

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS

XVI. Israel's Preparation For The Messiah By His Forerunner

B. The Encouraging Message Of Messiah's Forerunner

(Matthew 3:11-12; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:15-18)

I. Introduction

- A. Israel's last Old Testament prophet was John the Baptist, and God gave him the ministry of preparing Israel for her Messiah. That preparatory ministry is presented in Matthew 3:1-12, Mark 1:1-8 and Luke 3:1-18.
- B. As that forerunner, John began by denouncing Israel's sins, but he continued by encouraging Israel's people in predicting the promised blessings of the Messiah, so we view these passages for our insight and application:

II. The Encouraging Message Of Messiah's Forerunner, Matthew 3:11-12; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:15-18.

- A. The message of John the Baptist was not only "a scathing denunciation of sin and urgent exhortations to repentance but also a message of hope and promise." (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1981, p. 90) Luke 3:15 NIV states that the people of Israel "were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ," the Messiah.
- B. This positive hope in the people was not a surprising hope on their part even when John had been preaching a negative denunciation of their sins, for "ancient Rabbinic writings" had perused the Old Testament to find all of its predictions about the Messiah. They included His exaltation over Moses and the angels, His sufferings, derision, violent death for His people, His work on behalf of the living and the dead, His spiritual redemption from sin and restoration of Israel, the opposition He would face from Gentiles, their partial judgment and conversion, the prevalence of His Law and the universal blessings of His kingdom. (Ibid., p. 91-92, citing Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, 1912, volume 1, pp. 163-265)
- C. John thus responded to the messianic hope of his Hebrew hearers, addressing his connection to the Messiah Who was to come, and telling of His kingdom blessings, Matthew 3:11-12; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:15-18:
 - 1. John acknowledged that he himself baptized the people of Israel with water, but One Who was mightier than he was would come, the latchet of Whose shoes John confessed he was not worthy to unlatch as His slave, an obvious reference to the righteous Messiah of Whom John was the forerunner, Luke 3:16a.
 - 2. The prophet John the Baptist added that the Messiah would baptize the people of Israel with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Luke 3:16b), both of which had been predicted in the Old Testament (as follows):
 - a. Joel 2:28 with Ezekiel 36:25-27 predicted the baptism of Israel with the Holy Spirit, what would be fulfilled for the nation in the latter days in preparation for the Messianic Kingdom. A partial fulfillment of this baptism occurred on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-13 and marked those of us who are brought into the Body of Christ, the Church, by faith in Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:13 with Ephesians 3:1-10.
 - b. The baptism with fire refers to judgment, what is clarified in Luke 3:17 where John predicted that Messiah would thoroughly purge His threshing floor of the chaff of unbelievers and save His grain of believers for the Kingdom. This judgment was predicted in Malachi 3:2-5 where God was foretold to prepare Israel for the Kingdom by purifying the sons of Levi to offer righteous offerings, to punish sorcerers, adulterers, false swearers, and those who oppressed their employees, widows, orphans, and foreigners. This judgment will occur at Christ's Second Coming. (Ibid., Pentecost, p. 91)
- D. Luke 3:18 NIV asserts, "And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them." Indeed, John "preached the good news," with Luke here using the verb *euaggelizo* (Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 317-318) to tell how John proclaimed the encouraging, good news of the promise of Messiah's arrival and kingdom!

Lesson: *Not only did John the Baptist strongly denounce sin in Israel, but he also proclaimed the refreshingly encouraging, hopeful news of Messiah's arrival to present His Messianic Kingdom of blessing that the Old Testament had long predicted and to which Israel held in hopeful, positive expectation.*

Application: *(1) When we present the Gospel of Christ today, may we like John the Baptist balance the condemnation of sin that is addressed in the Gospel with its equally important hope of eternal life by faith in Christ. (2) May we realize that God's blessing is always dependent upon the complete judgment of sin, not only positionally in seeing unsaved people come to faith in Christ, but also in the practical sense of living the Christian life. (3) Accordingly, may we NOT SHY away from facing our sin as believers today, but FACE it and DEAL with it through the cross of Christ for God's great blessing!*