

Wednesday Evening Bible Study
December 19, 2018
The Gospel of Luke
The Ministry of John
Topics – Luke 3; John the Baptist
Text – Luke 3:1 - 20

Introduction

At the conclusion of chapter two, we saw Jesus at the age of twelve discussing matters of theology with the doctors of the Law in the Temple. That was the only glimpse that we received of the childhood of the Lord Jesus. In chapter three, we have fast-forwarded eighteen years in time and are at the beginning of the Lord's earthly, public ministry. But, first we will learn a little about John the Baptist who was the forerunner for the Lord Jesus. Lester Roloff likened John to a bulldozer operator who paved the way for the Lord Jesus.

I The Writing of Luke Presented Historical Context (3:1 – 2)

Luke goes to great detail to provide information that will give us historical context. The names that are mentioned in these two verses allow us to pinpoint the exact time period as they are all well documented historical figures.

A Tiberius Caesar (v. 1) – son-in-law and then adopted son of Caesar Augustus. He was coregent with August beginning in A.D. 11 or 12, but was the sole emperor from A.D. 14 – 37. This would make the 15th year of his reign probably at 25 or 26 A.D. Tiberius' reign started out well, and he was fiscally conservative. He eventually abandoned Rome, leaving a brutal man named Sejanus in charge while he lived on the Isle of Capri. He returned to Rome near the end of his life and had Sejanus executed for allegedly planning Tiberius' assassination. Tiberius became suspicious of everybody, and held many "treason trials" where suspected traitors and conspirators were found guilty and executed. He was succeeded by Caligula who was perhaps a more brutal emperor than he was.

B Pontius Pilate (v. 1)- ruled over Judaea from 26 – 36 A.D. In addition to the events that we will study surrounding Pilate's role in the crucifixion of Christ, we know through extra-biblical sources that Herod had an antagonistic relationship with the Jews. They hated him, and he was not too fond of them either. Though the Jews were granted many religious freedoms, Pilate aggressively asserted Roman authority over them. The Jews rebelled and even revolted against his authority at various times, including an incident where Pilate brought ensigns (or possibly shields) with Caesar's image on them inside of Jerusalem in view of the Temple. He also used the Temple tax money in order to build an aqueduct, which according to the Jews was a misappropriation of monies that were dedicated for a sacred purpose. Tiberius finally removed him after he ordered a massacre of a group of Samaritans. Pilate committed suicide some time during the reign of Caesar Caligula (37 – 41 A.D.)

C Herod Antipas (v. 1) – son of Herod the Great and Malthace. Tetrarch of Galilee from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. (He is mentioned in Matthew 14:1ff.; Luke 3:1; 9:7; 13:31, and 23:7) At the death of Herod the Great, his kingdom was divided among three of his sons. The term "Tetrarch" meant "leader of the fourth part." This Herod was known as Herod Antipas which is the shortened form of Antipater. He controlled Galilee and Perea. This meant that much of Jesus' ministry was in the territory of this second generation Idumean ruler.¹

He divorced his wife and married his brother Philip's wife, though not the same Philip who was the tetrarch of Ituraea.

¹ Utley, R. J. (2000). *The First Christian Primer: Matthew* (Vol. Volume 9, p. 124). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

D Philip (v. 1) – a son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra, and half-brother of Antipas. Philip was tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis (plus certain other territories) to the northeast of Galilee for 37 years (4 bc to ad 33). His wife was his niece Salome who danced for the head of John the Baptist (Mt 14:3–12; Mk 6:17–29).²

E Lysanius (v. 1) – ruler of an area northwest of Damascus. This is the only mention of him in the New Testament, and little is known about him.

F Annas (v. 2) – high priest from 6 – 15 A.D. he was deposed by the Romans, but retained his power without the authority. (See John 18:13; Acts 4:6)

G Caiaphas (v. 2) – son-in-law to Caiaphas who became high priest from 18 – 36 A.D. after and before several of Annas other sons.

Note – both Annas and Caiaphas bitterly opposed Jesus, and were the strongest voices demanding His crucifixion. The Jewish people denounced the corruption these religious rulers.

II The Ministry of John Provided Prophetic Fulfillment (vs. 4 – 6)

The ministry of John the Baptist was prophesied in the Old Testament by both Isaiah and Malachi.

"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." (Isaiah 40:3-5)

The prophecy indicates that John the Baptist was preparing the way for the Lord Jesus, just as a king would have a crew of workers clear the path ahead of him as he was entering a city.

Malachi prophesied something similar:

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 3:1)

It is interesting that John's ministry, which preceded Christ, was a ministry of repentance. Repentance precedes salvation.

III The Baptism of John Was Preceded By a Genuine Repentance (vs. 3; 7 – 14)

John's preaching was not flowery; it was pointed and powerful, and it demanded a decision. People left John's services either receiving or rejecting Christ. There was no middle ground.

John did not allow the candidates for his baptism to just intellectually assent to facts about a coming Messiah. He demanded a genuine repentance. I define repentance as a change of mind which produces a change of attitude and action about who Jesus is. John told these people who were being baptized that there needed to be a genuine change of heart, which would result in a change of behavior. Belief determines behavior.

Notice in v. 8 that being born Jewish was not sufficient for salvation.

*"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, **not of blood**, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* (John 1:12-13)

Jesus rejected the blood relationship just before He began teaching in parables. (See [Matthew 12:47 – 50](#))

² Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Philip*. In Baker encyclopedia of the Bible (Vol. 2, p. 1676). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

John warns the people in v. 9 that Israel will be rejected if it does not produce fruit, just as an unproductive tree would be.

Three groups of people demonstrated that they meant business with God, and they asked John what they should do. These actions would demonstrate that they had truly repented:

A The People (vs. 10 – 11) – Be generous and share what you have. Give your time, talent, and treasure to those who need them.

B The Publicans (vs. 12 – 13) – Stop stealing from people. It was common for tax collectors to take more than what was required, and keep it for themselves.

C The Police (v. 14) – Treat people fairly, and don't be corrupt.

Practical Point – Salvation is not a mere intellectual assent to the facts about Christ. It is a turning from unbelief and sin, and turning to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith and submission.

IV The Testimony of John Proffered Clarification (vs. 15 – 17)

There seemed to be some confusion as to John's identity. Some thought that he was the Messiah. John did not take any glory away from the Lord. He immediately corrected anybody who thought to elevate him.

See John 3:25 – 36 – John stated clearly that Christ was to increase.

V The Impact of John's Preaching Produced Enemies (vs. 18 – 20)

John the Baptist preached against Herod Antipas' marriage to his brother Philip's wife. According to the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible:

Around ad 29 Antipas took a trip to Rome and on the way paid a visit to his half-brother Herod Philip, who must have lived in a coastal city in Palestine. Antipas fell in love with Herodias, Philip's wife, who was also Antipas' niece. The idea of becoming the wife of a tetrarch appealed to her and she agreed to marry him when he returned from Rome if he would oust Aretas' daughter (*Antiq.* 18.5.1 §§ 109–110). Antipas agreed to the plan, and when Aretas' daughter heard of it she fled to her father. This was a breach of political alliance as well as a personal insult which led to retaliation by Aretas.

The marriage of Antipas and Herodias was in violation of the Mosaic law which forbade marriage to a brother's wife (Lev. 18:16; 20:21) except in order to raise children for a deceased childless brother by a levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5; Mk.12:19). In this case, Philip not only had a child, Salome, but he was still alive. This is the situation which John the Baptist spoke so boldly against, and Antipas threw him in prison. Herodias' hatred of John the Baptist was too great merely to settle for his incarceration. At an appropriate time, possibly Antipas' birthday, she planned a banquet at Machaerus in Perea. Her daughter, Salome, danced for the king and in an impulsive moment Antipas promised her under oath that he would give her anything, up to half of his kingdom. Following her mother's advice she asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter. Immediately Antipas was sorry for his rash promise, but in order to save face in the presence of his underlords he granted the request. Thus, John's ministry ended around ad 31 or 32.³

John's preaching eventually got him into trouble with the government. You cannot preach against sin the way John did without infuriating people who love their sin. John ended up in prison because he preached against the unlawful union of Herod with his brother Phillip's wife. However, John's imprisonment, though recorded here, would not take place until later. (Matthew 4:12; Luke 1:14) Ultimately, Herod would have John beheaded at the

³ Hoehner, H. W. (1988). *Herod, Herodian Family*. In Baker encyclopedia of the Bible (Vol. 1, p. 969). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

request of his wife. (Matthew 14:1 – 12) Luke does not record the events surrounding John's death. He only informs us of the testimony of Herod regarding his beheading of John. (Luke 9:9)

Anybody who lives for God and preaches the gospel will suffer some type of persecution in their life. "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" (2 Timothy 3:12) The religious freedoms that we enjoy in America will probably exempt us from a death sentence, but Christians are still persecuted and sometimes imprisoned for observing their faith. Christians outside of America sometimes are called upon by the Lord to pay the ultimate sacrifice for standing for Christ. In 2017, Fox News cited a report from a Christian research firm affiliated with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary where it was stated that nearly one million Christians were martyred for their faith in the last ten years.⁴ Lifeway reported that over 215 million Christians today face significant levels of persecution. The article states that an estimated 1 in 12 Christians live where their faith is "illegal, forbidden, or punished."⁵ Franklin Graham stated, "I am sure the number of Christians who are in prison or martyred each year would stagger our mind if we really knew what the total number really was."⁶

Illustration – The following is an article from *Voice of the Martyrs*:

At just 15 years old, Egyptian born Meriam first experienced persecution for her faith, after her family discovered she converted from Islam to Christianity.

Meriam was just three years old when she was left without a mother after her parents divorced. Meriam's mother discovered that her husband had converted to Christianity and after telling her family, they insisted she get a divorce.

Meriam's father was able to take her with him and the two of them left the family home to move in with her grandmother. Eventually, because he shared his faith often, Meriam and her grandmother became Christians too.

In January this year, Meriam's extended family found out she had also converted so they came to her home and demanded that she renounce Christianity. Meriam refused to deny her faith and told them she loves Jesus and would remain a Christian. Her uncles then began to torture her, beating her repeatedly by pinning her to the ground by her head and repeatedly kicking her.

Meriam and her father were then forced to escape their hometown and are now in hiding in Cairo from his family, as he fears they may return to kill her.

Despite her questions and fear, Meriam refuses to deny Jesus and is continuing her life in God. Since that day, Meriam and her father are rebuilding their lives together and she is now receiving psychological treatment.⁷

⁴ <https://www.foxnews.com/world/nearly-1-million-christians-reportedly-martyred-for-their-faith-in-last-decade>

⁵ <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/29/quarter-billion-christians-face-major-persecution-2018/>

⁶ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/may/franklin-graham-martyrs-summit-persecuted-christians-pence.html>

⁷ <https://vom.com.au/the-cost-of-converting-in-egypt/>

PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF JESUS

- City
- City (uncertain location)
- Decapolis city
- Decapolis city (uncertain location)
- ★ Administrative capital
- ▲ Mountain peak
- Major roads
- Other roads
- First procuratorship
- Territory of Antipas
- Territory of Philip
- Syrian territory

Coponius was named the first prefect and established the administrative capital at Caesarea Maritima

