

PREPARE YE FOR THE KINGDOM

– LUKE 3:1-17. – FEBRUARY 18. –

"Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." – Matthew 3:2.

JOHN THE BAPTIST was the last of the Prophets and Jesus declared that none of them was his superior – "There hath not arisen a greater Prophet than John the Baptist – and yet I say unto you that the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he." (Matt. 11:11.) Every member of the Kingdom of Heaven class must be higher than John because begotten of the Holy Spirit. They are reckoned as members of the House of Sons, while the Prophets belong to the preceding House of Servants: "Moses verily was faithful in all his House as a servant, but Christ as a Son over His own House, whose House are we." – Heb. 3:5,6; John 1:13.

God proposed from before the foundation of the world that He would redeem man and that He would establish His Kingdom for their restoration from sin and death conditions. The Redeemer of the world was to be the King by whose reign of a thousand years the work of Satan would be undone; the head of the Serpent would be crushed and humanity would be uplifted out of sin and death and be brought back to the condition in which Adam was at first – "very good." The obedient would learn through experience a great lesson, valuable to all eternity; the wilful rejectors would be destroyed without hope or remedy. But previously, from amongst the redeemed would be selected a little company to be associated with the Redeemer in His great work. These would be called the Kingdom – the Kingdom class – the Royal Family – Sons of God.

God promised Abraham, "the friend of God," that this great blessing would come to humanity through his posterity, and indeed all of the saved ones should be known as his posterity in that they would become proselyte members of Israel. Messiah was promised to be of

Abraham's seed also, and it was to be through this Messiah that Abraham's natural posterity would be blessed, and would be made a channel of blessing to all nations. One thing not explained to Abraham was that Messiah would have a company of joint-heirs selected from amongst men and counted the "Body of Christ," or "The Bride, the Lamb's Wife."

NECESSARILY TO THE JEW FIRST

Although God had not mentioned this elect class which He purposed should be members of the Messiah, or His Bride, nevertheless God determined that the opportunity to become members of this elect, special class should first of all go to Abraham's natural seed. For the three and a half years of Jesus' ministry and for a further three and a half years after His death the privilege of becoming His Bride and joint-heir was limited to Israel after the flesh.

Later it was sent on equal terms also to the Gentiles. Saint Paul tells us that it was necessary that the Gospel Message should go first to the Jews because this was the Divine arrangement. But he adds, "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for [the best of God's gifts, the privilege of becoming members of the spiritual Israel], but the election hath obtained it and the rest were blinded." (Rom. 11:7.) The blindness is not to be forever, but merely until the completion of the elect, spiritual class – then the blindness is to pass away and Israel is to be saved or recovered to the Divine favor lost eighteen centuries ago. (See Romans 11:25-33.)

Meantime the dealing with natural Israel proceeded just as though Jesus in the flesh were about to take the Throne; and just as though His disciples in the flesh were to be His Bride; and just as though the Jewish nation would then be exalted and used as the Divine channel; and just as though the promise would there have fulfilment: "In thy Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

"MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD"

It was in harmony with this *offer* which God knew would not be accepted by a sufficient number that He sent John the Baptist to announce Jesus as though He would be King of the Jews in the flesh and to announce His Kingdom as though it would be immediately established. However, all along God knew and had provided for the crucifixion of His Son, and that merely a beginning would be then made in the selecting of the elect Church, and that it would require more than eighteen centuries to complete it – and therefore require a tarrying of the Kingdom for more than eighteen centuries, until the Kingdom class should be ready in God's name and power to take the dominion of the earth – under the whole heavens.

As Jesus declared, "My Kingdom is not of this world (Age)," and as He did not establish His Kingdom at His first advent, but merely began the work of calling the "elect," so the work of John the Baptist was merely to the Jew and proportionately only was he the antitype of Elijah. A larger antitype of Jesus, and of Elijah and John as forerunners, we may now see. Jesus in the flesh and all His faithful members in the flesh for eighteen centuries have constituted the antitype of John the Baptist. Their message all the way down these centuries has been to all who hear it, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The antitype of the King whose Kingdom they announce is composed of the glorified Jesus and His glorified Bride, beyond the veil. These soon shall take the Kingdom and reign gloriously as Abraham's Seed for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

The Church has cried in "the wilderness" in the sense that she has been alienated and separated from the world. She has called upon all who would hear to prepare for Messiah's Kingdom. She has told more fully than did John the Baptist of the effect of Messiah's Kingdom – the leveling up of the valleys (the lifting up of the poor), the straightening out of the crooked things and the smoothing of the rough things, that thus all flesh might see, appreciate, understand, experience the salvation

of God. Both John and the Church declare that this salvation is to be brought through Jesus and His glorified [R4958 : page 33] Bride in Kingdom power. The point we are making is that while John the Baptist was an antitype of Elijah, and was forerunner or herald of Jesus, so, only more particularly, the Church in the flesh is a higher antitype of Elijah, and still more particularly a herald of the Messianic Kingdom.

"GENERATION OF VIPERS"

In John's day multitudes desired to be of the Kingdom class, but while still holding on to their gross sins. And so it has been throughout this Age. The only ones who can truly claim to belong to Abraham's spiritual Seed are such as show their repentance from sin and their loyalty to God by a full consecration to oppose sin and to walk in the footsteps of the Master, even unto death – even an ignominious death, if need be.

John declared that the "ax" was about to be applied to that nation. Pruning would no longer do. Each individual must either bring forth good fruit or be cut down and be cast into the "fire" – the great time of trouble with which the Age ended. The people asked John what they [R4959 : page 33] should do following their repentance. His answer was that those who had a surplus of coats should be ready to give or lend to those who had none, and those who had a sufficiency of food should likewise give to the needy. Thus would they show their repentance from the selfishness and hard-heartedness which evidenced them as sinful – thus would they show a condition of heart necessary to an acceptance of Jesus.

"ART THOU THE MESSIAH?"

When the tax-gatherers came to John repenting they asked, "How shall we conduct our lives?" He answered, "Exhort no more than that to which you are entitled by the Law." Soldiers also repented and asked John respecting their course: "What shall *we* do?" He answered, "Do violence to no man; neither exact anything wrongfully; and be content

with your wages" – thus will you show that you have repented and that you are seeking to do the Divine will, for such a course will be very different from the one to which you have been accustomed. But notwithstanding John's preaching of contentment he was apprehended as a disturber of the peace and beheaded.

The spirit of expectation was in the air and some of the people, wondering at John's teaching, asked if he were the Messiah. He promptly replied, "No; my baptism is merely that of water." Messiah's baptism will be that of "the Holy Spirit and of fire"; "His fan is in His hand and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor; He will gather the wheat into His garner, and will burn up the chaff with fire unquenchable." – Matt. 3:11-12.

"WRATH IS COME UPON THIS PEOPLE"

These things which John prophesied of Jesus were partially fulfilled more than eighteen centuries ago, but in another sense they are yet to be fulfilled. They were fulfilled so far as the Jewish nation was concerned. Jesus did baptize some of them with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and subsequently – all the faithful "Israelites indeed"; and He did, later on, baptize the unfaithful with fire – a time of trouble. Writing of that trouble St. Paul says, "Wrath is come upon this people to the uttermost; that all things written in the Law and in the Prophets concerning them might be fulfilled." Jesus did a harvesting work there for the Jewish nation only. He gathered their wheat into the garner of the Gospel Age by begetting them of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and onward, and "burned up" the nation in a time of trouble with which their Age ended, in A.D. 70.

But now for the larger fulfilment – world-wide. In the end of this Age all the "wheat" class are to be gathered into the heavenly garner by the change of the First Resurrection, and in the time of trouble coming all others than the true Church will be cut off from association with the Church and from all opportunity of membership in it – as "tares" they will be burned – reduced to the level of the rest of humanity. But, thank

God! at that time will begin the work of blessing the masses of mankind;
all the families of the earth are to be blest by the glorious, Messianic
Kingdom!

