

## Luke 3:1-20 - John the Baptist Prepares the Way

### Introduction:

Luke, with a true historian's approach, (remember Luke's intended audience – Greeks – in particular Theophilus – kind of the apologetics version of the Gospels) dates the ministry of John the Baptist with secular history. He places the emphasis upon John's message of repentance as the condition for the coming of the Messiah. From the Mosaic system of washing in water, which was a common custom of immersion in that day, John baptized those who came to him as merely a preparation (a moral reformation) for the coming of Christ. Christ would baptize by the Holy Spirit—a real transformation. – BBC

Some look at Luke's repetition of what Mark and Matthew had written and wonder as to the change in discourse for Luke. In the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 Chapters he fills in some gaps and gave new information. However, how blessed we are. There are some things that need 3 and not just 2 witnesses!!

***Luke 3:1-2 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.***

As a historian, Luke identifies the year that John began to preach by naming the political and religious leaders who were then in power—one emperor (Caesar), one governor, three with the title of tetrarch and two high priests. The political rulers mentioned imply the iron grip with which the nation of Israel was held in subjugation. The fact that there were two high priests in Israel indicate a few things: 1. that the nation was in disorder religiously as well as politically. 2. Rome had power and authority of Israel's religion. 3. Annas ("nasi" head of the Sanhedrin, represented Moses) & Caiaphas (represented Aaron = high priest) Though these were great men in the world's estimation, they were wicked, unscrupulous men in God's eyes. Therefore, when He wanted to speak to men, He by-passed the palace and the synagogue and sent His message to John the son of Zacharias, out in the wilderness. – BBC

Interesting note on John and what the Jewish religion missed out on....if he were to follow the normal course of life and carried out his training and profession he would have been serving in the temple in some capacity. Since the system was so corrupt and the leadership was so inadequate he went from priest to profit! The priesthood, especially since the death of Herod, was extremely corrupt. By birth John was a priest by the call of God he was a profit. This was roughly John's 30<sup>th</sup> year of age, therefore, according to temple custom, he was now to be admitted into the temple-service (where he should have attended as a candidate five years before).

We understand Synagogues to have originated during the exile to Babylon. You see all this corruption actually taking place from a well-intended beginning. The exiles misunderstood realization that the nation's lack of following the law had them in this position of God exercising his judgement for their sins; therefore, they became zealous about establishing a system for the nation that required absolute commitment to the Law. This was (just like any time we take something and make it more important than our relationship with God) the beginning of taking something well-intended and putting in a higher place than God and it turns into a crutch and a very good thing becomes not so good.

***Luke 3:3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,***

So John is in one of the most solitary parts of the country and gets his word from God, therefore came out of the wilderness to do God's work, not his own. Not that the physical act of baptism was anything new but John is saying repentance and being sorry for sinning therefore sin no more. No longer an empty religion but a personal thing. Moving forward with what Jeremiah started many years earlier helping people to see that it is a personal religion or personal faith not one that resides in a nation or a system of religion.

John preaches the baptism of repentance. He is the last of the prophets. He is actually an Old Testament character who walks out onto the pages of the New Testament. He is picturesquely unshaven, and shaggy, wearing camel's hair clothes. He is different in his dress, his diet, and his looks. He will receive the same reception that many prophets received—he will be put to death.

The most unwelcome message, even today, is the voice of the prophet. The world will not receive a man who contradicts its philosophy of life. If you want to be popular, and this is also true of preachers, you have to sing in unison with the crowd. God have mercy on the pulpit that is nothing in the world but a sounding board for what the congregation is saying. The world does not want to hear the voice of God, especially when that voice speaks of judgment. John's message was very strong. - McGee

***Luke 3:4-6 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS: 'PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD; MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT. EVERY VALLEY SHALL BE FILLED AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED PLACES SHALL BE MADE STRAIGHT AND THE ROUGH WAYS SMOOTH; AND ALL FLESH SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.' "***

In typical Luke fashion he goes a little further in the detail of the actual quotation than Matthew and Mark. He draws a clear distinction between the receivers of the Gospel and those that choose not to receive it. THIS WAS THE INTRODUCTION OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST!! The humble will be enriched by grace. The proud will be humbled. God, by His grace, can make straight what sin has made crooked.

As a nation, it was arid and cheerless, bringing forth no fruit for God. In order to be ready for the coming of the Lord, the people had to undergo a moral change. When a king was going to make a royal visit in those days, elaborate preparations were made to smooth the highways and to make his approach as direct as possible. This is what John called upon the people to do, only it was not a matter of repairing literal roads but of preparing their own hearts to receive Him.

The effects of Christ's coming are described as follows:

**Every valley shall be filled**—those who are truly repentant and humble would be saved and satisfied.

**Every mountain and hill shall be brought low**—people like the scribes and Pharisees, who were haughty and arrogant, would be humbled. (Mountains also speak symbolically to governments, strongholds)

**The crooked places shall be made straight**—those who were dishonest, like the tax collectors, would have their characters straightened out.

**The rough ways shall be made smooth**—soldiers and others with rough, crude temperaments would be tamed and refined. - BBC

***Luke 3:7 Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"***

Luke points out here that John would not change his message based on the audience (as so many teachers do today)! John dealt with "officials of the Church" the same way he deals and preaches to anyone else. Every single person regardless of status position, or lack thereof, have the exact same need!! Brood of vipers (in Luke's context and usage) can be said to a guilty and corrupted race of mankind. He reminds the brood here that the only way out is repentance!

I wonder how long a preacher would last in any church if he began his Sunday sermon by saying, "O generation of vipers"? I do not think he would be in the pulpit the following Sunday. The people would soon get rid of him. I do not recommend using John's unusual introduction for a sermon, but I do think it would be appropriate in many churches. – McGee

This is where I might disagree with McGee. I would say it is appropriate in every single Church (whether that be what the general population views as a Church or the Church as defined in scripture) needs to be preaching this message in

this way. We begin to walk down a very slippery path when we have teaching that is not EXACTLY describing and exhorting God's Word!! How do you think you get the Book of Mormon, Catholicism, even practicing homosexual leadership in the Baptist denomination? Alliance of Baptists – An American Baptist denomination; the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists – almost 100 churches and growing; Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (now officially part of the Baptist World Alliance) – birthed out of the SBC in 1990 at a meeting in Atlanta, GA – started over the issues of the ordination of women (Methodist, Presbyterian, etc.) and did not stop there. Not only do some of the member churches have practicing homosexuals in leadership, they perform same-sex marriages. 1800 congregations and 750,000 members

**Do we have a generation of snakes among us today? How do you see past the deceit and fear?**

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***Luk 3:8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from **these stones**.***

Don't let the mercy plead for by Abraham be your crutch. Chris's video – "cheap grace". In other words, your redemption and relation to God will not be simply guaranteed by godly parents or any other means of external privileges that one may have; birthright or otherwise! It is about you and you alone...and ultimately about Christ alone.

You need to hear that voice crying in the wilderness, "Repent." Repentance is not the message of the hour; we preach the grace of God, but if you have been a recipient of God's grace and have turned to Him, you are going to have to turn from your sins. If you do not turn from your sins, you have not really turned to God. Repentance is involved in salvation, but today God's message is, "... Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ..." (Act\_16:31). - McGee

**To see the true change in your life, you need to not only accept Christ as your savior, but also as your Lord. The latter is where many of us fall short. How about you? Is Jesus really the Lord of your life?**

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***Luk 3:9 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."***

In John's day, trees that did not produce were useless. They were cut down and used for firewood. John's message is strong. John never brought the message of the redeeming love of God. He wasn't called to give that message. His was a message of impending judgment. We need to recognize that this is one of the facets of the message from God for our day also. The nation of Israel had not been productive, as God had expected, and judgment was going to be their portion. John was telling Israel that if they did not bring forth fruit, the axe would come down on the root of the tree. The Lord Jesus Christ is saying the same thing to the church today. - McGee

***Luk 3:10-11 So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."***

John was telling Israel in plain, understandable language that they were living for "self" and not attempting to share what they had with others. - McGee

***Luk 3:12-14 Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."***

He gives specific ways in which they could prove their sincerity. In general, they should love their neighbors as themselves by sharing their clothing and food with the poor.

As for tax collectors, they should be strictly honest in all their dealings. Since as a class they were notoriously crooked, this would be a very definite evidence of reality.

Finally, soldiers on active duty were told to avoid three sins common to men in the military—extortion, slander, and discontent. Drastic departure here from what is typical. Soldiers of the day were seldom inclined to religion, yet these men even went so far as to seem committed to a very strict profession of faith. Interesting point that John does not say lay down your arms, he points out the sins that soldiers would typically be guilty of while performing their daily duties. It is important to realize that men were not saved by doing these things; rather these were the outward evidences that their hearts were truly right before God. - BBC

**How do you honor God in all areas of your life? Work, Marriage, Family, and even in your free time?**

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***Luk 3:15-17 Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."***

John makes it clear that his message is not the final one. He is preparing the way for the One to come.

Reflecting on Daniel, since the time of Nebuchadnezzar the scepter had been departed from Judah and the nation of Israel.

John baptized with water. John makes it clear he has not access to "the spirit". He says all I can do is to exhort you to repent. He is turning them over to one who he has prepared the way for. Although John preached with much authority and power and elegance it was enveloped in complete humility because he claims nothing other than the authority of Christ.

Jesus has been baptizing with the Holy Spirit for over nineteen hundred years now. He shall also baptize with fire at His second coming. Fire speaks of judgment.

Some folks think that this is a reference to the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came, and there was the appearance of fire on the heads of those assembled. However, it is important to notice that in Act\_2:3 it was "... like as of fire ..." (italics mine)—it was not fire. The coming of the Holy Spirit was not the fulfillment of the baptism of fire. That will take place at the second coming of our Lord. - McGee

***Luk 3:18 -20 And with many other exhortations he preached to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.***

John had reproved Herod publicly because he had married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Herodias had been furious over this and demanded that John be put in prison. Herod fulfilled her desire and had John arrested and imprisoned.- McGee

Notice: John did fear. He spoke truth to power, and Bible tells us he was the greatest prophet. **How about you do you speak truth to power? If not, where in your life today can you change and be strong and courageous?**

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