

Luke Chapter 3

In this chapter, we have three distinct portions

1. [The ministry of John the Baptist](#)
2. [The baptism of the Lord Jesus](#)
3. [The Lord's genealogy through Mary](#)

1. The ministry of John the Baptist

From verse 1 through to verse 20, we have the fullest account in the New Testament of the ministry of John the Baptist. Only Luke has told us about the appearing of Gabriel to Zacharias to tell of the coming birth of John. This is typical of Luke, for the same writer also tells us of the angel appearing to Mary regarding the Lord's coming, followed by the fullest account in the gospels of His birth and His early years.

But the chapter begins in what seems to be a rather strange manner.

1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene,

2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests,

Tiberius Caesar was of course the emperor of Rome, the most powerful man at that time in the known world. But why does Luke mention him at all? We then read of four other powerful men, especially in the land of Palestine. Pilate was the Roman governor, the pro-consul of Rome in the land. Three other men are then listed, each describes as a "tetrarch", someone who had authority over a quarter of the country. These five men therefore were the political rulers that mattered in Israel.

In verse 2, we then read of the two men that mattered in the religious sphere – Annas and Caiaphas, the High Priests. But something is not right here – you cannot have two high priests at the same time. Historians, as far as we can trust them, tell us that Annas fell out of favour with the Romans, and they deposed him in favour of his son-in-law, Caiaphas. The matter would seem to have been resolved at the time of the Lord's trial. He was brought before Caiaphas the high priest, but then it is disturbing again when John adds, "high priest that same year". Were they taking it in turns to be high priest? This would indeed seem to be the case for in Acts chapter 4, we read of Annas the high priest. These men were making a mockery of divine order. So Luke simply mentions these two men, then passes on to the real purpose he has in mind:

The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

God had a vitally important message to deliver to Israel. Who was He going to select for this task? Was it the Roman Caesar? Well in Luke chapter 2, verse 1, God indeed used a previous Caesar called Augustus to fulfil His will. The mother of the child who would be the Messiah lived in Nazareth, but the

prophet Micah had written that the child was to be born in Bethlehem. How was God going to bring Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem? Humanly speaking, there was no way that this could come about. The answer was, Caesar Augustus passed a decree that all the world should be taxed or enrolled. Throughout the vast Roman empire, thousands of people were on the move, for each had to go to the place of his origin. What was all this about? God used the most powerful man on earth to accomplish His will, that the child should be born in Bethlehem. But in Luke chapter 3, God has a spiritual task to perform – He needs someone to introduce His Son to the world. He was looking for a messenger for His Son. Tiberius is therefore by-passed. So too are Pilate and the three tetrarchs. So also are the two high priests. So where would God find the man He was looking for? Verse 2 tells us, “The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness”. We know this man better as John the Baptist. But in this verse only, he is described as John the son of Zacharias. Luke is telling us now the credentials of God’s chosen man. John was the son of Zacharias the priest, and of his wife Elizabeth, who was of the daughters of Aaron.

Luke chapter 1 describes their character:

6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

This godly couple had a son, John. And the son had the same spiritual character as his parents. This was the man who would be the forerunner of the Messiah.

But notice where John was when the word of God came to him. He was in the wilderness. Luke’s gospel is often described as the moral gospel, for he sets the moral scene before continuing on his subject. John was outside the political and moral corruption of his day – he was in the wilderness, and there God gave him a message. He not only received the word of God in the wilderness, he preached in the wilderness, according to Mark chapter 1:

4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

5 And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

It seems a strange place for a preacher, but if the man is in the right condition, then God will bring the audience to him. This was true in the experience of the great revivalists like Whitfield and Wesley. People came out into the fields to hear them preach.

John was not a man who would appeal to the natural senses. He was clothed in camel’s skin with a leather girdle about his loins. Neither was his message one for itching ears, as a man pleaser. He preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

In verses 4 and 5, John thundered out the words of Isaiah the prophet from chapter 40:

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

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;

6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Verse 6 is in fact a later quote from Isaiah chapter 52:

10 The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

This is interesting for John stops short of quoting Isaiah 40, verse 5, which speaks not of salvation but of glory:

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

All flesh, all nations, shall see the glory of the Lord and the salvation of God. It does not mean that all flesh shall be saved, but that all shall see it.

We should explain here the difference between interpretation and application of scripture. Interpretation is a strict explanation of the fulfilment of the word of God. There is only one interpretation possible. But we can also make applications of bible verses. Regarding the words of Isaiah, I believe they will find their fulfilment when the Lord Jesus comes to reign in His millennial kingdom. Great changes will take place – not geographical changes regarding paths, valleys, mountains, and ways – but rather spiritual changes in the lives of men. Were the changes to do with geography, then the millennial earth would be like Holland – a land without valleys and hills. But when the Lord does come to reign, the prophet's words will be fulfilled and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God".

We see elsewhere, similar examples of interpretation and application. In Psalm number 2, David wrote:

1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? {rage: or, tumultuously assemble} {imagine: Heb. meditate}

2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,

3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

There was no doubt an application of these words in the then current circumstances of David. The church in Acts chapter 4 also applied them to what had happened at Calvary and compared these circumstances with their own problems. But the full interpretation of the verses in Psalm 2 surely awaits the day of the Lord, and the rebellion of the nation and the nations against the Lord.

There is a similar occurrence in Acts 2 where Peter makes an application of Joel's prophecy to the events at Pentecost, while the interpretation of Joel is surely yet future.

Here though in Luke 3, John's audience felt the weight of his ministry and applied the scripture to themselves. Four groups of men are covered. There are those first of all whom John describes as a "generation of vipers". Who are they? Luke seems to apply these words to the whole multitude but Matthew 3 gives us a more specific target:

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

Of the four groups of men that we are to consider, this is the only group that did not come to John. John challenges them rather, "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come". These were the mountains and hills of Isaiah 40. They were the proud men who resisted the word of God, and who stood aloof in their stubborn arrogance. They claimed to be the children of Abraham after the flesh, but God was able "of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham". But one day, Isaiah's words will be fulfilled and all such men will be brought low.

In verse 10, however, the common people come to John of their own accord, and ask him a question:

What shall we do then?

Their conscience has been pricked by the word of God and they realise within themselves that they need to make adjustments in their lives in order to participate in John's baptism. These people answered to the valleys that were to be filled. Yet they themselves were to fill the valleys of those more unfortunate than themselves.

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.

It is interesting that this appeal to share their garments and their food with others is given, not to rich men, but to the common people.

The next group to come to John were the publicans or tax collectors. Their conscience also has pricked them, and they ask, "Master, what shall we do?" These were the "crooked" of Isaiah 40, who were to be made straight. One such man was Zacchaeus who was no doubt making an honest confession when he said, "If I have taken anything by false accusation, I restore unto him fourfold." John's advice to the publicans was:

13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

Last of all came the soldiers asking the same question. John's advice to them was:

14 Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

These obviously were the common failings of soldiers. They were the "rough ways", who had to be made smooth.

One more application of these verses has to be made of course before we pass on, and that is to apply them to our own lives. Are there any mountains and hills to be brought low in our lives? The Christian ought to be more marked by humility than the men of this world. The Christian knows that he had nothing to boast about when he first met the Lord Jesus. Salvation is not of works, according to Ephesians chapter 2. God's attitude to the proud is given to us by James in chapter 4 of his epistle. The same words are repeated by Peter in I

Peter 5:

God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Are their valleys unfilled in our own lives? Should we be giving more of our time or money to the Lord's work or to the people of God? This is one of the proofs of salvation brought forward by John in his first epistle:

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

And what about "crooked" things in our lives? Are we always marked by complete honesty and integrity. The law of God said, "Thou shalt not steal". Paul wrote, "Let him that stole, steal no more, that he may have to give to him that needeth". The law of God said, "Thou shalt not bear false witness". Paul wrote, "Lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds". Are there still crooked things we need to straighten out?

And finally, are there any "rough ways" that need to be smoothed out. Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 4:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

John told the soldiers to be content with their wages. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Godliness with contentment is great gain". Paul had learned the lesson himself as he wrote in Philippians chapter 4:11

I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

Paul had learned to be content, independently of his circumstances.

Before moving on from this section, we can surely see an application in the life of the Lord Jesus. In Luke chapter 3, we shall discover that the Lord Jesus is also baptised by John. Luke adds the comment that the Lord was praying as He was baptised. Though is no mention in His case though of repentance and confession. The Lord does not ask John, "What shall I do then?" The Lord has nothing to repent of; no adjustments are required in His life.

He left no valleys unfilled in His life. When five thousand people came to hear Him in the wilderness, He fed them with five loaves and two fish. They all ate and were filled. When the widow of Nain lost her only son, the Lord restored her son to her. He did likewise in Bethany to fill the valley that had formed in the life of Martha and Mary.

There were no mountains in His life that had to be brought low. He was meek and lowly in heart. Even when in John 12, He rode in triumph into Jerusalem and was proclaimed king by His disciples, men saw Him riding upon an ass and a colt, the foal of an ass. He of all men had the right to be served, but He said of Himself, "I am among you as one that serveth". In John 13, He knelt before His disciples and washed their feet.

There were no crooked paths in His life. After His death, the Jews said to Pilate, "We remember that deceiver said when He was alive, "In three days, I

will arise from the dead". But the Lord was the only one who could challenge men and ask, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" He also said about Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life". He told Pilate, "I am come to bear witness unto the truth". He was the true and faithful witness.

Lastly, there were in Him no rough ways. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

2Co 10:1 Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ,

We see this gentleness often by the way He used His hands. One day, some mothers brought their children to Him. He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:14). One day He met a blind man. He took him by the hand and led him out of the city. Likewise, in the house of Jairus, He took his daughter by the hand and lifted her up. There was a gentleness that marked Him. He had no rough ways to be smoothed out.

Continuing in Luke 3, John's preaching was raising questions in the minds of some. They were beginning to wonder if this man was the promised messiah. John however seems to have read their minds for he answers them in verse 16:

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:

John baptized with water but the messiah would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Baptizing with the Holy Ghost took place at Pentecost. Peter said of the Lord Jesus on that occasion:

He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.

The coming of the Spirit in Acts 2 was indeed a proof of the Lord's ascension. He had fulfilled His own words regarding the Comforter whom "I will send unto you". The second baptism of the Lord mentioned by John will be fulfilled at His appearing in glory, as described by Paul in II Thessalonians chapter 2:

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

In verse 16 of Luke 3, John describes his own position relative to that of the messiah, He says about Him:

the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose:

It is interesting to note the slight differences in how the three synoptic writers deal with this expression. In Matthew, the gospel of the king, John says about His shoes, "Whose shoes I am not worthy to bear". John was not worthy to be the king's servant. But in Mark, the gospel of the servant, John goes much lower and says, "The latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. John was not worthy to be even the most menial servant of the Master.

In verse 17, John continues by describing a future day when this world will become the threshing floor of the Lord Jesus:

17 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.

A number of scriptures refer to this day of judgment - Matthew 25 for example when He will separate the sheep from the goats. In Matthew 13:30, He will separate the wheat from the tares.

Verses 19 and 20 then record the imprisonment of John by Herod:

19 But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,

20 Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.

God has been speaking through His servant and men's lives have been transformed by the ministry of John, hence the wicked one soon intervenes in an attempt to silence the word of God. Herod had broken the law of God by marrying Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. John the Baptist had spoken out against Herod and had denounced him. To "shut up" John, Herod had literally shut him up in his prison cell. Other passages tell us that Herod would on occasions send for John and heard him gladly and did many things. But still he had Herodias as his wife. But John lost his life, not because of the hatred of the king, but because of a rash promise made to a dancing girl who asked for the head of John on a charger.

2. The baptism of the Lord Jesus

We know what things took place by piecing together all the gospels, but what about verse 21:

21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,

It is quite obvious that John baptized the Lord before he was put into prison, so why does Luke tell us about John's imprisonment followed by the Lord's baptism? Luke is giving us the moral order of events. Herod has tried to silence the word of God by putting John into prison, but if one door closes on earth, another door is opened in heaven. If one voice is silenced on earth, then another voice is heard speaking from heaven. The word of God is not bound. Paul's imprisonment yielded a flow of beautiful epistles which are the very foundation of the church of God today.

Only Luke tells us that when the Lord was being baptized, He was praying. But did the Lord need to pray? He had brought all things into being. He was the source of all life. He had power on earth to calm the storm, to feed the multitude, to heal the sick, to raise the dead. But Luke is the gospel of the dependent man, and the dependent man needs to pray. There is an interesting study in Luke regarding the prayer life of the Lord Jesus. He is found praying on no less than eleven different occasions. He prays at certain key points in His life, such as His baptism, but again unique to Luke on the mount of transfiguration. He prays also on the cross, once for those who crucified Him, and finally for Himself.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"

"Father, into Thy hands, I commend my spirit".

But He also prayed on a daily basis and on occasions prayed for His disciples. The perfect man needed to pray.

In Luke 3:22, heaven responded to His prayer:

22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

First of all, the Holy Ghost descended. Luke adds, in a "bodily shape like a dove". The first mention of a dove in the bible is in connection with the flood. Noah sent out the dove from the ark but it returned because it found no place, not even for the sole of its foot to rest upon. There was nothing yet, in a world under judgment, for the pleasure of God. But in Luke 3, the dove descends from heaven and rests in a bodily shape upon the Son of God. God had at last found someone in whom He had found His delight. The Father speaks from an opened heaven:

Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased

In Mark chapter 1, we read that the heavens were rent, the same word as is used of the veil of the temple when it was rent from the top to the bottom. God expresses His joy in His Son.

In chapter 15 of this gospel, we read of the joy of heaven over one sinner that repents. The Lord tells the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son to emphasise the joy of heaven in each case. In Luke chapter 3, many hundreds perhaps of sinners have come repenting to God yet heaven can contain this joy. But not so, when the Lord is baptised.

Many had come to John, seeking to make adjustments in their lives. Wrongs had to be put right – other things had to be added. But when the Lord came to be baptised, God saw a man who needed to make no adjustments in His life.

3. The Lord's genealogy through Mary

Out of the four gospel writers, only two, Matthew and Luke gives us genealogies of the Lord Jesus. There is no genealogy in Mark, for who would be interested in the genealogy of a servant. Likewise, there is no genealogy in John, for in this gospel, the Lord's origins are not on earth but in eternity. He is the eternal Word who was with God in the beginning.

There is a genealogy in Matthew – indeed it is so important to Matthew that he begins his gospel with it. He is laying the claims of the Lord Jesus to the throne of David and the promises of Abraham.

The genealogy in Luke is different. It follows the Lord's history, not back to Abraham, but back to Adam the first man. We might expect this in Luke, the gospel of the Son of man.

Both Matthew and Luke trace the Lord's history back to David but via different branches of the family. Matthew follows the legal line through Solomon. Joseph, the husband of Mary, is the legal heir to David's throne. The Lord therefore being Joseph's heir had the legal right to the throne of David.

The genealogy in Luke is that of Mary, who can also trace her roots back to

David via another son, Nathan. Thus the Lord has two claims to David's throne.

Note how Luke preserves the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus in verse 23:

23 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,

Matthew does the same in his genealogy in chapter 1. Had Jesus been the natural son of Joseph, he would have written, "And Joseph begat Jesus". But he side steps Joseph to tell us that he was the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus. Jesus was the son of Mary but not the son of Joseph.

The two genealogies, taken together, show how far Israel had drifted. An Edomite king, Herod, is on the throne at the time of the Lord's birth. Thirty years later, a Roman governor rules in Judea. The true heir to the throne is living in Nazareth, the son of a lowly carpenter and his wife. Nazareth was a despised place, and we know from Luke chapter 2 that Mary was so poor that she offered, not a lamb for her consecration, but two turtle doves, the offering that God would accept from the poor in the land.