***A STUDY OF MATTHEW***

 ***PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD"***

 ***Tom D Kat 2014***

  **Lesson 4**

Thirty years after Jesus was born, another dramatic figure appeared on the scene;

 ***(Matt 3:1-3)'In those days John the Baptist (In Hebrew; Yochanan the Immerser) came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND!"***

Matthew went on to explain:

 ***"for this is he who was spoken of the prophet Isaiah, saying:"***, ***"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight paths for Him!" (Isaiah 40:3)***

 ***EXPECTATION OF THE MESSIAH AT A FEVER PITCH***

At that time in Israel, there was much religious stirring going on, expectation of the Messiah was at a fever pitch! Why was that? Because they could count!! Daniel, whose understanding of the "the time of the end" came directly from God, had given them a TIME-LINE! A time line we still, examine, today, to help us understand the "time of the end" that is still future. The Arch-Angel Gabriel appeared to Daniel in response to his intercession on behalf of Israel, and revealed to him; that:

 ***(Dan 9:24-26) Seventy (Shabuim)) Weeks (a common Hebrew expression meaning "weeks of years") has been decreed for you for your people and your Holy City, (Jerusalem) to finish the transgression, for making an end to sin, to make atonement (forgiveness) for bringing in everlasting righteousness or (justice), for setting the seal on vision and prophet, and to anoint the most Holy place." you are to know and discern that seven weeks of years will elapse from, the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, until the Messiah the Prince, presents Himself in the Temple, as King! Then after 62 weeks (it the city) will remain built for another 62 weeks. Then after 62 weeks, Meshach, will be killed, and have no one! The people of a prince yet to come, will destroy the City and the Sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood."***

This prophecy was written down by Daniel Centuries before Christ was born. A decree to rebuild and restore the City of Jerusalem was issued by King Artaxerxes of Medo-Persia in 445 BC. (The previous decree, was issued by Cyrus giving permission to rebuild the Temple only) The decree to restore Jerusalem; began the countdown, 490 years later to the Day! Jesus was coming down the Mount of Olives mounted on a donkey, and the people were proclaiming Him their King!! That is why Jesus told the Pharisees, who had become upset by what the people were saying, "If they don't say it the stones will cry out". Because that was the day Daniel had foretold, and He HAD to be proclaimed King THAT DAY. You may want to go and re-read the story in Matthew 21 and Luke 19, now that you have this understanding.

The people in Israel KNEW that the time was close for the Messiah to appear, they also knew that the prophet Malachi had told them that God would send the prophet Elijah BEFORE the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. Malachi was the last prophet they had had and it had now been 400 years since there had been any prophet of God to speak to the people.

So; can you imagine the excitement when John showed up; looking and sounding like Elijah, the prophet, and saying; ***"THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS*** ***NEAR!"*** People streamed out from Jerusalem, walking 20 miles, and from the surrounding areas; great crowds came to hear John and to repent of their sins and be baptized in the River Jordan. It was a real revival; At least that is what we in the Western church would call it. Something that we in the protestant churches often do not realize is that full immersion was a common practice among the Jewish people. They experienced many immersions to restore them to ritual purity. John was adding a new concept; that of cleansing from a sinful condition in their hearts, on the occasion of repentance, which dovetailed nicely with what they already understood. It is perhaps a great loss that we in the modern church do not connect baptism with repentance in a stronger way. In theearly church, repentance was the REASON for being baptized. ***(Acts 2:38 Peter said REPENT and be baptized)***