

Luke continues to follow John the Baptist's story as the forerunner of Christ until it intersects with Jesus' baptism, which inaugurated His public ministry. John's mission was to prepare the people's hearts for the kingdom of Christ by calling them to repentance and his ministry reached its apex when Jesus came to him to be baptized, as confirmed by the God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, 2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

Luke continues his pattern of specifying the time frame of the events he is describing. He identifies who was ruling in Rome, the governor of Judea, the kings over Galilee and surrounding regions. He also identifies who was the high priest at the time, naming Annas and Caiaphas. Annas had served as high priest until A.D. 15, when he was deposed by Roman officials. However, he had been replaced by his son-in-law Caiaphas. Officially Annas was not the high priest but he still "called the shots" through his Caiaphas and his influence can be seen by the fact that when Jesus was arrested, He was taken to Annas first before being taken to Caiaphas. It was in this time frame that John the Baptist began his ministry, preaching in the wilderness.

3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;

John's preaching ministry called for people to be baptized as a sign that they were repenting from their sins. Because he was calling people to be baptized, he stayed near the Jordan River so that he could perform the baptisms. The word Greek word translated "remission" means "to be forgiven or pardoned." This baptism did not produce or earn the forgiveness since that would be salvation by works. Rather, baptism was a public statement that the one being baptized had repented and had been forgiven of their sins. John was preparing the hearts of the people to receive their Messiah and His kingdom.

4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways *shall be* made smooth; 6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Luke quotes Isaiah 40:3-5 to demonstrate that John was fulfilling that prophecy by preparing the way of the Messiah. John also confessed that this was what he was doing when the Jewish leaders sent representatives to ask John what his prophetic identity was (John 1:19-23). This is also exactly what the angel Gabriel predicted that John would do (Luke 1:17).

7 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? 8 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.

"Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him" – According to Matthew 3:7-10, John addresses the words that are quoted here to the Pharisees and Sadducees. Apparently John was skeptical of the sincerity of these two groups, with good reason. These two groups would be among Jesus' primary critics and antagonists, demonstrating that seeking the truth was not one of their priorities.

"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" – With a bit of sarcasm, John is asking the Pharisees and Sadducees why they even bothered to come to a preacher who was preaching a baptism of repentance. The "wrath to come" refers to God's wrath on sinful, unrepentant humanity at the coming of Christ and John does not believe that these people had come to him because of a sincere desire to repent.

"Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" – John challenges them to show the evidence that they have repented of their sins. This evidence would include a changing of their ways to leave their sins behind.

"and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father" – Many Jews believed that their salvation was automatically guaranteed because they were physical descendants of Abraham, regardless of the state of their heart. They thought that they would be beneficiaries of the promises that God made to Abraham simply because they descended from Abraham and that obedience through faith was optional. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that this idea was not true (**Rom. 9:6-8** "*Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed*").

"for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" – God didn't need these unrepentant Jews to be able to keep His promises to Abraham. If He wanted to do so, God could create descendants of Abraham from the stones that were lying on the ground. John's point is that repentance from sin is the evidence of God's redemptive work in a person's heart and has nothing to do with bloodline.

9 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.

"And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees" – God is ready to commence His judgment on unrepentant sinners through the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth.

"every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" – When God's judgment commences, those who do not demonstrate the "fruits worthy of repentance" (a changed life) will suffer the consequences in hell.

10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 11 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.

Conviction had fallen on the people and they asked how they should respond. John answers, citing the evidences of faith and repentance: a love for your neighbor. He instructs that those with a surplus should give to those with nothing instead of selfishly hoarding it for themselves. These instructions (vs. 11-14) are consistent with what God had already instructed the Jews to do in OT scripture: **Micah 6:8** “*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*”

12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

Publicans were the tax collectors of the day and were hated because they worked for the Roman government to collect taxes from their own countrymen. Often publicans would charge more than what the Roman government required and kept the surplus for themselves. John instructs these publicans to no longer cheat people and collect only what the government required from the tax payers.

14 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.

The “soldiers” of that day were likely employed to enforce law and order and obedience to the government, either the Roman government or the local Jewish leaders. We might look at them as police officers. It appears that they would often use their position intimidate and bully people (the Greek word for “violence” means “to shake; to terrify”), and falsely accuse people of criminal deeds in order to extort money from them. John instructs them to no longer do these things and to be content with the wages paid by their employer. Soldiers were often not paid very well.

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

The Greek word for “expectation” refers to the anticipation that the people had because they recognized that God was working through John. He was the first prophet to speak for God since Malachi’s prophesies some 450 years prior. So they were waiting with anticipation for what God would do next, and they “mused” (or wondered) whether or not John was the Christ (the Messiah).

Verses 16-18: John declares that he is not the Christ because there was One greater than himself that was coming. John was the spokesman but this greater One was coming to execute judgment and the people should get ready.

19 But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, 20 Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.

Herodias had married her uncle Philip, an incestuous arrangement. In an act that compounded this sin, Herod, the brother of Philip, had convinced Herodias to leave Philip and marry him, which violated Lev. 18:16, which forbid marriage or sexual relations with your brother’s wife. John had rebuked Herod for this (Matt. 14:3-4) and in response Herod “added yet this above all” (in addition to all his other sins) by having John arrested and thrown into prison. John’s arrest would happen sometime later after the events of vs. 21-22.

21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, 22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

“Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized” – As John was baptizing the people who were coming in repentance of their sins, Jesus joined them to also be baptized. The Holy Spirit had revealed to John Who this was that had come to him to be baptized and he protested since he didn’t think Jesus needed to be baptized. However, Jesus convinced John that it was a righteous thing for Him to be baptized (Matt. 3:13-15).

“and praying” – Only Luke’s gospel tells us that Jesus was praying when He was being baptized. Jesus prayed about everything that He did (**1 Th. 5:17** “*Pray without ceasing.*”). How much more should we include prayer in all that we do?

“the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him” – The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the physical form of a dove, which was a picture of gentleness (Matt. 10:16). Jesus already had the Spirit upon Him, but this event signified the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.

“and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased” – In addition to the visual confirmation of Jesus when the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, God the Father also gave an auditory confirmation by speaking from heaven. Here we have all three persons of the Trinity being present at once as distinct Persons.

23 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was *the* son of Heli,

“And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age” – Thirty years old is the customary age of entering the office of a prophet and was also the age at which the culture considered a man to be a full grown adult. Jesus may not have been taken seriously if he had been younger.

“being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was *the* son of Heli” – Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, and commentators believe that the genealogy listed through the remainder of the chapter represents Mary’s lineage going back to David and beyond to Adam.