* now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him.
16. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him;
17. and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think Jesus really needed to be immersed by John? If so, why? If not, why not?
- b. Why did John consider himself in need of immersion by Jesus, instead of Jesus having need of John's baptism?
- c. What do these phrases mean:
 - (1) "it becometh us"?
 - (2) "to fulfill all righteousness"?
 - (3) "he suffered him"?
- d. Why did God speak from heaven in this manner and on this particular occasion?
- e. What does Matthew mean by "the heavens were opened unto him"?