

Lesson 4

The Preparation for Jesus' Ministry

Luke 3

The Work of John the Baptist (3:1-6)

Luke very carefully dates the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ with the work of John the Baptist. His reference to the various political rulers places the begin-

ning of the gospel at AD 26. John did his work in the wilderness of Judea, the area near the Jordan River. He preached “the baptism of repentance (i.e., a baptism which demanded repentance before being administered) for the remission of sins” (3:3). Like the baptism of the great commission, the baptism of

John was “for the remission of sins” (cf. Acts 2:38). The work of John was foretold in Isaiah 40:3-4 (cf. Luke 3:4-5). He was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. Using figures of speech common to those who went



John the Baptist lived in the wilderness of Judea and did much of his work in this area. This photo shows the wilderness of Judea.

before a great king to prepare a road on which he could enter a city, Isaiah foretold that the harbinger of the Lord would prepare the way before Him. He would “make His paths straight. 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.” These figures of speech refer to encouraging the lowly, making humble the haughty, straightening out the crooked, and other forms of moral reformation.

John's Preaching to the Multitude (3:7-14)

Multitudes were attracted to John's preaching. John preached a message of repentance to an audience which trusted in its Jewish heritage for deliverance. The Jews thought that simply because they were descendants of Abraham, they had God's approval (3:8; cf. Rom. 9:6-7). John reminded them that God approved righteous character, not simply a Jewish birth.

Because of the wickedness of the Jewish nation, John said that the Lord's “axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire” (3:10). Judgment against Israel would soon be forthcoming (the destruction of the nation occurred in AD 70); only those who repented of their sins and turned in obedience to the Christ could be delivered.

When men heard John demanding repentance, they asked, “What shall we do then?” John explained what are the “fruits worthy of repentance” (3:8). The man with two coats should share with him who has none; the man with food should share with the one who is hungry. The publicans (tax collectors) were told not to exact more tax than was due. The soldiers were told not to “do violence” to any man, not to accuse any one falsely, and to be content with their wages. Hence, John's preaching called men to righteous living; in this way, he prepared the people for the coming of the Messiah.

John Is Not the Christ (3:15-18)

As men heard John preaching, they wondered whether or not he

might be the Christ, the Messiah. He quickly removed all doubt by saying, “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: whose fan is in His hand, and He will throughly purge His floor, and will gather the wheat into His garner; but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable” (3:17-18).

John showed the superiority of Jesus in these respects: (1) He baptizes in the Holy Ghost; (2) He judges by separating the wheat from the chaff; (3) He gathers His wheat to Himself, but burns the chaff with unquenchable fire (hell).

The Arrest and Imprisonment of John (3:19-20)

Luke briefly mentions the arrest and imprisonment of John; this is more fully recorded in Matthew 14:3-12 and Mark 6:14-29. John was arrested because he kept on preaching that Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great who slaughtered the infants in Matt. 2) had sinned in taking Herodias as his wife. Herodias had been the wife of his brother Philip before Herod Antipas took her as his wife. John said, “It is not lawful for thee to have her.” Consequently, Herod arrested John the Baptist. He executed him at Machaerus, a fortress on the north-east side of the Dead Sea, according to Josephus (*Antiquities*, 18.5.2). The boldness and courage of this preacher of righteousness is seen in his willingness to rebuke even high government officials.

The Baptism of Jesus (3:21-22)

A more detailed account of the baptism of Jesus is given in Matthew 3:13-17. At the height of John’s ministry, when many people were going out to be baptized by him, Jesus also went to John to be baptized. At first,



Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. This site on the Jordan River is just south of the Sea of Galilee. No one knows for sure where Jesus was baptized on the Jordan.

John protested baptizing Jesus, by saying, “I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?” (Matt. 3:14). Jesus replied, “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (3:15). John then obeyed the Lord by baptizing Him.

Both John and Jesus went down into the water and John baptized Him. When Jesus was coming up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him “in a bodily shape like a dove.” A voice from heaven spoke, “Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.”

John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. 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. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:32-34). The anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit was the fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 61:1; Acts 10:38). Jesus was thirty years old when He

was baptized and commenced His public ministry (3:23).

The Genealogy of Jesus (3:23-38)

The genealogy of Jesus in Luke’s gospel is traced through Mary (notice the statement: “being [as was supposed] the son of Joseph” [3:23]). The genealogy in Matthew’s gospel is traced through Joseph. Hence, the differences between the two genealogies are explained on this basis. Matthew demonstrates that Jesus is a *legal heir* to the throne of David; Luke shows that Jesus is a *physical descendant* of David through Mary.

The genealogy of Jesus is important because the Messiah had to be a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:3) and David (2 Sam. 7:11-14; Pss. 89; 132). As a descendant of David, Jesus was qualified to sit on the throne of David (1:32-33; Acts 2:30-31).

Luke’s genealogy traces the ancestry of Jesus back to Adam, the son of God (3:38). Luke presents Jesus as the Savior of the human race, not just the Messiah of Israel, and therefore takes His ancestry back to Adam.

Questions

1. What message did John preach (v. 3)? _____

2. In what way did he fulfill Isaiah 40:3-4? _____
3. On what basis did the Jews think that they were saved (v. 8)? _____

4. In what externals might Christians trust to develop attitudes similar to that manifested by the Jews in 3:8? _____

5. What did John tell the Jews that they needed to do in order to be saved (v. 8)? _____

6. What is the difference between “repentance” and the “fruit of repentance”? _____

7. When does repentance require restitution (cf. Luke 19:8)? _____

8. In what sense was the “axe” laid at the root of the tree (v. 9)? _____

9. What did John say about the Messiah (vv. 16-17)? _____

10. What caused John to be imprisoned (vv. 19-20)? _____

11. What moral attributes do you admire in John? _____
12. John was not interfering in politics when he preached on the sinful marriages of Herod. What are some similar issues on which preachers need to be speaking out today? _____

Answering Denominational Error

On Holy Spirit Baptism

1. Who must administer it? _____
2. Who determines who receives it? _____
3. On what basis does he determine who receives it? _____

The Purpose of Baptism

Baptists argue, “Baptism is not for the remission of sins because Jesus was not baptized for remission of sins.” However, Baptists say that one is baptized because his sins have already been washed away.

1. Was Jesus baptized to wash away His sins? _____
2. Was Jesus baptized because His sins had already been washed away? _____
3. Why was Jesus baptized? _____

The Action of Baptism

What in the text of Matthew 3:13-17 indicates what the action of Bible baptism is? _____

The Godhead

The baptism of Jesus shows the three persons of the Godhead. Fill in the following chart on the Godhead.

| Person of Godhead | Who Is He? | Where Was He? |
|-------------------|------------|---------------|
| First Person | | |
| Second Person | | |
| Third Person | | |

True or False

- ___ 1. John the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees a “generation of vipers.”
- ___ 2. A preacher today could not refer to sinful religious conduct by these terms because he is not inspired.
- ___ 3. The Pharisees and Sadducees were the largest religious groups among the Jews.
- ___ 4. John’s language offended some.
- ___ 5. We should protect newborn Christians from reading such rebukes in the Bible lest they be offended to see righteous people talk like that about other sinful religious conduct.
- ___ 6. We should protect newborn Christians from reading such rebukes in the papers circulated among Christians lest they be offended to see righteous people talk like that about other religions.

Is there ever a time when anybody should speak to anyone in the manner John spoke to the Pharisees? If so, when? _____
