

CONCERNING THE WAY

January 10, 2012

LESSON 124: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



Chapter 3

In chapters 1 and 2 Luke gives us brief stories of the birth of John the Baptist and birth and childhood of Jesus. In this chapter he jumps years ahead to when John and Jesus started their ministry at about the age of 30.

Luke 3:1-2 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Caesar Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, (2) and Annas and Caiaphas high priests, the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.

- Caesar (Emperor) Tiberius was Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus, who ruled from A.D. 14-37. John began his ministry in A.D. 29, the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius.
- Pontius Pilate was appointed governor of Judea in A.D. 26 and ruled to A.D. 36. He was generally in conflict with the Jewish people he ruled over.
- Herod refers here to Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. He ruled from 4 B.C.-A.D. 39, sharing the rule of his father's realm with his two brothers Archelaus and Philip.
- A tetrarch was a ruler with authority lower than a king, who ruled only with the approval of the Roman authorities. They were similar to being governor of a region, but were also called kings.
- Annas was the high priest from A.D. 6-15 but was deposed by the Romans. His son-in-law Caiaphas eventually came to power and stayed there until A.D. 36. Annas was considered by the Jews to be the rightful high priest even though Caiaphas was functioning in that role.
- What do you think Luke meant – “the word of God came to John”?
- “The wilderness” was probably an area on the southeast side of the Jordan River. Here he could be removed from civilization. He probably could not stand being near the religious hypocrisy he saw in Jerusalem.
- God isolated John and taught him the truth, apart from all the false teachings being put out by the accepted religious parties at the time. He would bring many Jews to God, but he would also be hated by many because of his message.

We'll use the books of Matthew and John to get more details about John the Baptist:

Matthew 3:1-6 In those days John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the wilderness of Judea (2) and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!" (3) He was the one the prophet Isaiah was referring to when he said, "He is a voice calling out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way for the Lord! Make his paths straight!'" (4) John had clothing made of camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist. His diet consisted of locusts and wild honey. (5) Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region along the Jordan began flocking to him, (6) being baptized by him in the Jordan River while they confessed their sins.

- This baptism was not the same as the baptisms we Christians experience today. This baptism was for

repentance to prepare their hearts for the coming of Messiah. To the Jews this was a sign of cleansing. Christian baptism today is something we do after we have accepted Christ's salvation as a symbol of the new life we have in Him. However, the word repentance (metanoia in the Greek language of that time) means the same to us as it did to the Jews then – It is a spiritual turning of the mind and heart from guilt and sin to receiving the cleansing forgiveness of God. These Jews knew that God would forgive sins (see Psalm 103:3, Isaiah 43:25, Micah 7:19, Isaiah 1:16,18), but the ritual sacrifices at the temple had become meaningless to them.

Luke 3:3-6 John went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, (4) as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "He is a voice calling out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way for the Lord! Make his paths straight!' (5) Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be leveled. The crooked ways will be made straight, and the rough roads will be made smooth. (6) Everyone will see the salvation that God has provided."

- A "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" was a call for preparation for the arrival of the Messiah, the salvation He was to bring, and the beginning of His Kingdom. To participate in this baptism was recognition of the need for God's forgiveness and a realization that one needed to live differently as a response to it. It was not salvation itself, but outwardly pictured an inner change of heart. They would still need to believe on Jesus as their Messiah to be saved.
- This quote is from Isaiah 40:3-5. Isaiah was writing of God's smoothing the way for the return of the exiles from Babylon to Judah. But all three Synoptic Gospel writers recognized that Isaiah was also speaking of John the Baptist.
- When a king traveled the desert, workmen went before him to clear debris and smooth out the roads to make his trip easier. In Luke the leveling of the land was a figurative expression symbolizing that the way of the Messiah would be made smooth because through John a large number of people were ready to receive Jesus' message.
- John preached that God's way of salvation would be available to all, not just the Jews.

Luke 3:7-9 John would say to the crowds that were coming out to be baptized by him, "You children of serpents! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? (8) Produce fruit that is consistent with repentance! Don't begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our forefather.' For I tell you that God can raise up descendants for Abraham from these stones! (9) The ax already lies against the roots of the trees. So every tree not producing good fruit will be cut down and thrown into a fire."

- There must have been legalistic Pharisees and Sadducees among the people that came to criticize and sabotage John's message. That would explain his harsh words. But here we see the message that John was preaching to the crowds. He was saying that your life proves whether or not you have truly repented (This is a major topic in the book of James as well).
- Most of the Jews thought that they were guaranteed salvation just because they were Jews – descendants of Abraham. What is the lesson for us in what John said?
- What do you think John meant by verse 9?

Luke 3:10-14 The crowds kept asking him, "What, then, should we do?" (11) He answered them, "The person who has two coats must share with the one who doesn't have any, and the person who has food must do the same." (12) Even some tax collectors came to be baptized. They asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" (13) He told them, "Stop collecting more money than the amount you are told to collect." (14)

Even some soldiers were asking him, "And what should we do?" He told them, "Never extort money from anyone by threats or blackmail, and be satisfied with your pay."

- Ethical teaching was important to Luke – you'll see him frequently refer to times that John or Jesus spoke about helping the oppressed and the poor.
- Remember that Jesus hadn't presented Himself as Messiah yet at this point. They had been baptized and repented, now they were asking John, "What should we do next to avoid God's judgment? What can we do to show our repentance is real?"
- John tells them three things, saying that true repentance will be proven in your life by how you treat others:
 - To the crowds - Be Generous
 - To the tax collectors - Be Honest
 - To the soldiers - Be Content

Luke 3:15-18 Now the people were filled with expectation, and all of them were wondering if John was perhaps the Christ. (16) John replied to all of them, "I am baptizing you with water, but the one who is stronger than I am is coming, and I am not worthy to untie his sandal straps. It is he who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (17) His winnowing fork is in his hand to clean up his threshing floor. He will gather the grain into his barn, but he will burn the chaff with inextinguishable fire." (18) With many other exhortations John continued to proclaim the good news to the people.

- The people were thinking John might be the Messiah, but he quickly set them straight about that.
- John made a prediction in verse 16. When was this fulfilled? (Hint: see Acts 2:1-4).
- Verse 16 and 17 actually refer to Christ's 1st and 2nd comings. Can you explain why?
- Verse 17 is probably a prediction that refers to the purifying work of judgment that the Messiah will accomplish (Malachi 3:2-3) when He returns.
- This description of the grain is a picture of judgment. In those days the harvested wheat was placed on a threshing floor, usually a flat rock. Using a winnowing fork you would toss the grain up in the air and the wind would blow away the chaff, leaving the edible grain to fall back to the floor. The grain would be gathered into a barn, and the chaff would be burned. So what does the reference to the threshing mean?

Here is what the apostle John said in his gospel about what the Baptist said to the priests and Levites:

John 1:19-28 This was John's testimony when the Jews sent priests and Levites to him from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" (20) He spoke openly and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." (21) So they asked him, "Well then, are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." (22) Then they said to him, "Who are you? We must give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" (23) He replied, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make the way of the Lord straight,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. (24) Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. (25) They asked him, "Why, then, are you baptizing if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?" (26) John answered them, "I am baptizing with water, but among you stands a man whom you do not know, (27) the one who is coming after me, whose sandal straps I am not worthy to untie." (28) This happened in Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

(Luke 3:19-20 are obviously not in chronological order, so I've moved them down to the next page.)

Luke 3:21-22 When all the people had been baptized, Jesus, too, was baptized. While he was praying, heaven opened, (22) and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "You are my Son, whom I love. I am pleased with you!"

- All four gospels record this event, but Luke condenses it the most. I've included Matthew and John's accounts for more detail.
- Since the dove was a symbol of peace or freedom from judgment (Genesis 8:8-12), the Holy Spirit's presence like a dove showed that Jesus would bring salvation to those who turn to Him. The voice of God authenticated Jesus by referring to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. Anyone standing there witnessing this that knew their scriptures would have understood that this was the Messiah that God had promised.
- Do you see the clear appearance of the Trinity here?

"The purpose of the baptism was to anoint Jesus with the Spirit and to authenticate Him by the Father for beginning His ministry. Each Person of the Godhead was involved in the activity of the Son on earth, including His baptism. The Son was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on Him, and the Father spoke approvingly of Jesus. In His baptism Jesus identified Himself with sinners though He was not a sinner." John Walvoord

Let's see what Matthew and John say about Jesus coming to John:

Matthew 3:13-17 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. (14) But John tried to stop him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?" (15) But Jesus answered him, "Let it be this way for now, for this is the proper way for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John let him. (16) When Jesus had been baptized, he immediately came up out of the water. Suddenly the heavens opened up for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. (17) Then a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love. I am pleased with him!"

- John recognized Jesus did not fit the requirements for his baptism, since his baptism was for repentance from sin, and Jesus had never sinned.
- What did Jesus mean in verse 15? It had nothing to do with the Law, because baptism was not required in the Mosaic Law.
- We don't know from these passages whether everyone present could see the manifestation of the Spirit descend on Jesus, or just John. The other people could have seen a dove without realizing what it really was.
- This event officially began Jesus' ministry as Messiah to His people.

John 1:29-34 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (30) This is the one about whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.' (31) I didn't recognize him, but I came baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel." (32) John also testified, "I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove,

and it remained on him. (33) I didn't recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The person on whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' (34) I have seen this and have testified that this is the Son of God."

- Why did John say, I didn't recognize Him? Though John and Jesus were related, as Mary and Elizabeth were relatives (Luke 1:36), we don't know of any contact between them in their lives before this. John did not know that Jesus was the coming One until He was revealed by the Father. All John knew was that he was to prepare the way for Him by baptizing with water.
- The prophesied Davidic King-Messiah was called God's Son in 2 Samuel 7:13, and also in Psalm 2:7. So this was not a new term. The title "Son of God" contains the idea of obedience and messianic King but is also Jesus' essential nature. He has always been the Son.

Luke 3:19-20 Now Herod the tetrarch had been rebuked by John because he had married his brother's wife Herodias and because of all the evil things Herod had done. **(20) Added to all this, Herod locked John up in prison.**

- The detailed story of John's imprisonment and death is in Matthew:

Matthew 14:1-14 At that time Herod the tetrarch, hearing about the fame of Jesus, **(2) said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist! He has been raised from the dead, and that's why these miracles are being done by him."** **(3) Herod had arrested John, bound him with chains, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. (4) John had been telling him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." (5) Although Herod wanted to kill him, he was afraid of the crowd, since they regarded John as a prophet. (6) But when Herod's birthday celebration was held, the daughter of Herodias danced before the guests. She pleased Herod (7) so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked for. (8) Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me, right here on a platter, the head of John the Baptist." (9) Under pressure because of his promises and his assembled guests, the king ordered that it be done. (10) So he sent word and had John beheaded in prison. (11) His head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she took it to her mother. (12) When John's disciples came, they carried off the body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus. (13) When Jesus heard this, he left that place and went by boat to a deserted place by himself. The crowds heard of it and followed him on foot from the neighboring towns. (14) When he got out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. He had compassion for them and healed their sick.**

- Herod was originally married to Aretas, daughter of the Arabian king of the Nabateans. He divorced her and took Herodias as his wife, who had been married to Phillip, Herod's brother. So Herodias was Herod's sister-in-law and also his niece, the daughter of half-brother Aristobulus. John must have been continually condemning Herod in his messages, the word got back to Herod, and he had John put in prison.
- Herodias, obviously hating John and perhaps worried that John was having an effect on Herod, used her daughter Salome to ask for John to be beheaded.
- Scholars debate the dates of John the Baptist's imprisonment and death. It is likely that John began his ministry about A.D. 29, that he was imprisoned the following year, and that he was beheaded not later than A.D. 32. His entire ministry lasted no more than three years—about one year out of prison and two years in prison.
- John had done the work that God had given him to do. He had spiritually convicted the nation of its sins

and had presented Israel with their promised King.

Luke 3:23-27 Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was (so it was thought) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli, (24) the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, (25) the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, (26) the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, (27) the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri,

- Luke gives us the genealogy of Jesus to further authenticate who He was, after He wrote of the Father authenticating Him with the Spirit. This genealogy shows the sovereignty of God in preparing the events of the world for the coming of the Messiah.
- There are names here we don't recognize and we can't verify the accuracy of this genealogy, but there is no reason to question any of it. Luke is considered a very accurate historian, and if he had gotten this wrong, he would have been called out by others who had known Jesus.
- Joseph was clearly the son of Jacob (Matthew 1:16), so this verse should be understood to mean "son-in-law of Heli." So this genealogy of Christ in Luke is actually the genealogy of Mary, the physical lineage from David, while Matthew gives that of Joseph, the legal lineage. Actually the word "son" is not in the original Greek, so it would be legitimate to add either "son" or "son-in-law" in this context. The two genealogies show that both parents were descendants of David—Joseph through Solomon (Matthew 1:7-15), inheriting the legal right to the throne of David, and Mary through Nathan (Luke 3:23-31), her line carrying the seed of David.
- Zerubbabel you may recognize – he was the grandson of King Jehoiachin, who was taken to Babylon in the deportation of 597 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:10-17). Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:2, the 2nd son of Jehoiachin (1 Chronicles 3:16-17). Ezra mentions him (2:1-67) as one of the leaders who came back from the Babylonian exile. So these people take us back to the Exile.
- Why does Luke say in verse 23 "so it was thought"?

Luke 3:28-31 the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, (29) the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, (30) the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, (31) the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Matattha, the son of Nathan, the son of David,

- These men take us back through King David. Eliakim was the son of Hilkiah the servant in charge of the household of King Hezekiah of Judah (2 Kings 18:18). Nathan was a son of David and Bathsheba (1 Chronicles 3:5). David is where the royal dynasty started, which God promised would never end. So you can see that Jesus is physically descended from the royal line through Mary.
- You can read the genealogy from Joseph, Jesus' legal father in Matthew 1. That line goes through Solomon, another son of David and Bathsheba.

Luke 3:32-38 the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, (33) the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, (34) the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, (35) the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, (36) the son of Cainan, the

son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, (37) the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, (38) the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

- There are many well-known men in this group. Jesse was David's father. Jesse was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth, who you can read about in the book with her name. Perez was the son of Tamar, and you can read that sordid story in Genesis 38.
- Judah was the fourth of the twelve sons of Jacob, and there was a prophecy about him that it would be through him that future kings would come (Genesis 49:10). Abraham, of course, was the father of the nation of Israel, who all Jews and many Arab groups are descended from. Then the line goes back to Shem, the son of Noah, then through the pre-flood patriarchs including Methuselah (the oldest man at 969 years) and Enoch (who was taken up into heaven without dying), all the way back to Seth and finally Adam.
- Why is Adam considered the son of God?