


A Study of the Gospel of Luke – Part One
Lesson 6

➤ **Read Luke 3:1–38.**

Chapter 3 picks up Luke’s narrative almost twenty years later than the previous chapter. Because Luke identifies the political and religious rulers of the time, commentators are able to place the beginning of John’s ministry around A.D. 27-29.¹

John, filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb, has been living in the wilderness where he “grew and became strong in spirit...until he appeared publicly to Israel” (Luke 1:80). He is about thirty years old.

➤ **Reread Luke 3:1–6.**

1. What propels John into ministry at this time? (v. 2; Mk. 1:2)
2. What is the focus of John’s ministry? (vv. 3–4; Jn. 1:6–8, 31; Acts 19:4)
3. The language used in verses 4–5 speaks of the kind of preparation that is made for the arrival of a royal dignitary. John’s ministry is not about improving the roadways of Israel, so what do you think Isaiah’s prophecy is referring to? (For help in understanding this imagery, consider Prov. 3:5–6 and Is. 2:12–18.)
4. What preparation needs to be made before the coming of “God’s salvation”? (vv. 3–4, 8a; Mt. 3:1–2; * Is. 59:20)

***Repent—
“to Change the Mind”:***

“The word *metanoeo*, expresses the true New Testament idea of the spiritual change implied in a sinner’s return to God. The term signifies ‘to have another mind,’ to change the opinion or purpose with regard to sin. ... It is sometimes conjoined with baptism, which as an overt public act proclaims a changed relation to sin and God...”²

► **Read Luke 3:7–14.**

5. Verses 7-9 tell us about John's message to those coming out to be baptized by him.
- Who specifically in the crowd is he addressing in these verses? (Mt. 3:7–10)

- What is his message to them?

- What identifies the true children of Abraham? (Gal. 3:6–9)

6. John's message to the people is not about morality or principles for living. Why then do you think he replies to their questions ("What should we do?") the way he does in verses 10–14? (Hint: Consider what he says in verse 8a.)

7. After calling for repentance, John baptizes the people in the river. What does this baptism signify? (v. 3; Mt. 3:6)

Pharisees and Sadducees

For Pharisees, the Law was central to all of life. In their desire to see that the Law was obeyed, they devised interpretations of the written Law that applied to every possible scenario of life. These oral laws were elevated to the same level as the written Law. Though they sought "by obedience to the Law... to represent the pure community, the true people of God preparing itself for the coming of the messiah'. ... [t]he tragedy was that the Pharisees earnestly sought God, but, because a particular picture of God had hardened in their tradition, they decided against Jesus... and thus against God..."³

The Sadducees also strictly held to the written Law of the Old Testament but they rejected the oral laws of the Pharisees. The Sadducees did not await a messiah or believe in life after death including "bodily resurrection, or rewards and punishments after death."⁴

► **Read Luke 3:15–20.**

8. The people are wondering if John might be the Christ they have been longing for. How does John help them get a bigger picture of the One to come? (vv. 16–17)

9. John is portrayed as a “fearless preacher of righteousness”⁵ (vv. 18–20). What are the consequences for speaking out against the sin of the local ruler, Herod? (v. 20)

► **Read Luke 3:21–38.**

10. This next section begins with Jesus’ coming to John to be baptized along with the throngs of people. Given that Jesus has no sin to repent of, why does Jesus come to be baptized? (Mt. 3:13–15; Heb. 2:14–17)
11. All four Gospels mention the fact that “the Holy Spirit descended on [Jesus]...like a dove” (v. 22). Why do you think this is so significant? (One consideration: Jn. 1:32–34)

12. God the Father declares from heaven, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (v.22). By submitting to baptism, Jesus accepts the role of substitute for the sin of mankind. In three short years, what begins here in his baptism will end with his death on the cross. He gets what we deserve and we, by accepting his sacrifice, get what he alone deserves.

In **Isaiah 64:1**, Isaiah prayed, “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down.” God did indeed come down in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, and here in Luke 3 the Holy Spirit “descended [from heaven]... in bodily form like a dove.” What a glorious answer to Isaiah’s prayer!

Because this is true, fill in the blank below with your name to hear what the Father says of you.

_____, you are my daughter,

whom I love; with you I am well pleased.

13. Luke concludes this section by listing a genealogy⁶ that traces Jesus' earthly lineage all the way back to Adam. The lineage in Matthew's gospel only goes back as far as Abraham. Why do you think Luke thought it was important to go all the way back to Adam?
14. In this chapter, we have seen that John's ministry was about preparing the way by bringing attention to the conditions of people's hearts and lives before God and pointing them to Jesus (God's salvation).
- a. What good fruit would be produced as a result of his ministry? (Lk. 7:29)
 - b. What exhortation does Hebrews 3:12–13 give us so that we, too, will have hearts that are able to hear God's word and see his provision for us in Jesus?

*📖 For further study

¹ Leon Morris. *The Gospel According to St. Luke: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 93.

² <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/repentance/>

³ Colin Brown, Gen Ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975-1978), 810-812.

⁴ Ibid, Vol. 3, 439.

⁵ Morris, 93.

⁶ There is some disagreement about whether this is Joseph's or Mary's lineage because of the various ways of tracing a family line. Because Luke has made the point that Jesus is not Joseph's physical son, it is probable that this genealogy follows Mary's line back to Adam.