

# THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL FORETOLD

**BIBLE TEXT** : Isaiah 40:1-31; 52:7-10; Matthew 3:1-3; 11:2-15

LESSON 352 Senior Course

**MEMORY VERSE:** "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations: and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14).

## **BIBLE TEXT in King James Version**

### **Isaiah 40:1-31**

<sup>1</sup> Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

<sup>2</sup> Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup> The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

<sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

<sup>6</sup> The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh *is* grass, and all the goodliness thereof *is* as the flower of the field:

<sup>7</sup> The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people *is* grass.

<sup>8</sup> The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

<sup>9</sup> O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift *it* up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

<sup>10</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong *hand*, and his arm

## **BIBLE REFERENCES:**

### **I The Mission of Christ's Forerunner**

1. A message of comfort, written in the prophetic future, was sent to Israel, Isaiah 40:1, 2.
2. John the Baptist was to come as the Lord's forerunner, or herald, Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:1-3;

#### **Malachi 3:1**

<sup>1</sup> Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

#### **Mark 1:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;

<sup>2</sup> As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

<sup>3</sup> The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

#### **Luke 1:13-17**

<sup>13</sup> But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

<sup>14</sup> And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

<sup>15</sup> For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

<sup>16</sup> And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

<sup>17</sup> And he shall go before him 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.

#### **John 1:19-30**

<sup>19</sup> And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

<sup>20</sup> And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.

<sup>21</sup> And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

<sup>22</sup> Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?

<sup>23</sup> He said, I *am* the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.

<sup>24</sup> And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.

<sup>25</sup> And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

<sup>26</sup> John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;

<sup>27</sup> He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

shall rule for him: behold, his reward *is* with him, and his work before him.

<sup>11</sup> He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom, *and* shall gently lead those that are with young.

<sup>12</sup> Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

<sup>13</sup> Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or *being* his counsellor hath taught him?

<sup>14</sup> With whom took he counsel, and *who* instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?

<sup>15</sup> Behold, the nations *are* as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.

<sup>16</sup> And Lebanon *is* not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.

<sup>17</sup> All nations before him *are* as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

<sup>18</sup> To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?

<sup>19</sup> The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains.

<sup>20</sup> He that *is* so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree *that* will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, *that* shall not be moved.

<sup>28</sup> These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

<sup>29</sup> The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

<sup>30</sup> This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

3. John's coming was to introduce the new dispensation of the Gospel, Isaiah 40:4-8; Matthew 3:5-12; 11:2-15;

**Mark 1:4-8**

<sup>4</sup> John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

<sup>5</sup> And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>6</sup> And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey;

<sup>7</sup> And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

<sup>8</sup> I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

**Luke 1:57-80**

<sup>57</sup> Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

<sup>58</sup> And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

<sup>59</sup> And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

<sup>60</sup> And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

<sup>61</sup> And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

<sup>62</sup> And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

<sup>63</sup> And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

<sup>64</sup> And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue *loosed*, and he spake, and praised God.

<sup>65</sup> And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea.

<sup>66</sup> And all they that heard *them* laid *them* up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

<sup>67</sup> And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

<sup>68</sup> Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

<sup>69</sup> And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

<sup>70</sup> As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

<sup>71</sup> That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

<sup>72</sup> To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

<sup>73</sup> The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

<sup>74</sup> That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,

<sup>75</sup> In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

<sup>76</sup> And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to

<sup>21</sup> Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?

<sup>22</sup> *It is* he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof *are* as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

<sup>23</sup> That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.

<sup>24</sup> Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.

<sup>25</sup> To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these *things*, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that *he is* strong in power; not one faileth.

<sup>27</sup> Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

<sup>28</sup> Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, *that* the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? *there is* no searching of his understanding.

<sup>29</sup> He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth strength.

<sup>30</sup> Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

<sup>31</sup> But they that wait upon the

prepare his ways;

<sup>77</sup> To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

<sup>78</sup> Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

<sup>79</sup> To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

<sup>80</sup> And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

#### **Luke 3:7-18**

<sup>7</sup> Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

<sup>8</sup> Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin 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.

<sup>9</sup> And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

<sup>10</sup> And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

<sup>11</sup> He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

<sup>12</sup> Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?

<sup>13</sup> And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

<sup>14</sup> And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse *any* falsely; and be content with your wages.

<sup>15</sup> And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;

<sup>16</sup> John answered, saying unto *them* all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

<sup>17</sup> Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

<sup>18</sup> And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

#### **John 1:30-37**

<sup>30</sup> This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

<sup>31</sup> And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

<sup>32</sup> And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

<sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

<sup>35</sup> Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples;

<sup>36</sup> And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

<sup>37</sup> And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

## **II The Gospel Dispensation and Its Culmination**

LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.

### **Isaiah 52:7-10**

<sup>7</sup> How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

<sup>8</sup> Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.

<sup>9</sup> Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

### **Matthew 3:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

<sup>2</sup> And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

<sup>3</sup> For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

### **Matthew 11:2-15**

<sup>2</sup> Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

<sup>3</sup> And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and

1. This transitory life makes the spreading of the Gospel message imperative, Isaiah 40:6-8;

#### **1 Peter 1:24**

<sup>24</sup> For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

#### **1 Peter 1:25**

<sup>25</sup> But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

2. God's instrument for the promulgation of the Gospel -- the Church -- must be zealously occupied in the work, Isaiah 40:9-11; 52:7-10;

#### **John 4:35**

<sup>35</sup> Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

#### **Acts 1:8**

<sup>8</sup> But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

#### **1 Corinthians 9:19-22**

<sup>19</sup> For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

<sup>20</sup> And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

<sup>21</sup> To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

<sup>22</sup> To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some.

#### **James 5:20**

<sup>20</sup> Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

#### **Jude 1:23**

<sup>23</sup> And others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

3. The omnipotence of God and the insignificance of man is shown, Isaiah 40:12-17;

#### **Isaiah 43:13**

<sup>13</sup> Yea, before the day *was* I *am* he; and *there is* none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?

#### **Revelation 19:6**

<sup>6</sup> And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

#### **1 Chronicles 29:12**

<sup>12</sup> Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all.

#### **Job 26:12**

<sup>12</sup> He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud.

#### **Psalms 115:3**

<sup>3</sup> But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.

#### **Matthew 19:26**

<sup>26</sup> But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.



see:

<sup>5</sup> The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

<sup>6</sup> And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

<sup>7</sup> And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

<sup>8</sup> But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft *clothing* are in kings' houses.

<sup>9</sup> But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

<sup>10</sup> For this is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

<sup>11</sup> Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

<sup>12</sup> And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

<sup>13</sup> For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

<sup>14</sup> And if ye will receive *it*, this is Elias, which was for to come.

<sup>15</sup> He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

4. Man's idolatry and pride are brought to nought, Isaiah 40:18-24;

**Daniel 4:37**

<sup>37</sup> Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works *are* truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

**1 Samuel 5:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod.

<sup>2</sup> When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon.

<sup>3</sup> And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon *was* fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.

<sup>4</sup> And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon *was* fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands *were* cut off upon the threshold; only *the stump* of Dagon was left to him.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.

<sup>6</sup> But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, *even* Ashdod and the coasts thereof.

<sup>7</sup> And when the men of Ashdod saw that *it was* so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god.

<sup>8</sup> They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about *thither*.

<sup>9</sup> And it was so, that, after they had carried it about, the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts.

<sup>10</sup> Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people.

<sup>11</sup> So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.

<sup>12</sup> And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods: and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

5. The glory of God and the Christian's hope are stated, Isaiah 40:25-31;

**Psalms 19:1-14**

<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

<sup>2</sup> Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> *There is* no speech nor language, *where* their voice is not heard.

<sup>4</sup> Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun,

<sup>5</sup> Which *is* as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.

<sup>6</sup> His going forth *is* from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

<sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple.

<sup>8</sup> The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes.

<sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether.

<sup>10</sup> More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover by them *is* thy servant warned: *and* in keeping of them *there is* great reward.

<sup>12</sup> Who can understand *his* errors? cleanse thou me from secret *faults*.

<sup>13</sup> Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

<sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

#### **Psalm 89:6**

<sup>6</sup> For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? *who* among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?

#### **Psalm 73:25**

<sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven *but thee?* and *there is* none upon earth *that* I desire beside thee.

### **NOTES:**

Isaiah's beautiful and powerful messages are sometimes addressed directly to the wayward Israelites, and at other times they are heralded to all the world. Since upon the authority of the inspired Word, we know that the opening of the 40th chapter is a prophecy of the coming of John the Baptist, we may safely say that the remainder of the chapter is one of the beautiful messages preached to all nations, proclaiming the Gospel and the coming Messiah for whom John was sent to prepare the way.

### **The Message of Comfort**

This 40th chapter of Isaiah is opened with a message of comfort to Jerusalem and to the Jews, conditioned, of course, upon their reception of Jesus Christ as their Messiah; but the world knows that the Jews as a whole refused the Son of God when He came to earth. Refused by the Jews, the message of comfort, the Gospel, was directed especially to the Gentiles, resulting in millions of souls being born into the Kingdom of Christ, receiving the comfort, of sins forgiven and power to live above sin in this life with the hope of eternal life in the realm beyond the grave.

The time is coming, and no doubt very soon, when the Jews will see Jesus Christ revealed as He comes back to earth to set up His Throne to reign in righteousness and power for one thousand years. All the living Jews in that day will lay down their arms of rebellion and receive and welcome Jesus as their Messiah. In that day it can be truly said: "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:2). The sufferings privations, and

persecutions that the Jews have endured through the years could have been avoided, and God's comfort could have been theirs, had they but received Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

The same truth applies to the individual Gentile heart today. The word of God is either an instrument by which to obtain eternal life, or it will surely be an instrument of death to the soul. The man who refuses to serve Christ and obey the Word of God invites all sorts of troubles upon himself in this life, and, if he persists in his rebellion, he will receive eternal punishment in the lake of fire; whereas the man who freely serves Christ has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. God's message of comfort is directed to the whole world, but it serves those only who will receive it.

### **Spirit and Power of Elijah**

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Malachi 4:5). Jesus, in speaking of this anticipation of the Jews, said: "I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them." Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist (Matthew 17:12, 13). The angel spoke prophetically of John: "He shall go before him 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 1:17).

Why necessarily the spirit and power of Elijah? Elijah was the representative prophet of the Old Testament, just as Moses was representative of the Law. John, coming in the spirit and power of the prophets' representative, fills an official place, closing up the period of the prophets, and stands on the threshold of the New Dispensation. "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16).

John the Baptist was guided and directed by the same Spirit Elijah had, and their missions were somewhat the same — to turn the hearts of the Children of Israel back to their God. Elijah prayed: "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (I Kings 18:37). The angel said of John the Baptist: "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God" (Luke 1:16). Elijah and John the Baptist lived similar lives — solitary and in the wilderness, requiring none of the refinements of ordinary living and demanding little for physical sustenance. Both were fiery men with a burning message from God; both men stood before kings and rulers to denounce sin; and both men were persecuted as the result of their fearless proclamations. Jezebel threatened and tried to take the life of Elijah, while Herodias schemed until she finally secured the death of John the Baptist. So similar were the characteristics of Elijah and John the Baptist that the Jews sent priests and Levites to ask him if he were the Christ or Elias, but said that he was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord" (John 1:23). Surely John the Baptist came in the power and spirit of Elijah.

### **No Respecter**

God is no respecter of persons. Any man who is willing to pay the price can really do exploits for God in the Gospel. Dollars and cents in themselves will buy nothing of God's power or favour, for God requires consecrated lives through which He can work. Elijah and John the Baptist sold out self and their own desires, and they

treasured God's gifts of righteousness, mercy, and power. Jesus said of John the Baptist: "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" (Matthew 11:7). No, John was not a reed shaken with the wind, for John's Spirit-filled message was firm and absolute with nothing wavering. If John had wavered, the people would not have left their homes, work, and cities to come to the wilderness to hear his message. The people did come — proof enough that if a preacher has enough of the Spirit of God upon his message, he will have an audience to hear him.

Jesus continued the question, "A man clothed in soft raiment?" No, those who wear soft clothing are more apt to be in a king's house, not labouring in the vineyard of the Lord's harvest. The Gospel demands that those who receive it must be willing to sacrifice. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15). Jesus concluded the question, "A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. . . . Verily I say unto you, . . . there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:9, 11). He that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven — anyone who is truly saved through Jesus' Blood and living according to the Word of God — is greater than John the Baptist. Thus Jesus pointed out the high calling and very responsible place that the true Christian holds in God's great and wonderful plan. Are we as Christians living up to God's expectations of us?

### **Urgency**

The Spirit of the Lord, speaking through the mouth of the prophet, showed the uncertainty of life and the urgency of the Gospel message. Mankind is likened unto grass, and his life expectancy as the flower of the field. From the standpoint of eternity, the above statement is especially true. Without God's love and mercy to spare and protect the sons of men, none would live out their allotted days. It is imperative to proclaim the Gospel message with its promise of eternal life through the atonement made through Jesus' sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection.

God has a chosen instrument — His redeemed people — with which to spread the Gospel throughout the earth. The good news of salvation has rung in the hearts of men and has been proclaimed in many forms and ways from the day that Jesus ascended into Heaven. The first band of Christian believers way truly small, but their activity, power, and influence were soon felt throughout the nations. Today the cause of Christ is still of uttermost importance, not only to individual Christians but also to all the earth's two and a half billion inhabitants. Every human being is invested with a soul that will live throughout eternity in one of two places — either heaven or hell. To be certain that his eternal home will be with God in Heaven, a person must have faith in Jesus Christ and be obedient to all His commands. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The urgency of the Gospel message can thus be seen, and the responsibility of publishing the Good News falls upon those who have received the love of God in their hearts.

### **Insignificant, yet Immortal**

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psalm 8:3, 4). The Prophet Isaiah commented, too, upon the mighty works of the omnipotent God and the insignificance of



man. "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing" (Isaiah 40:15). The truth is shown that man is very small among God's creations; and, unless God condescended to take recognition of man, there would be nothing that man could do to gain the attention or favour of the Creator. But God does take recognition of mankind — recognition far beyond even that which man takes of himself. God sustains the individual lives, and He notes the thoughts and actions of each life. "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret things, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:12).

### **Encouragement**

If man had to secure his salvation through his own good works, or if man had to rely upon his own merit to go to Heaven, the cause would be hopeless; but the true Christian relies upon God and his hope is in God's plan of salvation. "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear" (Isaiah 59:1). "I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right" (Isaiah 45:19). "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:28-31). Oh, glorious promise! Oh, happy people who walk in the light and will of the Lord God! How can anyone refuse the Lord's wondrous Gospel call?

### **QUESTIONS**

1. In what way did the prophet promise comfort to the Children of Israel and to Jerusalem?
2. Who was "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness"?
3. How did the voice in the wilderness fit in with Jesus and the Gospel plan?
4. How is the briefness of men's lives described in this lesson?
5. Why is it so important that a person's life should be devoted to God's service while man lives upon earth?
6. What does the word "omnipotent" mean?
7. Point out several verses from this lesson to show that our God is omnipotent.
8. With what are the nations compared, in the sight of God?
9. What encouragement is given to those who will trust in God?