

February 7: Luke 3 & Introduction to Luke

Chapter 3

In chapter 2 we read that John was destined to be “the prophet of the Most High” and that Jesus was to be “the Son of God.” Here in chapter 3, as the babies of chapter 2 emerge into adulthood, those intertwined identities come into full view. Luke begins by orienting us to the fact that we are in a new period of history by describing who the new “powers that be” are on the global stage. A significant chunk of time has elapsed since the infancy of John and Jesus! Pilate, Herod, Philip, Annas, and Caiaphas will all have significant bearing on the story to follow, all will play a role (directly or indirectly) in hindering God’s activity for the salvation of all flesh, but each of these “powers that be” are included in the “all flesh” to whom God will reveal the world’s salvation in Jesus Christ. In spite of all of their power and prestige, the word of God did not come to them, but to John –God’s true prophet, who had grown up in and was now beginning his ministry in the wilderness. The wilderness is significant in Israel’s history, and in the history of God’s salvation of God’s people. The wilderness is where Israel heard the word of God through the prophet Moses, where the people received the 10 commandments, and where they wandered in repentance for 40 years after they fell into idolatry of the golden calf. John’s baptism was a symbol of the life of repentance that God’s people were newly committing themselves to. John preached about all the ways the people had turned away from God, and urged them to change their lives and genuinely express repentance, and after they accomplished all of that they were to return to John at the Jordan river (the same river God’s ancient people crossed when entering the Promised Land), to be baptized as an outward symbol of their changed heart and newly transformed life. Luke links John with the prophet Isaiah’s words, connecting him to God’s ancient (and present) plan of salvation for God’s people. Isaiah was writing about the process of God’s people returning home to Jerusalem after exile, how God would literally build a highway in the desert to save God’s people and bring them home. The point is that nothing is impossible for God, that God will do whatever it takes to make a way for “all flesh” to see God’s salvation and to experience freedom and new life. The prophet John is the starting point of this new era of salvation history, for he is the one preparing the hearts of the people for the coming preaching and teaching of God’s son, Jesus, the Lord’s Messiah.

John doesn’t pull any punches. He calls out hypocrisy where he sees it, “You brood of vipers,” meaning “you’re under God’s judgment.” Some

gathered to hear John's preaching for entertainment, rather than out of a genuine desire for spiritual transformation. Those who are unwilling to change their hearts and lives cannot rely on their ancestor's faithfulness to save them. **"Bear fruits worthy of repentance"** is a crucial part of John's message from God. It means that if a person has a genuinely changed heart (repentance), then their actions should reflect that (bear fruits).

"What then must we DO?" Repentance is more than a change of heart, it's depicted by our actions.

What do the fruits of repentance look like?

- Sharing our abundance with those in need (food, clothing, etc).
- Ending our cheating, unscrupulous business practices and living righteously.
- Finding contentment with what we have.

Our relationship with God has real bearing on how we live in community with others. We cannot say we love God and live greedily like everyone else.

John "prepared the way of the Lord" by pointing the people toward the coming Messiah (Jesus). Jesus did in fact baptize us with fire and the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Vs. 18-20, Herod Antipas is one of the sons of Herod the Great, he ruled in northern Judea (Galilee) as only a minor tetrarch and was in league with the Roman oppressors, asking them to name him "King of the Jews" (as his father was known). He stole his brother, Philip's wife, Herodias. John preached boldly against this behavior, for which he was arrested and eventually beheaded.

Vs 21-38, Luke's gospel does not make a big deal of John's meeting of Jesus. It simply notes that after Jesus had been baptized he was praying, and it was during this time of prayer that the heavens opened up and the Holy Spirit descended upon him. The voice in this gospel is a personal word for Jesus –"YOU are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased."

If John's baptism is "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," why is Jesus baptized, since he's without sin? Some scholars believe that Jesus entered into baptism as an act of solidarity with all of us who DO need to be forgiven of our sins. Jesus made holy the sacrament of baptism by being the first to experience the sacrament as we know it today

(complete with the Holy Spirit's descent and the personal, intimate naming as God's child). Other scholars believe that John's baptism also functioned as a mikveh bath (flowing, natural water in which people were submerged fully). In Judaism, the mikveh bath is used as a ritual to mark a transition to a new vocation or phase of life, or to mark a returning to God. It is entered into by those preparing for marriage, converting to Judaism, after divorce, after childbirth, etc. The mikveh marks the transition between old life and new life. As such, Jesus may have simply sought out John's baptism as a means of ritually marking the end of his life as "carpenter's son from Nazareth" and the beginning of his life as itinerate preacher, teacher, and healer.

The genealogy simply shows that Jesus is not only anointed as the Son of God through his Baptism, as was promised to his mother, Mary, before he was conceived, but that Jesus also traces his lineage back through David and Abraham, to Adam, the son of God.

Introduction to Luke's Gospel

Taken as a complete unit, Luke-Acts is the longest book of the New Testament. It was likely written late in the 1st century, after the destruction of the Temple (70-73CE) as Luke foreshadows the Temple's destruction in the gospel. The author was likely a travelling companion of St. Paul's (as he refers to himself in the first person during one of Paul's adventures in the book of Acts), he is also referred to in Colossians as "the beloved physician." He was a well-educated writer who exhibits the broadest vocabulary of any author in the Bible (800 words not used anywhere else in the New Testament). He seems to possess a wealth of knowledge in classic Greek literature and Hebrew scriptures given the allusions and other literary devices he uses in his writing. He may have been a Hellenistic Jew or a Gentile whose embrace of Christianity led him to intensive biblical study. He likely used the Gospel of Mark, Q (a volume of Jesus' sayings – also used by Matthew), and some other unknown sources to craft his "orderly account of the events of Jesus Christ." About 1/2 of the gospel of Luke is composed of material, parables, stories, etc. that are found nowhere else!

Key Themes

1. Worship and Prayer (the gospel begins and ends with worship in the Temple), Jesus prays often, including the Garden of Gethsemane.
2. Food (eating, eating with sinners, Jesus criticized for being a glutton).

3. Ministry focused on the excluded and disadvantaged. (Jesus' mission is to bring good news to the poor, he is also shown ministering to and being followed by women more so than in other gospels).
4. Present availability of salvation (TODAY this scripture is fulfilled, TODAY you will be with me in paradise).