

GOSPEL SERMONS,

A Series of Discourses on Induction into Christ,
one each on Church Organization and the
Origin and Ministry of Angels,
the Millennium, etc.

— BY —

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CHAPTER I.

THE MISSION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

"And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins."
[Luke i: 76, 77.](#)

THIS is the language of Zacharias as he prophesied by the Spirit when John was born. He was to go before the Lord to prepare a people for His reception. There was perhaps never a time in the world's history when the world was farther gone in wickedness than at the time when Jesus came. There was not a crime known to the whole dark list of wickedness and sin that was not practiced by the Jews in those days. The heart grows sick in contemplating the picture drawn by Paul in his letter to the church at Rome. Had Jesus come without some one going before him to prepare public sentiment and reform the people, it is more than probable that he would have been murdered before his preparatory work was complete. Even as it was He often had to get away from the rabble privately to keep them from killing Him before the time for His crucifixion came. Hence the wisdom of God in sending John before the Lord to prepare the way before Him. [7]

The church of God having begun on the day of Pentecost, and since the days of John the Baptist, our scribes and preachers have passed by John's work and mission, perhaps without giving them that attention and study which their importance demands; and as a result we think it possible that their *connection* with the establishment of the great spiritual temple has not been as clearly seen by every one as may be desirable.

The conception and birth of John were as purely miraculous as were those of Isaac or of Jesus the Christ. He was given to his parents when his father was an "old man, and his wife well stricken in years" ([Luke i: 18,](#)) and the angel Gabriel was sent from the presence of God to announce the glad tidings of his birth, the character of his life, and the object of his mission. He was to be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, ([Luke i: 15](#)) and was to go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; *to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.* [Luke i: 17.](#) As it was John's God-appointed work to make ready a people prepared for the Lord, did he perform the work assigned him? If so, how did he prepare them? Whom did he prepare? What position, if any, did they occupy in the spiritual Temple when it was erected? Our first question is answered by answering the second, how did John make ready a people prepared for the Lord? Well, how did he prepare them? He gave them knowledge of salvation. How did he give them knowledge of salvation? By the remission of their sins. [Luke i: 77.](#) Did they have "a

feeling sense of pardon?" Well, yes, they had *knowledge of salvation* by the remission of their sins, and we guess they felt like they were pardoned. [8]

But how did they get *knowledge* of salvation? We suppose they got it by compliance with the conditions upon which God authorized John to offer it to them.

What were the conditions of salvation imposed by John? Let us see. "There was a man sent from God whose name was John. The same came for a witness to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe." [John i: 7](#). Then it was necessary that men *believe*, in the days of John. Yes, but what were they required to believe? "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." [Acts xix: 4](#). Thus we see they believed on a *Christ to come*--we believe in a Christ already come; this difference in their faith and ours--no more. Christ was the *object* of their faith then, and he is the *object* of our faith to-day.

But the theory of salvation by faith alone had not been discovered in John's day. "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, *Repent ye*: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [Matt. iii: 1, 2](#).

In preparing a people for the Lord in John's day it was necessary that the wicked should be reformed--turned in heart from disobedience to the law of God under which, as Jews, they had always lived, to the wisdom of the just; hence John commanded the people to repent, and he preached the baptism of repentance; that is, a baptism which belonged to or grew out of repentance; a sorrow for the past, with a determination to amend the life; and he baptised with water *unto* repentance. [Matt. iii. 11](#). Thus we see that John's baptism was both preceded and followed by repentance. The former the emotion and resolve of a moment, the [9] latter a life in harmony with that resolve. But their repentance was toward God in whom, as Jews, they had faith, and against whom they had sinned; and having repented for violating God's law under which they had lived, they were admonished to believe in him who was to come.

It may be well to remark here, that while John's mission was confined to the Jews, it was no part of Judaism. His mission was a special one--he was sent from God. [John i: 6](#). He lived under the law of Moses and complied with it as any other Jew, but his preaching and baptizing were done, not in obedience to that law, but by direct authority from God. Said he: "I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he," etc. [John i. 33](#).

Then God sent John to baptize clothed with special authority; and it is idle to talk of John baptizing in obedience to Jewish law. Let him who so affirms tell us the chapter and verse in the law of Moses under which John preached and baptized.

But what was the result of John's preaching? "And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins." [Mark i: 5](#).

But for what did John baptize? He "preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." [Mark i: 4](#); [Luke iii. 3](#). What did he preach for remission of sins? Certainly *that baptism that belonged to repentance*. However important faith may be there is nothing affirmed of it here; nor is there anything affirmed of repentance, only that it was connected with *the baptism preached by John for the remission of sins*. [10] Suppose I say "the coat of my friend kept me warm?" What do I say kept me warm? Certainly the coat that belonged to my friend kept me warm. Again: "The house of my friend gave my shelter for the night." What do I say gave me shelter? Certainly the house that belonged to my friend gave my shelter. Very well--the baptism of repentance for remission of sins--what is for the remission of sins? Certainly the baptism that followed or belonged to repentance. If this is not plain and conclusive then human language can make nothing so.

But what have we found now? Let us post up a little.

John's mission was a preparatory one--he came to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. He came from God to bear witness of the Light. Said he, "I saw and bear record that this is the Son of God." Again, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." The object of his testimony was that all men through him might believe--believe in him who was to come after him. Then faith was necessary and John preached it. Repentance was necessary and John preached that also. Baptism for the remission of sins was necessary and John preached and practiced this; and thus he gave knowledge of salvation to his people by the remission of their sins. Every one who accepted the terms was made ready for the Lord, but every one who refused to obey, rejected the counsel of God against themselves not being baptized with the baptism of John. [Luke vii: 30](#).

"Now, when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth he came and dwelt in Capernaum." [Matt. iv: 12, 13](#). "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, [11] Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [Matt. iv: 17](#).

Jesus seems to have been in Judea when he heard that John was cast into prison, and when he heard it he departed into Galilee. Nazareth had been the home of his childhood, but he now left it and went to dwell in Capernaum and from that time he began to preach the same thing in Galilee that John had preached in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [Matt. iii: 1, 2](#).

When John's preparatory work was ended and the fullness of time came for Jesus to enter upon, and continue the proclamation of the approaching kingdom it was necessary that his apostles be selected to carry forward this preparatory work, hence Jesus "came to his own, and his own received him not; but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." [John i: 11, 12](#).

Jesus came to his own, who? His own, the Jews, says every one at once. It is an old maxim, that "what everybody says must be true," and we freely admit that a construction put upon a Scripture, by everybody, for a long time, should be abandoned only after very careful examination; but when so examined and found erroneous it should be given up, however hoary with years or honorable of parentage. This has been the universally received construction put upon this passage for so long that it will be almost if not quite impossible to get a faithful re-hearing on the subject. Many are publicly committed, and they must not be expected to go back on themselves. We once accepted the common theory without examination, but it does not hurt us at all to say we were wrong, for we are most thoroughly [12] convinced that it is not the thought, and we have been so convinced for several years.

John came to make ready a people prepared for the Lord; did he prepare them? Yes. Did he prepare the Jewish nation? No, only a part of it. How did John prepare those he made ready? He gave them knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins. Were these the Lord's people? Yes, for it is said he (John,) gave knowledge of salvation to his (the Lord's) people. Here those that John prepared are called the Lord's people. To whom did Jesus come? He came to his own. Well, what is the difference between his own to whom he came--the people John made ready, prepared for him, and his people to whom he gave knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins?

When Jesus came to select his apostles did he come to those made ready for him by John? He did, and we know that some of his apostles were John's disciples, and there is strong reason for believing that all of the twelve were, and perhaps the seventy also. When Jesus came to his own did he come to the Jews? No, he did not need to come to them, for his mother was a Jewess, and he had been among them all his life. Had the inspired writer been seeking to guard us against this very thought, we see not how he could have selected language better calculated to protect us than the language employed. Let us look at it a little. He tells us that *his own* to whom Jesus came *were born* (past tense equivalent to had been born) "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," ([verse 13](#).) Bear in mind these *were born* when Jesus came to them, not of blood; had not every Jew been born of blood? If not, who had? Not born of the will of the flesh--had not every Jew been born of the [13] will of the flesh just like other people? Not of the will of man--had not all Jews been born of the will of man just as other men. But *his own* to whom Jesus came had been born in a different sense--how? Born of God. Yes, but born of God, how? By being born of, or complying with that system of means which God sent John to preach to them. We are, if Christians, children of God to-day, begotten of him. Begotten of him through the gospel. The gospel presents a system of means by compliance with which we become God's children, then why is it not true that John's disciples had all been born of God when Jesus came to them as his own, by having been born of that system of means which God sent John to preach to them, and with which they had complied? They had believed, repented, confessed their sins, and had been baptized by John in the river of Jordan for the remission of sins, and thus had knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins, hence were "his people," "his own" to whom he came.

They all obligated themselves to believe on Christ when he should come, but when he did come many of them did not receive him or believe on him and hence were condemned already because they believed not in the name of the only begotten Son of God, but had forfeited the obligation they assumed when John baptized them, by not believing on Jesus when he came.

But to those who kept the obligation assumed when baptized by John, and believed on Christ when he came, as they covenanted to do, Jesus gave *power* or *privilege* to become sons of God when the family should be organized on the day of Pentecost without anything more. They had believed, repented, been baptized for [14] remission of sins and had knowledge of salvation, what need had they of anything more, unless they, in some way, forfeited the privileges they had?

The disciples, made by John, were ready for companionship with Jesus, and when they saw him, they followed him, and became his disciples without anything more. "Again, the next day after, John stood and two of his disciples, and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. . . . One of the two which heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother." [John i: 35-40](#).

Thus we see that those made ready by John were his people to whom Jesus came, of whom his apostles were selected; and, if they were faithful, had power or privilege of becoming sons of God when the family should be organized. These, and those made by Jesus after John's death, became the "charter members" of the church on the day of Pentecost. One hundred and twenty of them were, with one accord, in one place, but they were restrained from operating until endowed with power from on high. When the Spirit came and took up its abode in the body, the church or spiritual temple stood forth. Then Peter preached, made converts, and they were added to the church daily. The church was established on the day of Pentecost, but it was a church before Peter began to preach on that occasion. Adam was a man in all his members, before God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, but until then there were no vital manifestations; so the church existed in its material before the day of Pentecost; but, until the Spirit came to give it *power* and *life*, neither power nor life was manifested. When Jesus became King in Zion--head over all things to the church and the spirit [15] vitalized the body, it went to work, before a convert was made, on the birthday of the church.

The temple of Solomon was typical of the church (see [1 Cor. iii: 16, 17](#)), and the temple was built of prepared stones, made ready for position before it was brought from the quarry, so that there was neither hammer, nor ax, nor tool of iron heard on the house while it was in building. [1 Kings vi: 7](#). So the spiritual temple was made of prepared material, *not a piece had to be worked over* before it was ready for position in the temple or spiritual family organized on that day. It needed nothing, but the Holy Spirit.

The very fact that John gave the approach of the kingdom as a reason why the people should repent shows that the *reformation enjoined by him had reference to citizenship in the coming kingdom*.

But if the disciples of John had to be baptized on or after Pentecost to enter the church of family of God, then the power or privilege of becoming the sons of God given to those who kept their obligation by believing on him when he came, was mere sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. The promise was meaningless to them, for they were not a whit in advance of the murderers of Jesus, for, even *they* could come into the church in that way, on the day of Pentecost and afterward. If this theory be true, then *John's ministry was a failure*; and notwithstanding all the miracles attending it, his *mission* seems to us a most ridiculous farce; therefore true it cannot be.

But were not some of John's disciples baptized after Pentecost? We answer, not one. Let him who so affirms show *who, when* and *where*. Were not the disciples found by Paul at Ephesus rebaptized? Yes, but it remains to be shown that they were John's disciples. Let [16] us see. "And a certain Jew called Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in the spirit he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue, whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." [Acts xviii: 24-26](#). Now, were the *disciples made by Apollos* the disciples of John? Surely not. We may well imagine the correction given by Aquila and Priscilla: "John's baptism was valid in its day, but John obligated those baptized by him to believe in a Savior to come, for then he had not come; but since he has come, died for the sins of the world, entered the grave and brought about a resurrection from the dead for all the race, and having all authority in heaven and on earth, commands penitent believers to be baptized into the sublime names of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *This baptism has superseded all others* and is in force now, why be baptizing with John's baptism setting aside that ordained by Christ?"

The moment they said they had not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit, Paul knew there was something wrong with their baptism, for the name Holy Spirit was a part of the formula into which they would have been baptized, if it had been correctly done; hence his question "unto what then were you baptized? And they said, unto John's baptism." This explains the whole matter. John's baptism was valid until superseded, since that of course it is not. Were a man baptized with it to-day it would be just as good, and no better, than the baptism of those disciples found by [17] Paul at Ephesus, but *he would surely not be a disciple of John, neither were they*.

But it is said John's baptism was simply that Christ should be made manifest to Israel. Well, if this was its only object, then it was not necessary to baptize any others but Jesus. The passage reads, "And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not; but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God." [John i: 31-34](#). *At his baptism* he was made manifest to Israel, because the Spirit abode upon him, and God acknowledged him as his Son; *but was it necessary to baptize the multitudes for this*

purpose? Nay verily, they were baptized for the remission of sins to fit them for position in the kingdom, with those who might come into it on the day of Pentecost and after that time. What they were commanded to do by John *was to be done because the kingdom was at hand*, and what bearing could its coming have on what they were required to do unless they were doing it to prepare them for position in the kingdom when it should come?

But as John's disciples were baptized by him for the remission of sins, and as Peter commanded the Pentecostians to be baptized *for the remission of sins*, for what should John's disciples be baptized who had been baptized for remission already? O, they had to be baptized to get into the kingdom, into which they could not enter when baptized by John because it did not exist. This [18] goes upon the presumption that all the material used in the construction of a house must go in at the same door through which the house is entered after its construction. In short, this theory ignores John's mission entirely, hence his miraculous conception, birth, and fullness with the Holy Spirit from birth, and the multitudes flocking to him to be baptized of him, was all much ado about nothing, for he was indeed but *a reed shaken by the wind*.

We must bear in mind that the teaching of John and Jesus was chiefly preparatory, prospective, hence in parables and figures which gave place in due time to literal realities; but if we undertake to make *literals out of figures* we are likely to get into trouble.

We are sometimes told that there was not time enough to have immersed the three thousand baptized on the day of Pentecost, hence they were not immersed.

By mathematical calculation it can be shown that there was ample time to have baptized twice the number; but before making this objection it might be well for those making to prove the *three thousand were baptized on that day*. "Does not the Bible say that three thousand were baptized the same day?" No, it says no such thing. Well what does it say? It says that as many as gladly received his word were baptized. Yes, just that many--no more. And we remark in passing, that infants could not have gladly received the word, and as none were baptized that could not so receive it, it follows that not an infant was baptized on that occasion. Is it not a little strange, that among so many there was not one dear little babe baptized?

But to return. As many as gladly received his word were baptized--how many did thus receive it? We do not know--does any one?

But three thousand were added unto them the same [19] day; were they added without baptism? No, none were added without being baptized, unless they had been baptized before. But if there were any there who had been baptized by John, or by the disciples of Jesus under their first commission, they were ready to be added without baptism. Were any such there? Most likely there were. We can scarcely conclude that, of all the multitudes so baptized, only one hundred and twenty were in that city and country. In arguing the resurrection of Jesus, Paul says, "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve;

after that he was seen of more than five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep." [1 Cor. xv: 5, 6](#). Here are more than five hundred brethren who saw the Lord after His resurrection: and how many there were that did not see Him, we have no means of knowing. Would not these have been as likely to be brought together by the things noised abroad on that occasion, as the rabble? These were doubtless expecting remarkable events; and would have been, we think, even more likely to come to the scene than others. Then they were ready to be added without baptism; and these five hundred would have reduced the number to twenty-five hundred. And how many more of that class there were, no one can tell. Hence no man can tell how many were baptized that day.

We insist that the construction of the language raises a presumption that *not all* of those added were baptized that day. Why not say, "Three thousand gladly received his word, and were baptized, and added to them the same day." This would have stated the case without ambiguity, and we conclude that the only reason it was not so expressed, was, that the *fact was not that way*.

"As many as gladly received his word were baptized." [20] This is a complete affirmation in itself. Then follows another. "The same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." This is a full and complete affirmation. Now why make the two affirmations while one would have been so much shorter and more clear. As stated before, the presumption is that the fact was not that way.

But our object in introducing this thought here is to call attention to the fact that those previously baptized by John, or the disciples in preparing material for the Kingdom were ready for position in the church without a second baptism. How many were baptized that day, we do not know; and we are quite sure that no one else knows.

Other minor matters might be mentioned, but we think we have struck the most important. We are not vain enough to suppose that our positions will all be accepted without criticism, but we are sure we have Christian love and patience enough to enable us to meekly hear anything that may come. [21]