

John's Call to Ministry

📖 Luke 3:1-6

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In Luke 2:41, Jesus' parents fulfilled more than the requirement of the Law, they both went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover. In verse 42, when Jesus turned twelve, they took him along according to the custom of the Feast. This was the custom of introducing a child a year or two ahead of time to the festive rights. In verse 43, after they fulfilled the required number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, unbeknownst to His parents. In verse 44, they supposed He was in the caravan with relatives and friends as they traveled a full day's journey. When they stopped that night they discovered His absence and began looking for Him among relatives and friends. But in verse 45, when they did not find Him they made a quick decision to return to Jerusalem and continue looking for Him. In verse 46, after three days of searching for Him they found Him in the temple, sitting among the well-educated teachers, engaging in question-answer dialogue. In verse 47, all who heard Him were amazed because He asked intelligent questions and answered their questions with a level of understanding that was not possible for a twelve year old under the Jewish system of education. It was evident that this child had a unique relationship with the Father and they should have detected that He was the Messiah since Isaiah predicted that the Father would teach the Messiah morning by morning in preparation for His ministry. In verse 48, when Joseph and Mary found Him, they were amazed that He was sitting among the teachers in dialogue. Mary used an approach typical of a Jewish mother, she put a guilt trip on Jesus, saying, "Why have You treated us this way? Behold your father and I have been anxiously looking for You?" In verse 49 Jesus answered with His first recorded words in Scripture. His answer was to the effect that they should have known exactly where He was, that because of necessity He had to be in His Father's house. It becomes apparent that if they had known who He was, they would have known where He was. Who He was was "the Son of God." In verse 50, Joseph and Mary did not understand this relationship. After this, verse 51 reports that they went down to Nazareth and He remained in subjection to them until the time of His ministry. And Mary kept in mind all the things that were said and done. Verse 52 says that Jesus kept increasing in spiritual wisdom or skill with the Scriptures as well as physical growth in stature. And He increased in favor with God and men. The brings to close the infancy narratives. The purpose of the infancy narratives is to emphasize the true human nature of the Messiah. Jesus had a true human nature and underwent a true human upbringing in the Jewish culture.

Tonight we come to Luke 3, but before we do, note that there is a space of time between Luke 2:52 and 3:1 of approximately twenty years. What happened during these twenty years is discussed in extra-biblical writings, but the Scriptures are silent. These are known as the "hidden" or "secret years." And the reason the Scriptures are silent on Jesus' further upbringing is because nothing significant took place Christologically. Jesus had a normal Jewish upbringing. He did not go around doing miracles and things like that. Really there are only three things we know about this twenty years. First, He entered into apprenticeship under his father, Joseph, at the age of twelve. Since his father was a carpenter, Jesus trained to be a carpenter. In 1st century Israel a carpenter worked mainly in "stone cutting" since there are so many rocks in Israel. He may have also worked with wood to some extent, but there are not many trees in Israel. While He was apprenticing with his father he probably travelled to the nearby city of Sepphoris, which was being built at the time. Since Sepphoris was a Roman city, this is when Jesus gained familiarity with the Roman customs, government and culture. Second, He attended synagogue and learned under the Pharisees who taught in Nazareth. This is where He gained His familiarity with the teachings of the Pharisees and their opponents, the Sadducees. Third, He continued to be taught by His heavenly Father morning by morning in preparation for His ministry. He, therefore, grew spiritually in His humanity during that time. But beyond that, we know nothing more of those twenty years.

In 3:1-20 we have a section reporting John's ministry. I don't think we can get through all this tonight because it is very difficult to connect with the situation. There is nothing in the Church age that is parallel to the situation with John and His baptizing ministry. So it is entirely unique and because of that we kind of have to try to put ourselves in their shoes if we are going to understand. I think it helps to outline these twenty verses. In 3:1-6 we see how John prepared the way for the Lord by a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Then in 3:7-14 he warned of judgment if they did not repent. Then in 3:15-18 John promised that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Finally, in 3:19-20, a note is made that John was imprisoned. By the end of verse 20 Luke's narrative moves to Jesus' ministry. John is hardly mentioned again, except for a brief appearance in 7:18-35. I think the reason is to show that while John was great, Jesus is much greater. Once He comes on center stage, He dominates the rest of the Gospel. So what we have in verses 1-20 is the preparation for Christ's ministry and the one who came to prepare the way was John. According to Luke 1, he was literally born for this purpose.

In 3:1 Luke sets John's ministry in the context of Roman rule, showing that even the Jewish rulers were subservient to Rome's rule. The list of rulers includes five Roman and two Jewish. It was a complex situation. Constable said that the reason Luke went into such details was "to document the reliability of his Gospel." In verse 1 we see a lot of specificity. **Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.** If you notice, in verse 1 Luke begins with the most significant political ruler, and then moves down to lesser political rulers and finally in verse 2 he mentions the spiritual rulers. The first, and most significant political ruler, is verse 1, **Tiberius**

Caesar. It was **in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar.** He became sole Emperor of Rome in AD14 and ruled until AD37. The account of his **fifteenth year** is debated, so we will leave that topic for awhile and return to it shortly. The second political ruler mentioned is a man well-known in the NT, **Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea. Pilate was governor.** Another equivalent term is "prefect" and the realm of his rule was **Judea.** His rule was from AD26-36. Now it's interesting that archaeology has uncovered an inscription mentioning Pilate during excavations of Caesarea by the Sea in 1961. This stone upon which the inscription is written was found in the Theater. The inscription has suffered some abuse, but reads, "Tiberium, Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea". So we have good archaeological evidence for the reign of Pilate during the reign of Tiberius and that his position was prefect of Judea, just as Luke writes in verse 1. The third political ruler mentioned is **Herod the tetrarch of Galilee.** This was **Herod** Antipas, also known as "Herod the Fox." He was one of Herod the Great's sons who took over a portion of his father's territory. He ruled from 4BC-AD39. And he is the one who later will marry Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and the result of that is that John the Baptist reprimanded him and so Antipas put him in prison over at Machaerus and when Herodias' daughter came in and did a very pleasing dance he did the very foolish thing of offering her anything she wanted. And the mother Herodias didn't like John so she directed the daughter to request John the Baptist's head, and Antipas gave it to her. So that's Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, a guy who was easily swayed. The fourth political ruler mentioned is **his brother Philip, tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis.** He ruled from 4BC-AD34. The fifth ruler mentioned is **Lysanias** who **was tetrarch of Abilene.** He is the only ruler critics cite as problematic since there is no evidence of a **Lysanias** ruling as **tetrarch of Abilene.** However, there is evidence of several rulers with the name **Lysanias.** And it's quite likely that this is one of those rulers, and quite likely that he also was a son of Herod, but we don't know that for sure. So there are your five Roman rulers, Tiberius Caesar, Pilate Herod Antipas, Herod Philip and most likely Herod Lysanias.

The sixth figure is mentioned in verse 2, and he's a spiritual ruler of the Jews. **in the high priesthood of Annas.** This **Annas** was the high priest from AD6-15. He didn't exactly cooperate with the Roman authorities, so they deposed him. And there were a couple after him that are not mentioned in this verse since they are not important, but they were deposed too. That brings us to the seventh figure, another spiritual ruler, **Caiaphas.** He was the son-in-law of **Annas** and held the office from AD18-37. What's strange about verse 2 is that Luke says **in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas,** as if two men were holding the same office. Pentecost explained, "Annas was the priest who by heredity had inherited the office of high priest and was recognized by Israel as their rightful priest. Annas had been removed from office by the Roman authorities, He was succeeded by his two sons, and then ultimately by Caiaphas, his son-in-law. While the Romans recognized Caiaphas as the high priest, Annas continued to be recognized by the Jewish people. He was the ruling power behind the office."¹ In other words, the real ruling power that was behind the high priesthood was Annas, even though the Romans deposed him, because he was the rightful heir of the office of high priest, and the Jews recognized him whether the Romans did or not. So the way that Luke communicated this is interesting because it shows the actual power

structure in the high priesthood at the time involved two men, both Caiaphas and Annas, and this is an accurate representation.

Now, verse 2b says it was when these seven men were ruling that **the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness**. And so we know the years these men ruled, it must have been sometime between about AD14 and AD37 that the word of God came to John. And he is designated as **John, the son of Zacharias**. You say, that's unnecessary. But there were many Jews named **John** and none of them were in **Zacharias'** family, so it must be mentioned. And it says that **the word of God came to him when he was in the wilderness**. That is actually the last thing we read about John in 1:80, where it says, "the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel." That word "deserts" is the same Greek word translated **wilderness** in 3:2. So they are the same place. And we suggested that he moved there after his elderly parents passed away, probably when he was no more than eight to ten years of age. The parallel in Mark 1:5 indicates that this wilderness area was around "the Jordan River" and in Matt 3:1 it says he came preaching in "the wilderness of Judea," so it would have been the southern portion of the Jordan River just before it empties into the Dead Sea. So the area John lived in and ministered in was northwest of the Dead Sea and extending somewhat north into the Jordan River Valley. This was the area near ancient Jericho and separate from society. Because the Essene community at Qumran was also in this region, some have claimed that John was an Essene. However, this has no good support. Even Josephus, who mentions both the Essenes and John the Baptist, never connects them. He seems to have led a life of solitude and not a life in a community. And this went on until verse 2 says, **the word of God came to him**. The word translated **word** is $\rho\eta\mu\alpha$ rather than $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$. The significance of $\rho\eta\mu\alpha$ is that it refers specifically to the spoken word, not to the written, or incarnate word. The spoken word is a subset of the larger term $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$. Fruchtenbaum said, "The Greek term for *word* here is not *logos*, but *rhema*, meaning "the spoken word."...Yochanan heard the audible voice of God calling him to his mission. The term "Logos,"...is the wider term and includes the written, spoken, and incarnate word..."² Schurmann tied $\rho\eta\mu\alpha$ to the specific call to begin ministry, likening it to Jeremiah's call to ministry in Jer 1:1-4. The parallel gives credence to this view. Thus, the audible voice of God was the means used to call Yochanan into his prophetic office.

According to verse 1, the year he was called into the prophetic office was Tiberius Caesar's **fifteenth year**. So here we are going to turn our attention back to the debate over the **fifteenth year**. The debate is really a debate because people are trying to use this date to identify the date of Christ's crucifixion and His age. The debate centers on whether the counting of the fifteen years began when Tiberius was co-regent with Caesar Augustus or when he was the sole ruler of Rome. Fruchtenbaum said, "If it were the former, then the specific year would have been A.D. 26, and the crucifixion would have fallen in the year A.D. 30....This author prefers the former, and this work will be based on A.D. 30 being the year of the crucifixion."³ Hoehner, who wrote extensively on the chronology of Christ's life, disagreed. He said that if the crucifixion is held to be in A.D. 30 that Christ's ministry was a little over two years. "However, if one thinks that Jesus was crucified in A.D. 33...then Christ's ministry was

at least three years in duration." This is my opinion as well. Christ's ministry seems to have been about three and a half years in duration. Hoehner, in citing all the views, said, "The fifth opinion is that Luke used the normal Roman method of reckoning, according to which Tiberius' fifteenth year would have run from August 19, 28 to August 18, 29. Lewin states: "The reign of Tiberius, as beginning from 19th Aug. A.D. 14, was as well-known a date in the time of Luke as the reign of Queen Victoria in our own day, and that no single cause has even been or can be produced in which the years of Tiberius were reckoned in any other way..." This argument seems the most formidable and it fits nicely with Luke's writing a gospel to the Gentiles as a Gentile, since as a Gentile writing to Gentiles he would use dates known to Gentiles. As such Hoehner concluded, "Hence, it means that John the Baptist's ministry began sometime in A.D. 29." Since Jesus came to John at the Jordan not long thereafter, we can then begin to ask how old He was when He began His ministry. No one doubts what 3:23 says, that He "was about thirty years of age..." But this word "about," which is *ωσει* should be understood to mean "approximately." Therefore, Jesus was not thirty years of age, but He was approximately thirty years of age. And since Jesus was born before Herod the Great died in 4BC, we can very safely conclude that in AD29 He was thirty-four or thirty-five years old. After that He ministered for about three and a half years and was crucified in AD33, having lived to thirty-seven or thirty-eight years of age. But no matter what you conclude, you have to deal with the fifteenth year of Tiberius, that's the critical reference.

In any case, what Luke has done in the first two verses of chapter 3 is introduce John's ministry in the midst of a very complicated political and religious situation in the land of Israel. A Roman Emperor was in power with a well-placed prefect named Pilate, three tetrarchs who descended from Herod the Great ruling districts that Jews lived in and two religious leaders who worked with Rome to keep harmony. John's ministry would disturb this harmony, challenging the Roman political leaders and the Jewish religious leaders to repent. The year was AD29 when God audibly called him into the prophetic office.

In verse 3, he **came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**. The verb **came into** does not necessarily mean that he was in the wilderness and then moved **into** another the district around the Jordan. Rather, the meaning is that he had a widespread ministry as he moved about in **all the district around the Jordan**. In other words, John was not staying in one place but ministering in **all the district around the Jordan**. The parallel in John 1:28 says that "these things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan." There was a Bethany on both sides of the Jordan, but this one was beyond the Jordan, meaning on the other side, in what is today, modern day Jordan. And archaeologically, the area on the other side of the Jordan is considered the best location for John's baptizing ministry, but it is noted that he moved about in this entire area, on both sides of the Jordan.

But the interesting thing is what John was preaching. This is the difficult thing for us to understand because we are in the Church and there is simply no parallel to John's baptism and message to the Church. We simply do not live in the times of Israel under the Law of Israel. So this act and message are foreign to us and it has to be

developed to be understood. Now what John was preaching was **a baptism of repentance**. And so we will just break this down word by word. Baptism is from the Greek word βαπτισμα. This word means "the ceremonial use of water for purpose of renewing or establishing a relationship with God," and may be translated, "*plunging, dipping, washing, water-rite, baptism*." I'm not going to go into the mode of baptism at all, but you can tell that the word was used of immersion. And the definition really summarizes well the purpose of John's baptism. It was a ministry to Israel to renew their relationship with God. They had a relationship with God through the Abrahamic Covenant, but the relationship needed to be renewed because they were responsible to live under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, the Mosaic Covenant was their rule of life and to be in harmony with God they needed to live according to it. The problem was that the Pharisees dominated all of Jewish life and thought. They taught in the synagogues the rabbinic interpretations of the Mosaic Covenant. So, of course, the people followed their interpretations. But this was a problem. The problem is illustrated by Jesus in the Discourse on Kingdom Righteousness, Matt 5-7. In that discourse, Jesus used the formula, "You have heard it said....but I say to you." What Jesus was doing was contrasting their interpretations of the Mosaic Covenant with His own. And His point was that the Pharisees interpretations were not accurate representations of the Covenant. They had added, they had subtracted and they had changed the true intent of the Covenant. And since the people were following the Pharisees interpretation rather than the true meaning, they were not living according to the Mosaic Covenant, but rather, living in sin. And because they had a relationship with Him under the Abrahamic Covenant, this meant that they were under God's discipline. The disciplinary measures are written out in Lev 26 and Deut 28 as having five degrees. The fifth degree was to be forced to live under Gentile kingdoms. At the time they were living under the fifth degree of discipline under the Roman Empire, the rulers of which are listed in verse 1. The question is how does Israel get out of discipline and renew their relationship with God. The answer is a baptism repentance. This was preparatory for the forgiveness of their sins by the Messiah.

So John's baptism was a water baptism, but it was not simply a ritual. Note that it required **repentance** in order to qualify. Repentance is from the word μετανοια and means "a change of mind." What the people needed to have a change of mind about was the interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant. If they would continue in following the Pharisees interpretation, there would be no change of mind, but if they were to follow John's interpretation, then there would be a change of mind. And if they hadn't changed their mind then John wouldn't baptize them. This is reported in the parallel passage of Matt 3:7, "When he [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" And John refused to baptize them. Why? The text says because they did not come bearing fruit in keeping with repentance. How did John know? Because they still wore all the special clothing that designated them as Pharisees and Sadducees. So they hadn't changed their mind. They wanted to renew their relationship with God without a change of mind. But that's not possible, so John refused to baptize them.

Now this **repentance** was supposed to result in was a change of ethical behavior. This is clear in both Matthew and Luke's treatment of John's baptism, but it's enough to just look down at Luke 3:10-14. In other words, what

we are saying here is that the Jews needed to repent and this repentance needed to be accompanied by a change in ethical behavior, such that their behavior was in accordance with the Mosaic Covenant. So we read in verse 14 the people are asking John, 'Then what shall we do?' You know, how are we to live now? "And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.' Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, 'And what about us, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.'" So, the repentance would need to be followed by a change in ethical behavior. They simply could not go on living the same way as before. They had to change. This was the way the people could prepare for the Messiah's arrival to deliver them from the fifth degree of cursing under Rome.

The baptism of repentance would have as its goal the **forgiveness of sins**, as verse 3 says. It was a **baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**. The phrase **for the forgiveness of sins** is εἰς with the accusative meaning "with a view to." With a view to the forgiveness of sins. So they are going to repent, they are going to change their ethical behavior and ultimately the goal is the forgiveness of sins through the one who is mightier than John, that is through faith in the Messiah. Bock is pretty good when he said, "The final characteristic mentioned about this baptism is its goal. It is directed toward...(*eis for*), the forgiveness of sins...John is a preparatory figure...He prepares a people for God. Most importantly, John says that his baptism is nothing compared to the baptism that the Mightier One brings ([Lk.] 3:16). So John's baptism is a prophetic eschatological washing; that is, it is a baptism of promise that looks to the greater baptism of the Spirit...It points forward to the cleansing that comes to those who respond to Messiah's offer with faith. This association of Spirit and cleansing was mentioned in the OT (Ezek. 36:25-27; Zech. 13:1). In short, John's baptism was a step on the way to the Promised One's forgiveness. The repentance in view here will not only make one alter the way one lives, but also will cause one to see "the Mightier One to come" as the promise of God. To submit to this baptism is to confess one's commitment to this perspective. This is the essence of John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."⁴ By getting baptized they were committing themselves to changing their ethical behavior and believing in the One John pointed out to be the Messiah, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

This explanation of John's baptism is confirmed by Paul's interaction with some Jewish disciples in Acts 19, so turn there. In verse 1, when Paul "came to Ephesus," he "found some disciples. These were Jewish disciples. Paul said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." Paul said "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." At that point, verse 5 says "They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." The point is that these Jewish disciples had been in the Jordan River area when John ministered and

they received the baptism of repentance, committing themselves to believe in the One coming after him. But they left the land and went home before they found out who He was. Fruchtenbaum said, "The main detail to note here is that those who were baptized by Yochanan were making a commitment: they would accept whomever Yochanan identified as the Messiah....Many years later, in fact decades (Acts 19:1-7), the Apostle Paul ran into a body of Jews who had been baptized by Yochanan, but had never heard who the Messiah was because they lived outside the land. Paul had to tell them that it was Yeshua of Nazareth. In keeping with their baptismal commitment to Yochanan, these people then accepted Yeshua as the Messiah and were baptized again into believer's baptism."⁵ So Paul's commentary on John's baptism is exactly as we have stated; it was a baptism of repentance where the person baptized was making a commitment to believe in the One coming after him, that is in Jesus, who would provide forgiveness of sins. So John's ministry was preparatory for Messiah coming. He was helping the people get ready

As we turn back to Luke 3:4 we come to an extensive quotation of a prophecy in Isa 40:3-5. This prophecy is applied to John as the one would come before Messiah to prepare the way for Messiah. But it is a very large question as to whether John fulfilled this as I will show. Verse 4, **As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight. 5'Every ravine will be filled, And every mountain and hill will be brought low; The crooked will become straight, And the rough roads smooth; 6And all flesh will see the salvation of God.' "** The words **as it is written** are a common way of introducing an OT quotation. To Luke, John in some way was connected with Isaiah 40:3-5. Exactly how is not entirely clear. The original context of Isa 40:3 seems to be a general prophecy of God sending a prophet before He Himself brought about Israel's salvation. This seems to have happened on several occasions. For example, it happened when God sent Moses to prepare the way for His salvation from Egypt and again when God raised up Cyrus to prepare the way for His salvation from Babylon. In step with this pattern, God was now sending John to prepare the way for His salvation from Rome. The only difference seems to be that Luke viewed this salvation as the ultimate salvation, or deliverance into the glories of the Messianic kingdom. Clearly then, in verse 4, **The voice of one crying in the wilderness** is the voice of John. He quite literally was **in the wilderness**. His **voice** was **crying** out to Israel with the message of repentance that would lead to the forgiveness of sins by Messiah. The words **make ready the way of the Lord** and **make His paths straight**, make clear what we have said before, that after they repented they would need to have an ethical change in their behavior, just as Luke 3:10-14 describes. "What should we do?" The people asked? If you have two tunics, share with him who has none, don't collect more taxes than what you have been ordered, don't take money by force, don't accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages, these are all ethical behaviors. This would **make ready the way of the Lord and make His paths straight**. As Bock said, "The heart that turns in repentance is to express itself in concrete acts and await God's deliverance. ...To make a highway for the Lord is to be morally ready for his coming..." This is exactly what the angel Gabriel said John would do in 1:17, "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the

fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Now interestingly, in the Isaiah prophecy, the **Lord** in Hebrew is YHWH. Isaiah was predicting that the way for YHWH would be made ready. Since this text is ultimately looking toward Jesus, the Messiah, then Jesus is YHWH. Summarizing, Luke 3:4 says John was the voice of one crying in the wilderness in order to prepare the nation ethically through his baptism of repentance so that they were ethically ready for the Lord to come.

Now, if verse 4 is the people's ethical preparation, verse 5 is the Lord's coming in power to deliver. This is speaking of supernatural judgments. **Every ravine will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be brought low, the crooked will become straight, and the rough roads smooth.** When Messiah comes He comes in judgment and levels the earth in preparation for His Messianic reign on a renovated earth. Deep ravines will literally be filled and every mountain and hill will be leveled. Other passages like Isa 2 teach that the Lord Himself will rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple on a raised platform for all to see and all nations must come up to this raised platform to worship Him and learn His ways. Bock said, "...in 3:5 the stress is on what will happen as a result of God's activity. Luke 3:5 pictures God's powerful coming to his people, a coming for which humans are to prepare themselves ethically. This arrival, as understood by first-century Jews, would have brought expectations of the great day of the Lord (Isa 2:6-22)." And what's interesting is that from Luke's vantage point at this time, the geographic leveling would occur at His first coming, but as the story unfolds we learn that Israel does not respond to John's ministry of preparation, and therefore Messiah must come again to re-organize the world. So there will be two comings, but that is not clear yet, and we have to read the text as if there could have been only one coming.

Finally, in verse 6 the quote from Isaiah 40:5 and the focus is on all people on earth seeing God's arrival. **all flesh will see the salvation of God.** But the quote is altered slightly from Isaiah, who said, "And all flesh will see the glory of God." But the section in Isaiah that deals with seeing the glory of God dovetails with seeing the salvation of God, so to the Jewish mind these two things pointed to the same time period, the glory of God seen in His salvation when He comes to establish His kingdom.

Putting the whole quote from Isaiah together, John is the one sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. His voice cried repent in the wilderness. Those who repented should change their lives ethically so as to make ready the way of the Lord, to make His paths straight. When He comes He will come in great judgment to re-organize the planet, and at that time all people on earth will see the glory of God in His salvation.

Having explicated this difficult passage, a few observations are in order. First, the ministry of John and his baptism are entirely unique. There is nothing like this kind of preparation for Messiah's arrival directed toward the Church. John had a unique ministry. That is why it is so difficult to understand. We are not Jews living under the Mosaic Covenant. If we were we would readily understand this passage. But the short story is that under the

Mosaic Covenant Israel would only be blessed if they lived according to the ethical commandments of the Law. At the time of John's coming, most Jews were not, so John was sent to prepare them by calling them to a baptism of repentance that would commit them to believing in the Messiah for forgiveness of sins when He came. Most of the nation did not repent, and therefore, when Messiah came He did not bring His mighty deliverance. Second, this explains why John was confused later about whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. John expected the Messiah to carry out these great judgments and deliver Israel from Rome and establish the kingdom. But He wasn't doing that and John was in prison. It didn't fit what he expected Messiah to do. Therefore, John was confused. Third, John did not fulfill Isa 40:3 in my estimation. It remains for Elijah to fulfill. Mal 4:5-6 predicts that Elijah will return before the great and terrible day of the Lord and restore the hearts of Israel. According to the angel John came in the spirit and power of Elijah. Jesus went so far as to say that John could have been Elijah, but because the nation did not receive him, he was not Elijah and that Elijah is still to come. Therefore, John did not fulfill Isa 40:3-5, but Elijah will. John only came in the spirit and power of Elijah.

¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 81.

² Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*, 490.

³ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*, 490.

⁴ Darrell Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 288-289.

⁵ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*, 495.