

The Gospel of Luke - Chapter Three

Summary of Chapter Three

John began preaching when Tiberius was the Emperor and Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judæa. Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee.

John began his ministry in the Jordan Valley and preached that the people needed to undergo a baptism of repentance turning back to God. Crowds of people began to follow John and he preached as God led him. He taught people how to live a better life regardless of whether they were a soldier, government official or tax collector. He was instructing people the need for them to change their lifestyles.

Many people started to wonder if John was the promised Messiah but he strongly denied this, pointing out that he only baptised with water but that the Messiah would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Luke only gives a brief account of Jesus' baptism in his Gospel but we do get the glorious image of the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove and the Father acknowledging him.

John then concludes this chapter with Jesus' genealogy to show that he is not only a descendant of King David but is the Son of God.

From other accounts of the baptism we know that, although they were cousins, John did not know Jesus before he encountered him on the river bank. He expected Jesus to baptise him but Jesus said, 'No, it has to be the other way round: <<to fulfil all righteousness>>' (Matthew 3:15).

III. Luke 3:1-4:15 - Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus

Luke describes John the Baptist's ministry of preparation for Jesus (Luke 3:1-20) and then the focus shifts to Jesus himself (Luke 3:21-4:15).

Again, Jesus is seen as being superior to John (vv.16-17).

III.a Luke 3:1-20 - John the Baptist prepares the way

The ministry of Jesus begins with the coming of John. This is confirmed in Acts 1:21-22 where Luke writes: <<Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out

among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection>>; in Peter's discourse with Cornelius: *<<You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judæa, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached>>* (Acts 10:36-37), and Paul preaching in Pisidian Antioch: *<<Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie'>>* (Acts 13:24-25).

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judæa, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituræa and Tracōnitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene

Luke 3:1

The list of rulers again demonstrates Israel's submission to foreign rule and oppression. The sceptre has departed and the law-giver was gone; the time for Shiloh has come! See Genesis 49:10 (KJV).

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Cæsar is probably AD29 plus or minus a year. Tiberius became emperor in AD14 though he may have been in charge of certain provinces prior to that time.

Pontius Pilate, governor of Judæa. Jewish sources considered Pilate's reign (AD26-36) to have been quite harsh, charging him with greed and cruelty. As examples of his disregard for Jewish religion, Josephus mentions Pilate bringing pagan Roman legionary standards into Jerusalem and appropriating temple funds to build an aqueduct (Jewish Antiquities 18.55-62; see also Philo, Embassy to Gaius 299-306). An inscription found at Cæsarea indicates that Pilate dedicated a structure there to the imperial cult of Tiberius.

Herod Antipas was a tetrarch, ruler of a quarter of the kingdom, ruling Galilee and Perea from 4BC to AD39. Matthew writes: *<<At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus>>* (Matthew 14:1), placing the incident during the period of his reign.

Herod Philip I was tetrarch of the northern Trans-Jordanian territories from 4BC to AD34. This region lay to the east of the Jordan River and largely north of the Yarmuk River known as Ituræa, Batanaea, Trachonitis, Auranitis and Gaulonitis.

He is also known as Herod II and sometimes incorrectly referred to as Philip II.

Antipas and Philip I were both sons of Herod the Great who ruled until 4BC and was discussed earlier. They were designated as Herod's heirs upon his death, along with their brother Archelaus, who reigned as ethnarch of Judæa until AD6. When Joseph brought Jesus back from Egypt we read: *<<But when he (i.e. Joseph) heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judæa in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee>>* (Matthew 2:22).

It is likely that Lysanias ruled a territory near Damascus and that this region was given to Herod Agrippa I around AD37. Luke's precision in naming five Roman officials, with their specific titles,

shows concern for detailed historical accuracy and his accuracy is confirmed by historical records outside of the Bible.

² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.

Luke 3:2

After 400 or so years of silence, God was again speaking to his people through a prophet. We had left John in the wilderness in Luke 1:80. He now emerges as a man of God for the people.

High priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas: Caiaphas was High Priest and presided over the Sanhedrin. He managed to retain control of the high priesthood for nearly 18 years (c. AD18-36), longer than anyone else in the 1st Century as confirmed by Josephus (Jewish Antiquities 18.35, 95). He was certainly the high priest during Jesus' ministry, although he also consulted frequently with his father-in-law Annas, as seen in John 18:13 <<*and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year*>>.

Josephus' depiction of a high priestly house in the upper city of Jerusalem (Jewish War 2.426) has suggested to some scholars the possibility of identifying Caiaphas' house with some residence amid the wealthy Roman-era houses excavated atop Mount Zion. Others contend for the traditional site of Caiaphas' house beneath Saint Peter of the Cockcrow Church toward the base of Mount Zion. An archaeological find in 1990 raised the possibility that an elaborately decorated ossuary, a box for reburying the bones of the dead, which has the name Joseph Caiaphas crudely etched into its side, once contained Caiaphas' bones. This ossuary was found in a relatively modest tomb complex south of Jerusalem.

Annas was also known as Ananus and was the patriarch of one of these powerful families of high priests, as confirmed in Acts 4:6 <<*Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family*>>. He served as high priest during AD6-15 and the high priesthood was subsequently held by five of his sons, including his son-in-law Caiaphas.

Annas' past stature merited his continued designation as high priest as seen in Acts 4:6 earlier and, even after his deposition, he retained significant control over his family's exercise of this position, so that Luke can speak of 'the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas'.

Josephus mentions a monument of Annas (Jewish War 5.506), which has been plausibly identified as a highly decorated tomb found near the Kidron Valley.

Mark identifies John the Baptist as the predicted one who prepares the way of the Lord, as announced in Isaiah 40:3 <<*A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God*>>; and Malachi 3:1 <<*See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come, says the LORD Almighty*>>.

Isaiah the prophet is named because he was more prominent, and most of the quoted material comes from him. When the text is expounded in the following verses, Mark refers only to the Isaiah citation.

John will be identified by Jesus as the one who comes in the spirit of Elijah for, as well as here in v.2, it is written elsewhere: <<*See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that*>>.

great and dreadful day of the LORD comes>> (Malachi 4:5), <<For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come>> (Matthew 11:13-14), <<And they asked him, Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first? Jesus replied, To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him>> (Mark 9:11-13).

The path or way is to be readied for the Lord and, not surprisingly, the one who comes after John is both the Lord and the Messiah, as confirmed in Mark 8:29 <<But what about you? he asked. Who do you say I am? Peter answered, You are the Christ>>. The following Gospel account demonstrates that Jesus, as the Messiah, is also a member of the Godhead. This is confirmed in Mark 1:2-3 <<It is written in Isaiah the prophet: I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way – a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’>>.

The word of God came to John designates him as a prophet like the OT prophets, such as we see in others: <<Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel>> (1 Samuel 15:10), <<Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet, David’s seer>> (2 Samuel 24:11), and: <<But this word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God>> (1 Kings 12:22). There are many other similar examples among the books of the prophets including Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jonah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. This was an amazing event since ‘the word of God’ had not come to any prophet for public proclamation since Malachi in about 460-400 BC. After a silence of approximately 460 years, God was once again speaking to his people.

In the desert indicates that the great promises of Isaiah were beginning to be fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist, see v.4, and: <<A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God>> in Isaiah 40:3.

³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.



The map shows where the River Jordan flows from the Sea of Galilee southwards to the Dead Sea.

Luke 3:3

Confirming scriptures are: <<In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judæa and saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near>> (Matthew 3:1-2), and: <<People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judæa and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River>> (Matthew 3:5-6).

A baptism of repentance was not something new for it had been spoken of by the OT prophets. For example: <<Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offences; then sin will not be your downfall>> (Ezekiel 18:30).

To repent or change one's mind in the OT called for a change in a person's attitude toward God that impacted one's actions and life choices. It involved the idea of turning, i.e. from one way of thinking and living to a different way. Common external signs of repentance included prayers of remorse and confession, and renouncing of sin. Lead Pastor Rich Webb would refer to this as a change of mindset.

John's startling declaration of the nearness of God's kingdom draws even city dwellers out into the wilderness. Baptise is from the Greek word baptizō and means 'to plunge, dip or immerse'. John was immersing people in the River Jordan. When people were baptised by him, being immersed in the water symbolised both the cleansing away of sin and a passing safely through the waters of judgment and death. Christians today differ over whether full bodily immersion is required for the symbolism of baptism.

Having made the difficult journey from Jerusalem, the people demonstrate their repentance by confessing their sins.

John apparently baptised in several locations throughout the region near the Jordan River.

The precise location of Jesus' baptism is disputed and today competing venues vie for visitors. The traditional baptism site is Qasr el-Yahud on the western bank of the Jordan River. However, the scene might instead be identified with 'Bethany across Jordan', i.e. on the eastern side as noted in John 1:28. Although this text may imply that John had baptised Jesus earlier, and perhaps in a different locale. It is likely that John baptised people in more than one location.

⁴ As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

A voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

Luke 3:4

The quotation from Isaiah 40:3-5 proclaims that the Lord himself is coming to bring salvation to his people.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.

Luke 3:5

Every valley filled. A poetic way of saying that the way for the Messiah will be expedited, i.e. brought forth soon.

Every mountain and hill shall be made low. Obstacles will be removed. But these images are also metaphors that have ethical overtones: the proud and arrogant will be humbled, for example: <<*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*>> (Luke 14:11), and: <<*I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*>> (Luke 18:14). The humble and lowly will be exalted and the crooked will be changed: <<*With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation*>> (Acts 2:40), and we also know that we should: <<*Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?*>> (Ecclesiastes 7:13).

⁶ And all mankind will see God's salvation.

Luke 3:6

All mankind will see predicts the salvation also of the Gentiles.

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

Luke 3:7

Vipers is a general term for any of a number of poisonous snakes in Israel, showing that the people had become the seed of the Serpent: <<*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel*>> (Genesis 3:15).

Who warned you to flee? The question could easily be phrased 'Who has told you to flee from the coming wrath by merely submitting to a rite of baptism?'

The crowds included the Jewish religious leaders as we see from Matthew: <<*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, he said to them: You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'. I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire*>> (Matthew 3:7-10). The population are keen in the main to repent, as they would wish God to rid them of their oppression, rather than having an overwhelming desire to do his will. Some, of course, will come to full repentance, will receive the Gospel and move on into eternal life. Some, mainly the leaders, will strongly oppose the message, but most will fall away when they find that this is no quick fix, and that it requires commitment and sacrifice on the part of the believer. But just as the promise is there for those who repent, so is the warning of the axe for those who persist in their unbelief. Trees that do not produce fruit as a testimony of God's grace will be used as fuel for the fire of his judgement. This still applies in today's society.

⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'. For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

Luke 3:8

Do not begin to say. They are not even to think of saying We have Abraham as our father. As they claimed in John 8:39 <<*Abraham is our father, they answered. If you were Abraham's children, said Jesus, then you would do the things Abraham did*>>, and in John 8:53a <<*Are you greater than our father Abraham?*>>. One is not a member of God's family by natural descent but by responding personally to God and his call. Using their descent from Abraham is little more than an excuse, similar to excuses we hear today why people will still not submit to the Gospel and follow Christ into eternal life.

⁹ The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Luke 3:9

Is already or even now. The kingdom of God is not a remote future event but was revealed in the new and decisive way in the ministry of Jesus, for which John the Baptist was preparing the way.

The axe trees. A warning that the coming judgment is very close at hand. Consider this: <<*Then he told this parable: A man had a fig-tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig-tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir', the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig round it and fertilise it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down'*>> (Luke 13:6-9).

The parable shows that Jesus is giving us a final chance by extending the time we have to repent but it is not an unlimited time. We will discuss this further in Chapter 13.

A parable is a story that may or may not be true and which is intended to make some point that is worthy of note, or as a rebuke to the listener to which it does or does not apply. Some people will argue fiercely that all parables are true, as Jesus, being the creator and sustainer of the universe, knows everything that has ever happened, and therefore does not need to make up stories. We are best served just trying to understand the point rather than argue semantics!

¹⁰ What should we do then? the crowd asked.

Luke 3:10

What should we do then they ask in light of vv.7-9? The frequency of this question in Luke-Acts indicates its importance: <<*Tax collectors also came to be baptised. Teacher, they asked, what should we do? Don't collect any more than you are required to, he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, And what should we do? He replied, Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay*>> (Luke 3:12-14), <<*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. Teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*>> (Luke 10:25), which then prompted the parable of the Good Samaritan. On the Day of Pentecost we read: <<*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?*>> (Acts 2:37), and Paul, addressing the crowd after his arrest in Jerusalem: <<*'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. 'Get up', the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do'*>> (Acts 22:10).

How often should we be asking this question of ourselves?

True repentance requires a change in ethical behaviour as is indicated by the examples of vv.10-14, as confirmed in: <<*bear fruit in keeping with repentance*>> in v.8.

¹¹ John answered, The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.

¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptised. Teacher, they asked, what should we do?

¹³ Don't collect any more than you are required to, he told them.

¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, And what should we do? He replied, Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.

Luke 3:11-14

Tunics were garments worn under the cloak noted again in Luke 6:29.

Tax collectors collect tolls, tariffs and customs, and were notoriously dishonest and despised: <<*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them*>> (Luke 15:1-2). They are not told to quit their profession but to be honest in carrying out their duties.

In Palestine, tax collectors were representatives of the Roman governing authorities. Their tendency to resort to extortion made them despised and hated by their own people as seen in Luke 19:8, which is the remarkable story of Zacchæus, a senior tax collector who repented and gave back half of everything he had.

Similarly, soldiers are not told to resign but to avoid the moral temptations of the profession. John does not say that working for the Roman government or serving as a soldier is in itself morally wrong, but he insists that God expects upright conduct from his people.

Israel had no army and it seems unlikely that the Romans would allow Jews to serve in Roman garrisons, at least not in their own country. Some commentators claim that these are Roman soldiers and thus the first Gentiles accepting the Gospel but it is more likely they were Jewish temple guards.

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. ¹⁶ John answered them all, I baptise you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Luke 3:15-16

In the two phrases one more powerful than I will come and he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire, the Greek word order emphasises the pronoun he pointing to Jesus as confirmed in John 3:30 <<*He must become greater; I must become less*>>. John the Baptist's answer indicates that people will know that the Christ has come when he baptises with the Holy Spirit, which took place at Pentecost in Acts Chapter 2. Whether being baptised 'with the Holy Spirit and fire' will be positive, involving the coming of the purifying fire of the Spirit at Pentecost, Acts 1:8 and 2:3; or negative, involving the divine judgment of fire, i.e. <<*When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?*>> (Luke 9:54), and, later Jesus says: <<*I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!*>> (Luke 12:49), and again in Luke 17:29 <<*But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all*>>; positive or negative - depends on the response of the individual person.

John's water baptism will be superseded by the baptism associated with the 'Coming One'. Those who repent and trust in him will receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit, as confirmed in Joel 2:28-29 <<*And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days*>>.

which was used by Peter in Acts 2:16-21 <<'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'>>. While the unrepentant will receive the judgment of eternal fire; the repentant may undergo a purifying fire: <<I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire>> (Matthew 3:11).

The divided tongues of fire in Acts 2:3 were not literal flames, for Luke says 'as of', but looked enough like fire that this was the best description that could be given. Fire in the OT often indicates the presence of God, especially in his burning holiness and purity, consuming everything that is impure. See examples in Exodus 3:2, 13:21, 19:18 and 40:38, Isaiah 4:5, and Ezekiel 1:4.

These tongues may, therefore, portray both the purity and the power of the speech of these disciples as they proclaimed: <<the wonders of God>> (Acts 2:11b), as well as the holy presence of God.

¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Luke 3:17

Winnowing fork is a wooden pitchfork used to throw the chaff and grain into the air to separate them.

The wheat or grain would be gathered and the chaff burned as fuel in the oven. It reminds us: <<If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?>> (Matthew 6:30).

Unquenchable fire portrays the horrible nature of the final judgment. John is probably alluding to the words of his predecessor: <<And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not. Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire, says the LORD Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them>> (Malachi 3:18-4:1).

¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them. ¹⁹ But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, ²⁰ Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

Luke 3:18-20

John preaches the good news or Gospel, indicating that he is different from the OT prophets because he is the first preacher of the good news of the kingdom of God. For it is written: <<The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of

the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it>> (Luke 16:16).

John had many attributes as a preacher and proclaimer of God's word:

1. He was an affectionate preacher: exhorting and beseeching, he pressed his message home upon his hearers, followed his doctrine closely and was fully sincere.
2. He was a practical preacher: much of his message lifted people to seek their duty before God, directing them to their work but amusing them with matters of subtle speculation.
3. He was a popular preacher: although he had the religious leaders among his followers, it was the common man who was his target audience. He spoke at their level of understanding by keeping his message simple and jargon free.
4. He was an evangelical preacher: bringing the Gospel to the people in all his exhortations, he directed people to the Christ to come; exciting and encouraging them in their expectations of him. All messengers should press upon their recipients the need to come to Christ, both for righteousness and for strength.
5. He was a copious preacher: many things he preached so the Bible tells us. He preached a great deal, shunned not to declare the whole Counsel of God and he varied his preaching that those who were not reached and touched by one truth, might be by another but each being the same truth.

It is not clear whether Herod imprisoned John solely for his outspokenness over Herod's incestuous and unlawful marriage, or whether it was to silence: <<*A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the LORD*>> (Isaiah 40:3). Tradition has it that John preached for about 18 months prior to Jesus starting his public ministry; about six months before Jesus' baptism and a year afterwards. Therefore, the mention of his imprisonment and, as we read elsewhere, his execution, is out of sequence with the baptism that comes next in Luke's account. This was probably done to allow Luke to complete the account of John before focusing on the Christ. In a way, John's death was providential for just as the morning star shines brightest before sunrise, so it disappears as the sun comes up over the horizon.

III.b Luke 3:21-4:15 - The Baptism and Genealogy of Jesus

The description of Jesus as God's Son (Luke 1:31-35) is confirmed: at his baptism by a voice from heaven (Luke 3:22), and his anointing by the Spirit (Luke 3:22, 4:1 and 4:18), by his genealogy (Luke 3:38), and by Satan's acknowledgment of him as the Son of God at his temptation (Luke 4:3 and 4:9).

III.b.i Luke 3:21-22 - Jesus' baptism

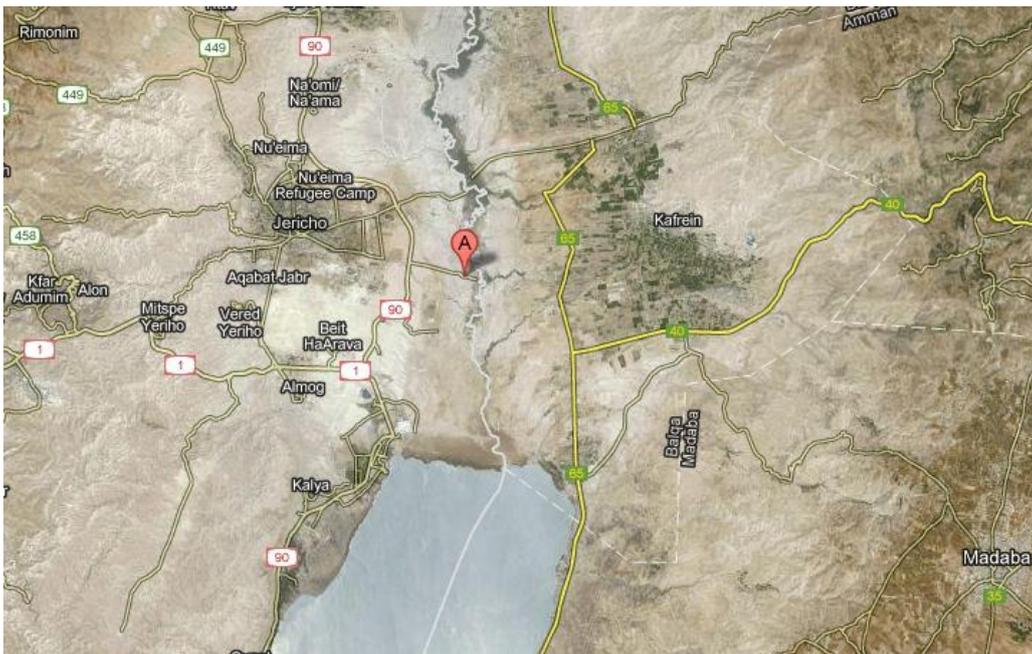
Jesus submits to John's baptism of repentance to identify with Israel's sin, foreshadowing the judgment he will endure at the Cross. Luke does not explicitly mention John's role in Jesus' baptism, although he acknowledges it in Acts 1:22 <<*beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection*>>.

²¹ When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened

Luke 3:21

Jesus did not take precedent in his baptism over the common man but was baptised with the people. He had no sin to confess at his baptism but he did pray in order to maintain communion with the Father and perhaps to ask the Holy Spirit to come upon him at that time.

As previously stated, the precise location of Jesus' baptism is disputed and today competing venues vie for visitors. The traditional baptism site is Qasr el-Yahud on the western bank of the Jordan River. However, the scene might instead be identified with 'Bethany across the Jordan' as noted in John 1:28, though this text may imply that John had baptised Jesus earlier and perhaps in a different locale. It is likely that John baptised people in more than one location, as confirmed v.3 and in John 3:23a <<Now John also was baptising at Aenon near Salim>>, and in John 10:40a <<Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptising in the early days>>.



The traditional baptism site is Qasr el-Yahud just north of The Dead Sea

Was praying; heaven was opened to show visible evidence of God's action.

Most of us accept that we live in a three or four dimensional world, but modern science now accepts there are between 11 and 13 dimensions, and perhaps yet more to be discovered. We don't know the location of heaven, but that it appears to be above and around us. In my understanding, it may well exist in parallel to us, in another dimension, and what we see on this occasion is God making a clear path between the dimension of heaven and that of earth. Of course, we can never know this for sure and scripture tells us to accept by faith what is unseen.

²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.

Luke 3:22

The Holy Spirit descended on him. Jesus is anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit for his ministry. This will be an important theme in the following chapters, e.g. <<Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert>> (Luke 4:1),

<<Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside>> (Luke 4:14), and especially: <<The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour>> (Luke 4:18-19), which announces the start of his ministry.

Like a dove. This simile does not necessarily mean that the Spirit actually assumed the form of a dove but it does indicate a bodily form of something like a dove. It was probably ephemeral.

Voice came from heaven, as God speaks: <<Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send?>> (Isaiah 6:8).

You are my Son, whom I love or my beloved Son. Jesus is not only a man, he is also the uniquely loved Son of the Father. As with Mark, it is recorded that God is speaking directly to Jesus, whereas in Matthew he addresses the crowd: <<And a voice from heaven said, This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased>> (Matthew 3:17).

Jesus is the Son of God, not in the sense of being created or born: <<Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made>> (John 1:3), but in the sense of being a Son, who is exactly like the Father in all attributes, and in the sense of having a Father-Son relationship with God the Father.

The Greek word underlying only is monogenēs and means one-of-a-kind or unique as in the case of Isaac, who is called Abraham's one-of-a-kind son in Hebrews 11:17. This is in contrast to Ishmael, as confirmed in Genesis 22:2, 22:12 and 22:16. Thus 'only' is a better translation than 'only begotten' made familiar through its use in the KJV. We see this clearly in John 1:14 <<The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth>>.

Other scriptures that come to mind are: <<I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth>> (Psalm 89:27), and: <<I will be his father, and he shall be my son>> (2 Samuel 7:14a).

This divine affirmation is confirmed in Luke 1:31-35, and Luke 2:49, and will be repeated at the transfiguration in Luke 9:35.

Well pleased shows that the Father takes delight in all that Jesus is and all that he has done in his life. It may also indicate that Jesus is the servant of the Lord by alluding to Isaiah 42:1, which states: <<Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations>>, in which case, it would be forecasting the death of Jesus for his people.

III.b.ii Luke 3:23-38 - The genealogy of Jesus Christ

Matthew demonstrates Jesus' legal claim to the throne of David, emphasising Jesus' legal descent from David and Abraham, while Luke's genealogical record emphasises Jesus' biological descent from David and Adam.

The Jews kept extensive genealogies to establish a person's heritage, inheritance, legitimacy and rights as confirmed by Josephus (Life of Josephus 1-6). In Matthew's Gospel, he likely draws on the genealogies of the OT with some omissions. In this version of Jesus' genealogy, Matthew does not mean all the generations that had lived during those times but all that he included in his list, for he evidently skipped some such as three generations

between Joram and Uzziah or Azariah in Matthew 1:8, which is confirmed in 1 Chronicles 3:10-12. Perhaps for ease of memorisation or perhaps for literary or symbolic symmetry, Matthew structures the genealogy to count 14 generations from each major section. According to the Jewish practice of gematria, the giving of a numeric value in the consonants in a word, David's name would add to D + V + D, or 4 + 6 + 4 = 14, and David is the 14th name on the list.

Whereas Matthew traces Jesus' lineage from Abraham to emphasise Jesus' Jewish heritage, Luke traces it back to Adam to show that Jesus is the fulfilment of the hopes of all people and records. As Paul puts it: <<*From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live*>> (Acts 17:26).

In addition to some minor differences and gaps mentioned above, the genealogies in Matthew and Luke differ significantly in the period from David to Jesus, even naming different fathers for Joseph: Jacob in Matthew 1:16 and Heli in Luke 3:23. Both Matthew and Luke are evidently depending on detailed historical records and various suggestions have been proposed to explain the differences:

1. An old suggestion is that Matthew traces Joseph's ancestry, while Luke traces Mary's ancestry. But very few commentators defend this solution today because Luke 1:27 refers to Joseph not Mary and taking v.23 as a reference to Mary's ancestry requires the unlikely step of inserting Mary into the text, where she is not mentioned but Joseph is mentioned.
2. The most commonly accepted suggestion is that Matthew traces the line of royal succession, moving from David to Solomon in Matthew 1:6, while Luke traces Joseph's actual *physical descent* by moving from David to Nathan, who is a little-known son mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:14 and Luke 3:31, and both lines converge at Joseph. **(Not the prophet Nathan that David so frequently conferred with).**
3. Apparently some post-Babylonian genealogy records show that Solomon's line ended with Jeconiah and the legal right of accession then passed to Shealtiel, who was in the line of Nathan. This is not so clear from scripture but certainly a possibility to resolve the two routes from David.

Then there are various explanations for the two different people named as Joseph's father: Jacob in Matthew; Heli in Luke. In most proposed solutions they are thought to be different people and a second marriage is assumed, sometimes a levirate marriage.

The OT law stated that a surviving brother of a childless deceased man was obligated to marry the dead man's widow, i.e. his sister-in-law, in order to provide for her needs and to preserve the deceased brother's family line by dedicating any first born son to him. This is what was later called levirate marriage from Latin levir, meaning brother-in-law and is fully explained in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and Genesis 38:8.

Therefore, by this analysis, Joseph was the legal son of one but the physical son of the other, and thus there are two lines of ancestry for the two men.

Some commentators have suggested that Heli was Mary's father but that there were no male heirs in the family so Heli adopted Joseph as his son when Mary and Joseph were married.

Examples of this elsewhere are: <<*Sheshan had no sons – only daughters. He had an Egyptian servant named Jarha. Sheshan gave his daughter in marriage to his servant Jarha, and she bore him Attai*>> (1 Chronicles 2:34-35), <<*And from among the priests: The descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai, a man who had married a daughter of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by that name*>> (Ezra 2:61 and Nehemiah 7:63). You

may also refer to Numbers 27:1-11 for the story of Zelophehad's daughters and the resulting inheritance law when there is no son.

Although the genealogies in Matthew and Luke differ in their organising principles, both of these genealogies emphasise that Jesus was the son of David, v.31 and Matthew 1:6. Luke further emphasises the virgin birth, as recorded in Luke 1:34-35 with the phrase: <<He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph>> (v.23).

A further anomaly is the insertion of Cainan between Shelah and his father Arphaxad. This is an anomaly found only in the LXX and the reason for its insertion is lost in the mists of time. But Luke, copying from the manuscript, was obliged to include it.

What is worthy of note is both Matthew and Luke would have written down their lists from public sources that would have been easily verifiable when both Gospels first came into circulation and there is no evidence that either list was challenged by the authorities at the time, who would have had a good reason to do so.

²³ Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli,

Luke 3:23

If Jesus was born sometime before Herod the Great's death in 4BC as confirmed in Matthew 2:16 and began his ministry c. AD28-30 as we saw in v.1, he would have been about thirty years old or in his early 30s.

²⁴ the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, ²⁵ the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, ²⁶ the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, ²⁷ the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, ²⁸ the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, ²⁹ the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, ³⁰ the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, ³¹ the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, ³² the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, ³³ the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, ³⁴ the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, ³⁵ the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, ³⁶ the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, ³⁷ the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Kenan, ³⁸ the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Luke 3:24-38

Son of Zerubbabel: Zerubbabel was listed in Ezra 3:2 as the son of Shealtiel, who was in turn, listed as the son of King Jehoiachin in 1 Chronicles 3:17. Jehoiachin was taken prisoner by Nebuchadnezzar and was transported to Babylon for the rest of his days. Due to the time in

captivity it is more likely that Zerubbabel was the grandson or even great-grandson of Shealtiel but is called his son in Ezra as he was the last significant relative in his ancestral line. This is quite common in Jewish genealogies. Zerubbabel is also referred to by his Babylonian name Sheshbazzar in Ezra Chapters 1 and 5.

Jesus is the Son of God as confirmed in Luke 1:31-35, in Luke 2:11 and in v.22.