

December 18, 2022

"John the Baptist Appears"  
Lesson 3 of Unit

Luke 3:2-6, 15-18

**Intro**

All four gospels describe John the Baptist as coming in the type of the prophet Elijah. John came as the last prophet of Israel (excepting Jesus). His ministry task was "to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17).

In chapter 3 of his gospel, Luke sets the context of John's public ministry within the political and religious context of the day. Luke's writing mentions Roman emperor Tiberius Caesar, governor of Judea Pontius Pilate, tetrarch of Galilee Herod Antipas, and Annas and Caiaphas, the two Jewish high priests who served during Jesus' lifetime.

These references do show a timeline of when things happened. But they also remind Luke's readers that the Jewish people were living under Roman occupation. They were waiting for a Savior who would free them. However, John's preaching told of a different kind of Savior and salvation.

**Read Luke 3:2-6**

1. vs. 2: Three important things about John are noted in this verse

First, "the word of God came to John"

This is the same phrasing / meaning as the OT prophets

They got their messages from God to deliver to the people

John is put in the same light as these OT prophets

Second, John is the "son of Zechariah"

Zechariah was a Levitical priest

This makes John in the lineage of the Levite priests

Scripture doesn't say if John began following his father as a priest

But John's role is priestly, serving God in a ministerial role

Third, John was "in the wilderness"

The wilderness was often a place of both chastisement and renewal

Jesus spent time in the wilderness before beginning His public ministry

This is likely a purpose of John being in the wilderness before his ministry

2. vs. 3: John goes into the countryside surrounding the Jordan river, on both sides of the river

His message is "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"

Repentance means acknowledging sin and turning to God

This repentance must be done to receive forgiveness from God for those sins

John does this, as does Jesus

The people are to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins

People were baptized in the OT as a sign of being cleansed from their immorality

Gentiles who converted to Judaism were baptized as a sign of their conversion

Jesus and his disciples also baptized those who repented and sought forgiveness

After Jesus' death and resurrection, baptism is included in the act of salvation  
In Acts 2:38, Peter's response to the crowd's "What shall we do?" is this:  
"Repent and each of you be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins"  
Peter also notes that the Holy Spirit will be given to each one who does this

3. vs. 4: Luke quotes the OT prophecy from Isaiah as it applies to John

"one calling in the wilderness" (see vs. 2)

"Prepare the way for the Lord"

John fulfills this by the message he is preaching

People are being called to repent and get ready for the Messiah's appearing

The Messiah would save His people—spiritually, not physically as they thought

4. vs. 5: Luke's gospel is the only one to include this part of Is. 40:3-5 that forms this prophecy

The prophecy says that "every valley shall be filled in, every...hill made low"

In other words, God will "level" everything out in people's lives as they come to Him

The negative aspects of people's lives (crooked roads, rough ways) will be improved

John's message and purpose are again shown in this verse

John's father Zechariah says in Luke 1:79 that the Messiah will "guide our feet into the way of peace"

John is preparing the people's hearts to hear and accept Jesus as that Messiah

5. vs. 6: The last part of Isaiah's prophecy is that "all people will see God's salvation"

Is. 40:5 refers to "the glory of the Lord"

Here Luke refers to this as "God's salvation"

The Greek version of the OT, the Septuagint, phrases this idea like Luke does

All in the world will hear of God's salvation, and see it themselves if they choose to

### **Read Luke 3:15-18**

6. vs. 15: In the missing verses (7-14) John is teaching the people what to do to show repentance

To those who have much, share with those who are in need

To the tax collectors, to only collect what is commanded without the extra on the side

To the soldiers, to avoid abusing their power and to be content with their pay

The crowd hears and sees John, and they wonder, "Is this the Christ?"

It isn't an idle question; it's a deep curiosity

Some expected a military leader, some a prophet like Moses

Many were checking John out to see if he was indeed the Messiah

7. vs. 16: John quickly sets the people right

"One who is more powerful than I will come"

John isn't the Messiah and doesn't claim to be

He isn't as powerful as the Messiah

He is humble, seeing his unworthiness in comparison to the Messiah

John acknowledges that he baptizes with water  
Here he tells that the Messiah will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire  
If John isn't baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire, he isn't the Messiah

The fire that the Messiah will us is likely judgment, based on what follows.

8. vs. 17: A winnowing fork is used to sift the good grain from the worthless chaff  
The grain is kept, but the chaff is burned  
Fire here is judgment  
John is warning the people that the Messiah will remove impurity from His people  
He is going to sanctify His people to God  
Those who are the chaff are those who turned away from him

9. vs. 18: Luke notes that John used "many other words" to "exhort the people"  
The passage in Luke 3 is only one of many things John said to prepare the people's hearts  
John not only warns the people, but he encourages them too  
He "proclaimed the good news to them"  
The Messiah was coming; the kingdom of God was almost here!  
There was a way out of sin and spiritual condemnation!

Application: John did multiple things in his ministry:

He came as a forerunner for Christ  
He served as a prophet to the people  
He baptized people into a life of repentance  
He proclaimed the imminent arrival of God's salvation  
He did these things after being prepared by a wilderness experience

We as Jesus's followers are called to follow Him (right?) and to proclaim the good news of His salvation. All of us are like John, prepared the people in our worlds for Jesus. There may need to be (or may have already been) a wilderness experience in our lives. We certainly cannot do God's work on our power and strength. We need the Holy Spirit's power and leading to accomplish God's work.

Prayer: Father God, help us to submit to you so that we can be people prepared to do Your work of preparing others to receive salvation from You. Help us recognize the "wilderness experiences"  
You need us to go through to be a prepared people. In Jesus's name, Amen.