

**Exegetical Notes, Luke 3:1-20**  
**“John Prepares the Way”**

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**Luke 3:1-20**

**Verse 1-2**

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar -- when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene -- during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.*

- Luke, the author of this Gospel is writing a historical recounting of the events around the life and death of Jesus. See Luke 1:1-4. Dates are extremely important in recording historical facts. Therefore, Luke gives us this information overlapping the years when certain men were in office so that we can know when these events took place. As the Jews used one calendar and the Romans another, a simple calendar was not possible to give. By giving overlapping information we can narrow the events to a particular time.
- John began his ministry sometime between 25 and 26 A.D.
- The John mentioned here is the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. See Luke 1:5-25, 39-45, 57-80. For more information about John see Matthew 3:1-17 and Mark 3:1-13.

**Verse 3-6**

*He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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.  
Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.  
The crooked roads shall become straight,  
the rough ways smooth.  
And all mankind will see God’s salvation.’”*

- The quotation is from Isaiah 40:3-5. The implication is that John was called by God to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah. His job was to make the road the Messiah would travel straight without hills or valleys. He was to do this by calling the people of Israel to repent of their sins and to accept the word of God as their guide for life. John was to call Israel back to a Biblical lifestyle.
- The sign of the people’s repentance and their acceptance of a Biblical lifestyle was immersion baptism.

#### **Verse 7-9**

*John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 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. The ax 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.”*

- John did not coddle his audience. When crowds of people came to him for baptism, he warned them that being baptized to look righteous in the eyes of other people was no good. Baptism was only meaningful if it issued from a changed life. Such a life would be clearly shown by the attitude and behavior, the fruit, of a changed person’s life.
- Since those coming to him were Jews, he warned them that they could not simply lean on the favored status as God’s people to secure their place in God’s favor. He told them that those who did not choose God’s way of life would be judged and cast into the fire.

#### **Verse 10-14**

*“What should we do then?” the crowd asked. John answered, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.” Tax collectors also came to be baptized.*

***“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.”***

- People who were sincerely repentant wanted to understand how their lifestyle should change so as to please God. So they began to ask John questions about what they should do to show their sincerity. John’s response was that people who were truly sincere about living for God would share with others and treat others fairly in all their dealings. Sincerely repentant people would not abuse or take advantage of others. They would live contentedly within their means.

### **Verse 15-18**

***The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 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.” And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.***

- People speculated that John must be the Messiah, the Christ. But he clearly told them that he was not the Messiah but that the Messiah was coming. In fact, he told them that the Messiah was already among them and prepared to begin his ministry.

### **Verse 19-20**

***But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.***

- The story of John’s arrest by Herod and his execution is told in Matthew 14:1-12. John was an outspoken critic of Herod the tetrarch because Herod had married the wife of his brother and other things. Herod arrested John and eventually beheaded him because John was critical of him and exposed his sin.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *John Prepares the Way*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)