

LUKE 3

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIZER

John the Baptizer was the first Divinely-inspired prophetic messenger to break the silence of the Lord's message during the four centuries which had elapsed since the days of the prophet Malachi. The importance of John's ministry is indicated by Luke, in the minute exactness with which he fixes the date of its commencement. By naming the civil and religious rulers of the times, he gives a very specific designation of the period in which John began to preach. Such a list of wicked leaders indicates the absolute moral and religious degeneracy of the times, and the need of someone to call Israel back to the true service and worship of God. And such a messenger appeared in the person of John the Baptizer. After a long period of self-denying discipline in the wilderness, he came preaching a definite message from God; and he drew out great throngs to the Jordan Valley to listen to his preaching, and to accept his baptism as a sign and seal of repentance. The nature of John's ministry is declared to have been a fulfillment of the prediction of Isaiah, who described "one crying in the wilderness" – that is, one who was sent by God to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. This preparation is pictured in imagery that would have been very familiar in those days. Back then, when a monarch was about to take a journey, a servant was sent before him to prepare the highway. Valleys needed to be filled, hills lowered, twisted places made straight, and rough ways made smooth. In the same way, before people are ready to receive Christ, moral obstacles must be removed; people must repent of their sins and turn from them. And observe how Luke closes his quotation from Isaiah with the line, "And all flesh shall see the salvation of God." This is very much in accordance with the universal theme of his Gospel.

John preached about sin and judgment, and repentance and pardon. However, the tone of his message, as recorded by Luke, seems to have been particularly severe against those who regarded his baptism as some kind of magical ceremony which could make impenitent persons safe in the hour of judgment. John bade them show their repentance by the fruits of a changed life, and he warned them to not trust in their descent from Abraham as the pledge of their salvation. The thing which he demanded was plain and practical – namely, that each person should turn from his besetting sin, and show love to his fellow human beings. But this was not all that John preached. Some of the people imagined that the prophet himself was the Messiah; but John openly declared

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *The public ministry of John the Baptizer – verses 1-14*
- ❖ *John's testimony to the people concerning the coming Messiah – verses 15-20*
- ❖ *Jesus comes to John to be baptized by him – verses 21-22*
- ❖ *Luke's record of the genealogy of Jesus – verses 23-38*



that the mission of Christ was so much greater than his own, that he himself would be unworthy to even act like a slave and loosen the buckle of Christ's shoes.

It may be asked why Christ – the ideal Man, and the Son of God – came to be baptized by John, whose baptism was one of repentance

(verses 21-22). Surely it was not to confess any sin of His own, for He had none. Rather, first of all, it was to set His seal of approval upon the work of John. In this way, He attested the message which John preached – namely, that repentance and confession of sin are absolutely necessary for all who are to share in salvation. Moreover, by His baptism, Jesus identified Himself with His people – not as being sinful; but as sympathizing with them in their hatred of sin, in their distress for its burden, and in their hope and expectation of relief. Then again, baptism indicated that the penitent person had broken with the past, and was about to begin a life of new holiness and obedience. Similarly, in His baptism, Jesus was ending His quiet years of preparation in Nazareth; and He was about to enter upon the ministry of service and sacrifice which was to be performed in obedience to the will of his Father. The baptism of Jesus may be considered as a consecration to His high office as Messiah and Savior of the world.

The genealogy of Jesus that is given by Luke (verses 23-38) is different from that which is recorded by Matthew. According to respected chronologer Dr. Floyd Nolen Jones, "The New Testament registers were given to certify the Messianic lineage of Christ Jesus, and so establish His credentials and claim to the throne." Matthew traced His ancestry back to Abraham and David's kingly descendants, showing that Jesus was indeed the possessor of the rights to David's throne and crown. But in Luke's account of the Savior's human ancestry, He goes back to Adam through the line from which His mother Mary descended, showing that Christ is truly the "seed of the woman" that was promised to come all the way back in Genesis 3:15. But Dr. Jones also points out that "Luke carries the register back to God – revealing that not only was God the Creator and Father of Adam, He is ... the real Father of the Messiah." This is why Luke's genealogy opens with the statement that Jesus was the *reputed* Son of Joseph (verse 23). He was the legal heir of Joseph because of Joseph's marriage to His mother Mary, but He was not really the son of Joseph; for in reality, He was the only begotten Son of God!

Lord Jesus, we praise You for the reminder that You were both the Seed of the Woman and a descendant of Adam, making You the Savior for all mankind! Amen.