

Luke Chapter 3

Luke 3:1 "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene,"

“Fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar”: Because of the way Tiberius came to power, this date is hard to fix precisely. When the Roman Senate declared Augustus emperor, they did so on condition that his power would end with his death, rather than passing to his heirs. The idea was that the senate, rather than the emperor himself, was to choose the heir to the throne.

However, the emperor himself was to choose the heir to the throne. Augustus circumvented that difficulty by appointing a co-regent, on who he planned gradually to confer the imperial powers. When he outlived his first choice for successor, Augustus next selected his son-in-law, Tiberius, whom he adopted and made his heir in A.D. 4 (Augustus disliked Tiberius but hoped to pass power to his grandsons through him).

Tiberius was made co-regent in A.D. 11, and then automatically became sole ruler at the death of Augustus on Aug. 19, A.D. 14. If Luke’s chronology is dated from Tiberius; appointment to the co-regency, the 15th year would be A.D. 25 or 26. If Luke was reckoning from the death of Augustus, this date would fall between Aug. 19, A.D. 28 and Aug. 18, A.D. 29.

One other fact complicates the setting of a precise date: the Jews reckoned a ruler’s term from the Jewish New Year following accession. So if Luke was using the Jewish system, the actual dates could be slightly later. The earlier date of A.D. 25-26 seems to fit the chronology of Christ’s life best.

“Pontius Pilate ... Herod ... Philip”: Pontius Pilate was the fifth governor of Judea. Herod Antipas is the main Herod in the gospel accounts. He was the one who had John the Baptist put to death (14:1-12), and examined Christ on the eve of the crucifixion (Luke 23:1-12).

It seems this son of Herod was a murderer and probably, as bad as or worse than his father. Joseph had obeyed God and came back into the land of Israel, but was afraid to go to Jerusalem. God gave Joseph a dream and told him to go to an area away from Jerusalem, "into the parts of Galilee".

Luke 3:2 "Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zachariah in the wilderness."

“Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests”: According to Josephus, Annas served as High-Priest A.D. 6-15, when he was deposed by Roman officials. He nonetheless retained defacto power, as seen in the fact that his successors included 5 of his sons and Caiaphas, a son-in-law.

Caiaphas was the actual High-Priest during the time Luke describes, but Annas still controlled the office. This is seen clearly in the fact that Christ was taken to Annas first after His arrest, then to Caiaphas.

These above two scriptures are just setting the time that the things that happen in chapter 3 occur. Tiberius Caesar was the second Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judaea and was subordinate to Caesar. Herod was subordinate to Pontius Pilate and was over the small area of Galilee where John the Baptist and Jesus lived.

Annas and Caiaphas were the head of the temple worship. We can see the chain of world power in this area here. This "John", mentioned here, was John the Baptist. This Word of God that John received was from God, not man. The message John got was a message of the spirit.

Of course, it will affect these rulers indirectly: but the message is not for them as rulers. The message John gets speaks to the soul of man.

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

“Baptism of repentance”: The symbolism of John’s baptism likely had its roots in Old Testament rituals (Lev. 15:13). Baptism had also long been administered to Gentile proselytes coming into Judaism. The baptism of John thus powerfully and dramatically symbolized repentance.

Jews accepting John’s baptism were admitting they had been as Gentiles and needed to become the people of God genuinely, inwardly (an amazing admission, given their hatred of Gentiles). The people were repenting in anticipation of the Messiah’s arrival. The meaning of John’s baptism differs somewhat from Christian baptism (Acts 18:25).

Actually, Christian baptism altered the significance of the ritual, symbolizing the believer’s identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3; Col 2:12).

John had one message, "repent". That should be the message of our day also. To repent is the first step on the way to being saved. Then when we repent, we must change our mind and become a new creature in Christ. Our thoughts must be different. We must walk a different walk than before. Our desires must change.

What John the Baptist was saying is turn from your wicked ways and live a holy life pleasing unto God.

John had been chosen even before his birth for this job. He had lived a near perfect life and was well respected by those around him. This message that John had received from God was very similar to the great commission which says, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15).

Luke 3:4 "As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

You can find the Scripture in Isaiah (in chapter 40:3). It appears that John the Baptist was not speaking in the temple. He was out in a desert area where few lived. John was preparing the people to be ready for the Savior. He was proclaiming the coming of the Lord.

Luke 3:5 "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;"

This is speaking of obstacles of every kind which shall be done away with so that everyone will be able to hear.

Luke 3:6 "And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

"All flesh": I.e., Gentiles as well as Jews. All 4 gospels quote (Isaiah 40:3; i.e. Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; John 1:23). Only Luke adds (verses 5-6), thus using a familiar text from Isaiah to stress his theme of the universal scope of the gospel.

Salvation is not just for one particular group; salvation is for everyone who will accept it. Salvation is an offer of God to all mankind, a way out.

Luke 3:7 "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?"

"The wrath to come": Possibly a reference to the coming destruction of Jerusalem. But this certainly also looks beyond any earthly calamity to the eschatological outpouring of divine wrath in the Day of the Lord, and especially the final judgment, where divine wrath will be the just fruit of all the unrepentant (Rom. 1:18; 1 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 10:27).

This was an evil generation. This was a generation who had turned its back on God. The sad thing here is that John was speaking to people who professed to know God. Our generation is like this as well. Our country claims to be under God, and sin is everywhere.

Movies are X, R, or PG rated. Television is so bad you can't allow the children to watch even the shows especially made for them. If there was ever a generation of people displeasing God, it is ours. Even people who go to church and claim to be Christians are doing things abominable to God. We take God so lightly that we have difficulty having any time for Him at all.

John the Baptist called them "vipers" because they belonged to the old devil. No one wants to face the wrath of God, then or now. We fear the wrath, but will not live a life pleasing to God. The only way to avoid God's wrath (hot anger), is to live pleasing before Him.

Luke 3:8 "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."

“Stones”: The imagery may echo Old Testament verses such as (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26); God can sovereignly turn a heart of stone into a believing heart. He can raise up children to Abraham from inanimate objects if He chooses, or even from stony-hearted Gentiles (Gal. 3:29).

“Children unto Abraham”: Abraham’s true children are not merely physical descendants, but those who follow his faith, believing God’s Word the way he did (Rom. 4:11-16; 9:8; Gal. 3:7). To trust one’s physical ancestry is to shift the focus of faith away from God Himself, and that is spiritually fatal (John 8:39-44).

The Lord does not have grandchildren, only children, who your parents are makes no difference. The promise to Abraham and his descendants was conditional. God would bless them, if they kept His commandments. There was a curse if they did not keep His commandments.

Abraham's true seed do the works of Abraham as we read (in John 8:39). Abraham's true seed are the ones mentioned (in Galatians 3:29).

These fruits worthy of repentance are a changed life.

Luke 3:9 "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."

In this, John was telling this people, you have had your chance. Preparation had been made. If you are not productive to the kingdom, you will be cut down. Just as we will see in a later lesson where Jesus cursed the fig tree and it withered and died. Irreversible judgment was imminent.

This (verse 9), is speaking of what happens to those at the judgment who have wasted their lives on themselves. Those people who have lived in sin to please their own flesh; and have had no regard for the souls of those around them. The end of these people is hell and the lake of fire.

Luke 3:10 "And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?"

This is the same question the young rich man asked Jesus ("what must I do to be saved?").

Luke 3:11 "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."

“Two coats”: Shirt-like garments. Only one could be worn at a time. John was still stressing the imminence of the coming judgment. This was not a time to hoard one’s surplus goods.

John is saying in this, you say you have repented and want to live for Jesus, now show me by giving up your selfish ways. Begin to do for others and stop thinking so much of yourselves.

Jesus will teach later on that in as much as you have done this for the least of these, you have done it for Him. Giving to someone who cannot possibly pay you back is giving to God.

Luke 3:12-13 "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?" These publicans were people who collected taxes for the Romans. This is a very good question they have asked." "And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you."

“Publicans”: Tax collectors who were disloyal Israelites hired by the Romans to tax other Jews for personal profit. They became symbols for the worst kind of people. (9:10-11; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31; Mark 2:14-16; Luke 5:30; 7:25, 29, 34; 18:11-13), Matthew had been one of them.

Some of the tax collectors took bribes and pocketed some of the money for themselves. This type of employment was looked down upon by the Jews, but it appears here that John is saying, "If you must do this job, be honest and don't put any more burden on the people than is required".

Luke 3:14 "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."

“Soldiers”: These were most likely members of the forces of Herod Antipas, stationed at Perea, perhaps, along with Judean police.

“Violent ... Accuse any falsely”: Here and (in verse 13), John demanded integrity and high character in the practical matters of everyday life, not a monastic lifestyle or a mystical asceticism. (James 1:27).

We see here, that many of the soldiers desired to be among those who repented and were ready for the coming of the Lord. John again tells them to do their job well without cruelty. He tells them to be careful and not to accuse anyone of a crime they did not do.

Again he reminds them to be satisfied with the wages they make and not to covet others' money or wealth. These soldiers being armed could cause others around them problems, if they desired. John is warning them not to do this.

Luke 3:15 "And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;"

It appears that many believed that John the Baptist was the "looked for" Messiah. They had expected Messiah for so long, and John seemed right for what they were looking for. Certainly, he was like no other man that they had ever come into contact with.

They also know of his miracle birth to aged parents. The other gospels do not mention that many thought John to be Messiah. He was so different, it is not surprising that many thought this man to be Messiah.

Luke 3:16 "John answered, saying unto [them] all, 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:"

“Baptize”: He shall baptize with the Holy Ghost referring to the spiritual rebirth of the regenerate who shall receive the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). This experience began at Pentecost (Acts 1), and was repeated upon every new group of converts (Samaritans, Gentiles, John’s disciples), until it became normative for all Christian believers.

John here is trying to cool down their belief that he might be Messiah. He tells them quickly that he is not Messiah. John is attempting to prepare them for the Messiah. John the Baptist's message is "repent". "Repent", as we said before, means to have a change of heart, to turn from the old ways and walk in a better life.

The baptism of John was certainly different from Jesus' baptism. John's was the baptism of repentance, the washing away of sins and rising to a new and better life. The baptism of Jesus sets you on fire to work for Him. This baptism of John was not the baptism of power from on high. This baptism of fire was the baptism evident at Pentecost.

John knew that he was not Messiah and was quick to tell others that he was not. He was a voice proclaiming the coming of the Savior. This baptism of fire the Messiah would bring would burn away the sin and set all who receive it on fire to work for Messiah. Just as Isaiah's lips were purged with fire (in Isaiah 6:6).

Luke Chapter 3 Questions

1. In verse 1, who did the Word of God come to?
2. Where was he when the Word came?
3. Who was reigning at the time?
4. Who were the 2 high priests at this time?
5. Who was this "John" the son of?
6. This message that John gets is to what?
7. What was John preaching?
8. In what area did he preach?
9. What does repent actually mean?
10. What is the great commission given to believers?
11. What had Isaiah prophesied about John?
12. What was John preparing the people for?

13. What does verse 5 really mean about the valleys being made low?
14. Who shall see the salvation of God?
15. What kind of generation did John call the multitude that came to be baptized?
16. Who were these people, really?
17. How can we relate them to people of our day?
18. How is the only way to avoid God's wrath?
19. What did John warn them about Abraham?
20. What lowly thing did John say that God could raise seed of Abraham from?
21. What did John tell the soldiers to do?
22. Who are Abraham's true seed?
23. These fruits worthy of repentance are what?
24. If a tree does not bring forth good fruit, what is done to it?
25. What kind of fate awaits those who refuse Jesus?
26. What question did they ask John?
27. In verse 11, what was John really saying to them?
28. Who were the publicans?
29. How could they be saved?
30. What changes did John tell them to make in their lives?
31. What did John tell the soldiers to do?
32. Who did the people believe John was?
33. Why did they believe this?
34. What was the difference in John's baptism and the baptism of Jesus?
35. What does Jesus' baptism cause you to do?