

**Luke 3:1 ¶ 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,  
Luke 3:2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.**

Again, this chapter begins with a time identifier that marks the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist. He marks the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, a time when Pontius Pilate is governor of Judaea. Luke also notes that Herod, Philip and Lysanias are serving as regional heads in Galilee, Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Abilene respectively. He also notes that Annas and Caiaphas are high priests.

Research indicates that based on the reign of Tiberius Caesar, the time is 26-29 AD, depending on whether you count the time he reigned jointly with Augustus.

I am reminded that the focus of Luke's gospel is on Jesus the Man. I think all his historical references to rulers and censuses etc. are to emphasize that Jesus was an actual historical figure.

It seems to be widely accepted that Caiaphas was the actual high priest, but that Annas, the former high priest and father-in-law of Caiaphas, was still very influential.

*John 18:13 "And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year."*

At this point in time is when God decides to speak to the son of Zacharias, (commonly known to us as John the Baptist) who is living in the wilderness. Context indicates that this is when God called him to begin his public ministry of preparing the hearts of the people to receive the Messiah.

**Luke 3:3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;  
Luke 3:4 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.  
Luke 3:5 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;  
Luke 3:6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.**

John had a specific message—a call for the people to be baptized in testimony to the fact that they were sinners in need of forgiveness.

Luke then tells us that John's ministry was directly connected to Isaiah's prophecy.

*Isaiah 40:3–5 “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: 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.”*

I think Luke was using a word picture to describe a spiritual truth. It was customary for great pains to be taken to ensure that the route taken by a king was cleared of obstacles to ensure the best possible journey. The Messiah was coming to redeem man from sin and offer free forgiveness of sin and eternal salvation. John’s ministry was to encourage people to prepare their hearts through repentance of their sins in readiness to receive the salvation that Jesus would offer.

Obviously, John’s message didn’t get the full results called for in the prophecy; that time is yet future—the time when Jesus ascends His throne in Jerusalem. Though all flesh did not see the salvation of the Lord in Jesus when He came the first time; they certainly will when He comes to establish His Kingdom.

**Luke 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Luke 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Luke 3:9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.**

Evidently, it wasn’t long before John was garnering an audience of “multitudes.” The context indicates that his message was bold, powerful and “not politically correct.” Luke is so detailed that I am surprised he didn’t give us more of the context for such strong language; Matthew supplies that for us.

*Matthew 3:5–10 “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. **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? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”***

John knew that it was the attitude of the Pharisees and Sadducees, the spiritual leaders of the people, that would pose one of the biggest obstacles to his message of repentance. These leaders basically embraced the idea that the fact of their Jewishness was sufficient before God. John first addresses them with a question that is aimed at their motives for coming to hear him; he was aware of their self-righteous attitudes. He then boldly declared that they needed to acknowledge

that they were sinners, repent of their sin and begin living so as to give evidence to the truth of that repentance. He declared that those who do not will face God's fiery judgment.

Jesus dealt with these same attitudes from these same leaders.

*John 8:39–42 “Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.”*

**Luke 3:10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?**

**Luke 3:11 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.**

I think it is telling that the response from the audience was basically to ask how they could earn right standing before God. They were so focused on works and keeping the letter of the law that they couldn't process the idea that they needed a change of heart. John's answer was to point to actions that were reflective of a change of heart—to show love and mercy to those in need.

**Luke 3:12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?**

**Luke 3:13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.**

I think it is significant that Luke singles out the response of the publicans, the hated tax collectors, from the rest of the crowd. Their question seems to be more reflective of a true desire for repentance. Just to ask the question was indicative of their desire to make a change in their lives; they knew they were treating people wrongly. John's answer was direct—be honest in your dealings with the people. This would hit the publicans where it hurt the most—in their wallet. To become an honest tax collector would indeed reflect a change of heart.

**Luke 3:14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse *any* falsely; and be content with your wages.**

It's hard to imagine, though not impossible, that these soldiers would refer to Gentile Roman soldiers. It seems much more likely to be referencing those Jews in the ranks of the temple soldiers such as were sent to arrest Jesus. I think it unlikely that Gentiles would have been convicted of a message to repentance before experiencing the miracles of Jesus and His disciples as testifying to a message of truth and power that can make a difference in one's life.

John's answer to the soldiers was three-fold—1) do no violence to others, 2) make no false accusations, and 3) be content with your wages. Like the tax collectors,

these soldiers had power and authority that posed the temptation to take advantage of their position for selfish gain—much like those in the ranks of the police and judiciary in America today. John is basically telling them to comport themselves with integrity and compassion—again, evidences of a change in one’s heart.

**Luke 3:15 ¶ And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;**

**Luke 3:16 John answered, saying unto *them* all, 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:**

**Luke 3:17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.**

John’s bold message delivered with such authority caused the people to wonder whether he was the long-awaited Christ, the Messiah. John very quickly discounted such thinking, though He acknowledged the importance of his message concerning the need for being baptized with water in acknowledgement of the need for repentance. John declared himself unworthy to even “untie the laces of the shoes” of the One who would come after him who would baptize them with the Holy Ghost (Spirit) and with fire. This man would possess the power and authority to separate those serving God from a pure heart vs. those who are serving Him in pride in the flesh. He pictured this truth using the process of separating the wheat from chaff. The wheat would be safely stored for His use, and the chaff would be destroyed.

The prophet Ezekiel had declared that the day was coming when God would put His Spirit into the hearts of His people.

*Ezekiel 36:26–28 “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.”*

In context, he is implying that it is this coming one that is the Christ.

**Luke 3:18 And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.**

**Luke 3:19 But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,**

**Luke 3:20 Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.**

With these verses Luke basically summarizes the ministry of John the Baptist. Though he does not tell us about John’s death, he tells us about the imprisonment that leads to his death. It is a continuing testimony to the boldness of John’s preaching. He didn’t shy away from pointing out the sin in the life of the king.

This again brings up a weakness in the church today. As a whole, the church is embracing a “politically correct” message, one that focuses on the love of Christ without touching on sin and the judgment of sin. People need to be confronted with their sin to understand the need for repentance that leads to salvation. John wasn’t worried about what the people thought about his message; he was more concerned about being obedient to the One who commissioned him to share that message—no matter the personal cost.

**Luke 3:21** ¶ **Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,**  
**Luke 3:22** **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.**

I think Luke is basically saying that John’s ministry was ending as Jesus’ ministry was beginning. Jesus’ baptism was basically a public commissioning of His ministry in the person of the Son of God. God gave His blessing by sending the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove to light upon Him accompanied by a discernible Divine verbal affirmation. Both Matthew and Mark record this event, but Matthew gives the most information.

*Matthew 3:13–17* “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Evidently, John knew that Jesus was the Messiah and was uncomfortable at the thought of baptizing Jesus—One who did not need to repent. I think that Jesus’ baptism was an early declaration that He understood how His ministry would culminate from the beginning—as the bearer of my sin and your sin on the cross. Matthew’s account seems to indicate that only John was aware of the presence of the Spirit in the dove and heard God pronounce His blessing on His Son.

I think this was probably significant to John considering what would lead to his death. Still, his imprisonment caused him to send his disciples to Jesus for one more confirmation that He was the Christ. The Lord answered Him by quoting from Isaiah’s prophecy that was indicative of the Messiah.

*Matthew 11:2–6* “Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”

I think it is significant to note that Luke tells us that Jesus was praying as He was baptized. I think this information could only come through the inspiration of the Spirit. Jesus is ever pictured in the gospels as making it a priority to spend time in prayer and fellowship with His Father. I think it testifies to the relationship that He had developed with His Father, God the Father in heaven, that He would be praying as He was being publicly commissioned for His ministry.

In this next section Luke introduces the genealogical record of Jesus by telling us that He was about 30 years of age at the time of His baptism. This too I think is an important fact since it corresponds to the age God had established as making one eligible to serve as a priest.

*Numbers 4:47 "From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that came to do the service of the ministry, and the service of the burden in the tabernacle of the congregation...."*

**Luke 3:23** 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,  
**Luke 3:24** Which was *the son* of Matthat, which was *the son* of Levi, which was *the son* of Melchi, which was *the son* of Janna, which was *the son* of Joseph,  
**Luke 3:25** Which was *the son* of Mattathias, which was *the son* of Amos, which was *the son* of Naum, which was *the son* of Esli, which was *the son* of Nagge,  
**Luke 3:26** Which was *the son* of Maath, which was *the son* of Mattathias, which was *the son* of Semei, which was *the son* of Joseph, which was *the son* of Juda,  
**Luke 3:27** Which was *the son* of Joanna, which was *the son* of Rhesa, which was *the son* of Zorobabel, which was *the son* of Salathiel, which was *the son* of Neri,  
**Luke 3:28** Which was *the son* of Melchi, which was *the son* of Addi, which was *the son* of Cosam, which was *the son* of Elmodam, which was *the son* of Er,  
**Luke 3:29** Which was *the son* of Jose, which was *the son* of Eliezer, which was *the son* of Jorim, which was *the son* of Matthat, which was *the son* of Levi,  
**Luke 3:30** Which was *the son* of Simeon, which was *the son* of Juda, which was *the son* of Joseph, which was *the son* of Jonan, which was *the son* of Eliakim,  
**Luke 3:31** Which was *the son* of Melea, which was *the son* of Menan, which was *the son* of Mattatha, which was *the son* of Nathan, which was *the son* of David,  
**Luke 3:32** Which was *the son* of Jesse, which was *the son* of Obed, which was *the son* of Booz, which was *the son* of Salmon, which was *the son* of Naasson,  
**Luke 3:33** Which was *the son* of Aminadab, which was *the son* of Aram, which was *the son* of Esrom, which was *the son* of Phares, which was *the son* of Juda,  
**Luke 3:34** Which was *the son* of Jacob, which was *the son* of Isaac, which was *the son* of Abraham, which was *the son* of Thara, which was *the son* of Nachor,  
**Luke 3:35** Which was *the son* of Saruch, which was *the son* of Ragau, which was *the son* of Phalec, which was *the son* of Heber, which was *the son* of Sala,  
**Luke 3:36** Which was *the son* of Cainan, which was *the son* of Arphaxad, which was *the son* of Sem, which was *the son* of Noe, which was *the son* of Lamech,  
**Luke 3:37** Which was *the son* of Mathusala, which was *the son* of Enoch, which was *the son* of Jared, which was *the son* of Maleleel, which was *the son* of Cainan,

**Luke 3:38** Which was *the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.*

The scripture contains two genealogies of Jesus—one through Joseph in Matthew and one through Mary in Luke. Some dispute this understanding, but it is the most reasonable explanation to me of the differences in the two records according to the purposes of the authors. Matthew's purpose was to present Jesus as the Jewish King and Luke to present Him as the Son of man. Matthew focused on His descent from Abraham through the royal line of David, while Luke focused on His descent from Adam through the royal line of David. Luke specifically points out that Joseph was known as Jesus' father, but indeed was not as shown by the phrase "as was supposed."

For both Matthew and Luke to take such pains to list the genealogy of Jesus is another strong testimony to the truth of His existence; He was a real man!

I think it is also interesting that Luke declares Adam to be from God—a statement of His direction creation. It was the failure of the first Adam that led to the necessity for the coming of Jesus as the second Adam. Paul declares this truth clearly in his letters to the Romans and the Corinthians.

*Romans 5:12–19 "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many....Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."*

*1 Corinthians 15:21–22 "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."*