

CHAPTER 3

Overview of Luke 3

In chapter 3, Luke briefly describes the ministry of John the Baptist, followed by the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Luke will describe John's message of repentance, the purpose of his ministry in regard to Jesus, and how John's confrontation with corrupt Jewish leadership will eventually result in his imprisonment and execution at the hands of Herod. Luke will also emphasize how John instructed his followers "to bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Luke will then clearly show that Jesus' ministry began soon after His baptism by John the Baptist. At the end of the chapter, Luke will cite the genealogy of Jesus, and point out that Jesus is not only a physical descendant of David, but the end of the promised "seed line," descending all the way down from Adam until fulfilled in the Messiah.

What to look for in Luke 3

1. As you read each paragraph ask, "How is God speaking to me personally through His word?"
2. Look for John's role in the gospel, and how John fulfills Old Testament prophecy.
3. Look for the contrast between those who are unrighteous and those who are righteous.
4. Look for the contrast between those of noble means and those of meager means.
5. Find the important instructions from John when he tells his followers what they must do to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance."
6. Find the verse that contains all three Persons of the Godhead (Trinity).
7. Look for the important purpose of the genealogy that Luke provides, especially as it pertains to the "seed line."

1 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,

2 in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

3 And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;

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

3:1-6 In verses 1-6, Luke directs his readers to focus on the life and ministry of John the Baptist. Why is that important? Because God cares enough for His people to prepare them for the One who will become the consolation of Israel. But there is a catch. Only those who will respond to John's message will be prepared to receive the Lamb of God when He appears. Why? Because John's message was one of repentance. This message will prepare God's people for the Messiah whose first coming will be as a sacrifice for sin. In God's great plan, personal sin must be dealt with before one can enjoy God's eternal blessings.

3:1 One might glance over verse 1 as just helpful historical detail (which it is), but there is so much more to it than that. Verse 1 is snapshot of what's wrong with the world. All those named are ruthless and godless leaders, driven by power, greed, ambition, lust, adultery and even incest. This is in stark contrast to the righteousness that John the Baptist preaches, and to the love, compassion, mercy and holiness that Jesus will teach. Verse 1 represents a stark contrast to godliness. Note later that none of

BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH;

6 AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.’ ”

7 So he *began* saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 “Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

9 “Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

those named seek out John when he is ministering in the wilderness, and none will be followers of Jesus.

3:2 Annas and Caiaphas, dual high priests at the time, can be counted among those in verse 1. Annas was a sort of High Priest emeritus, and Caiaphas was his son-in-law in the process of assuming Annas’s authority and responsibility. The High Priest was in charge of temple activities, as well as the head of what was known as the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious body of Israel’s theocratic state. Annas and Caiaphas were political pawns to Herod and the occupying Roman government; all three parties hated each other and were constantly at odds. Because Annas and Caiaphas were of God’s chosen race, true Jews (as opposed to Herod, who was not a Jew but an Edomite), their sin of failing to recognize the Messiah, and in fact rejecting Him, are considered more heinous. They, too, failed to visit John in the wilderness, and in regard to Jesus, they will be instrumental in His death. A message about repentance for personal sin is never welcomed.

3:3 John the Baptist is considered the last of the Old Testament prophets. John’s message was clear: all men need to repent and have their sins forgiven. The bad news is there is no one who doesn’t sin; the good news—the gospel—is that anyone can be forgiven if there is true repentance. Luke makes it clear from the very beginning that without the issue of personal sin being dealt with God’s way, there can be no real enjoyment of God’s blessings, and therefore no real experience of God’s love and grace.

3:4 Luke presents the big picture of John’s role in Jesus’ ministry, although at the time, John’s followers probably did not grasp it. John was sent by God to announce that His Son was coming. If a person wouldn’t repent with John’s call, how would a person ever repent with Jesus’ call? John was announcing, therefore, that to really accept Jesus, one must be willing to address personal sin. Most people in John’s day wanted the blessings of the Messiah, but didn’t want to be bothered with the issue of personal sin. That same problem exists today, even in the American evangelical church.

3:5-6 John is quoting Isaiah 40:4-6. All four gospels record this passage when referring to John the Baptist. John himself is “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” and announcing the coming king. This passage was well known by the Jews to be a messianic prophecy; that is, an Old Testament prophecy declaring the arrival of the long-awaited-for Messiah. Isaiah’s prophecy pictures a royal visit. As was customary in ancient times, the receiving monarch would see that the “way” was made smooth. This was done by filling in ravines and gullies with dirt, smoothing out the roads, and leveling “hills” to make the journey as comfortable as possible for the

arriving monarch—a sign of intense respect. John quotes these verses from Isaiah as a way of warning his listeners to repent and turn away from sin, for the King, the Messiah, is coming. They are to “make ready the way of the Lord” by turning away from unrighteousness and “bear fruits in keeping with repentance” (v. 8). Eventually, “all flesh” will see the Messiah, whether they choose to acknowledge Him or not. John’s warning is to be ready to receive Him by dealing with personal sin.

3:7 The ritual of baptism was begun sometime after the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon. By Jesus’ day, the ritual was performed by pouring water over the head of the repenter using a gourd. John lived in the wilderness near the Jordan River, and therefore, the river was a convenient place to perform baptism. (The religious authorities will confront John on his qualifications for performing baptism, as he is neither a Pharisee nor a scribe [John 1:24-25].) The pouring of water over the head of the repenter symbolized a spiritual cleansing; that is, the washing away of sin and unrighteousness, and was accompanied by confession. In verse 16, John will state that the coming Messiah will baptize, not with water, but with “the Holy Spirit and fire.” This prophecy is fulfilled in Acts 2:1-4.

John’s words are not what we would call “politically correct” or “seeker sensitive.” To call those who come to him a “brood of vipers” is to call them evil, as “vipers” are poisonous snakes and almost always associated with evil, sin and death in Hebrew culture. Therefore, John likens people who are living in sin to descendants of Satan, the serpent in Genesis. “Who warned you...” is a bit rhetorical, for certainly Satan would not have warned them. It was God through the Holy Spirit who warned them. Thus, the next verse starts with the word “Therefore” referring to what they must now do to avoid the wrath—judgment—that will surely come upon all unrighteousness.

3:8 What they must “do” is “bear fruits in keeping with repentance....” Note that John does *not* say, “Bear fruit *so that* you may be forgiven” or that bearing fruit *is* their repentance. Good works does nothing to help a person receive forgiveness. Good works—fruit—should be the *result* of having been forgiven. We do good works *because* we are forgiven, not in order to earn God’s forgiveness. And, John clearly states that being Jewish does not automatically count for forgiveness or protect a Jew from God’s wrath and judgment. The same principle is true today. Just because someone calls himself a Christian, or claim to be born-again or evangelical, doesn’t automatically protect that person from earthly judgment by God. God must see that a person’s repentance is real, and He observes this by

10 And the crowds were questioning him, saying, “Then what shall we do?”

11 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.”

12 And *some* tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?”

13 And he said to them, “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.”

14 *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.”

15 Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ,

16 John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

our change in behavior toward others *as a result of* repentance. (See verses 10-14 below.)

3:9 John prophetically announces that God is already in the process of changing His plan in regard to the Jews, and the whole system of the Old Testament laws, tithes, works and sacrifices is about to change. This may be one reason John was so hated by the religious leaders who depended on the tithes and sacrifices of the people to maintain their comfortable lifestyle.

3:10-14 Look carefully at these verses and you will see one of the most important messages in the New Testament. Do you see it? The message lies in John’s three responses to the question, “What shall we do?” That is, “Okay, now that we’ve repented and been baptized, what’s the next step? What are the fruits we must bear in keeping with repentance?” John’s answer to their question says nothing about keeping the Sabbath, offering a lamb at the temple, keeping the laws of cleanliness and remaining undefiled, and nothing about fasting, prayer or memorizing the Torah. John’s answers all have one common theme: good fruit is defined as how one treats his neighbor. This theme will be seen throughout the gospels but will not be clearly articulated until after Pentecost. James will be the first to state the theme in his letter: “...love your neighbor as yourself” (2:8). All of John’s answers have loving one’s neighbor as the common theme. This theme has been present in the Old Testament prophets but does not become the basis for all good works until the New Testament. Therefore, even before Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection, the Bible clearly teaches that living out one’s repentance is demonstrated by how one treats one’s neighbor. For the born-again Christian, the most important test of a transformed life, therefore, is not how many verses one memorizes or how often one goes to church or how many hours one spends in prayer or how much theology one knows. The true test is in how a Christian treats others. This principle is true whether one is a great sinner like a tax collector, a new believer like the soldier, or someone who is just a part of the crowd.

3:15-17 All who are oppressed, as were the Jews under the Romans, look for a deliverer, one who will overpower the evil forces and raise up the righteous. Many of John’s Jewish followers wondered if John himself was that deliverer, the Messiah. But John clearly states that he is not. Ironically, though, through John, all those who repented and had their sins forgiven *were delivered!*

3:16 Until the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, only special people in the Old Testament, like kings and prophets, had the anointing of the Holy Spirit

17 “His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

18 So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people.

19 But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done,

20 Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.

21 Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened,

22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”

(e.g., Ex. 35:31; 1 Sam. 11:6; Ezek. 2:2). However, as the prophet Joel foretold, there would come a time when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all flesh. But the coming of the Holy Spirit will also bring fire, that is, judgment, for those who reject the Holy Spirit.

Note, too, that being baptized with the Holy Spirit is not the same as being “filled with the Spirit.” Being baptized with the Holy Spirit means to *receive* the Holy Spirit, which occurs when one receives Jesus Christ as personal Savior. (See John 1:33; Acts 1:5, 2:38; Rom. 6:3.)

3:17 Jesus Himself will be the judge, and John prophesies that judgment will begin even with Jesus’ earthly ministry, for there will be those who receive Him and His message (wheat) and those who reject Him (the chaff).

3:18 The use of the word “gospel” here is interesting. We Christians believe that the gospel is the good news that Jesus died for our sins. Yet Luke uses the word here during John’s ministry. In this context, the gospel refers to John’s preaching that a person’s sins can be forgiven through repentance, and that their reward, the Messiah, is about to appear.

3:19-20 There are four Herods named in the gospels. The first was Herod the Great who ruled when Jesus was born. The Herod named here is Herod Antipas, one of seven sons of Herod the Great. Herod Antipas had a half-brother named Philip (Herod Philip I, but not the same Philip mentioned in 3:1). Philip was married to an ambitious, scheming woman by the name of Herodias, who was actually Philip’s niece. However, Herod Antipas and Herodias had an affair, and Herodias eventually left Philip and married her uncle Herod. This affair was not only sordid but, according to Jewish law, incestuous (Lev. 18:16). Sometime in his ministry, John confronted Herod with this particularly hideous sin, and Herod eventually imprisoned John at the behest of Herodias’s daughter. (The details of John’s imprisonment and death can be found in Matthew 14:1-12.)

The other two Herods appear in the book of Acts (12:18-23; 25:23 – 26:32).

There is an obvious contrast here between the righteousness of John and the unrighteousness of Herod and Herodias.

One other note: the Herods were not Jewish—they were Edomites. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, the firstborn son of Isaac who sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew (Gen. 25:27-34). Esau eventually moved away from Isaac and began the nation of Edom, a mountainous, barren country southeast of the Promised Land. Since the Exodus, the descendants of Jacob (Israel, therefore

Israelites) and the descendants of Esau (Edomites) became perpetual enemies. Herod the Great, an Edomite, had been seated as ruler over the Jews by Caesar because Herod was very powerful, very unsympathetic toward the Jews, and particularly vicious. The entire temple guard was made up of loyal Edomites. Herod would tolerate no uprising from the Jews, lest he be demoted by Rome. So, not only did the Jews hate the fact that an Edomite had been placed as a ruler over them, but Herod was buddies with Caesar whom they also hated.

3:21 On this particular day, Jesus was perhaps the last in line to be baptized, and His appearance may have been a surprise to John. John knew Jesus, as they were cousins, and John had obviously heard the extraordinary details of His birth. It is possible that John and Jesus spent many hours together as children, playing as children do, but at the same time discussing the things of the kingdom of God. John obviously knew that Jesus was special and destined for greatest in the kingdom of God, but had yet to believe that his cousin would actually be the Messiah. Therefore, John may not have anticipated that Jesus needed baptizing, as we read in other gospel writers. Nevertheless, John follows Jesus' instruction and, with a gourd, pours water over Jesus' head. While Jesus was praying, John observes the Holy Spirit come upon Him. This does not mean that Jesus became the Christ at His baptism, as some liberal scholars propose. It means that Jesus is now anointed with *power* by the Holy Spirit to begin His ministry. Most likely, Jesus didn't begin His ministry until his legal father Joseph had died, as there is no mention of Joseph in the gospels apart from the birth narratives.

It is often asked, "If Jesus was without sin, why did He get baptized?" One must remember that it is not baptism per se that takes away sin. Baptism is a public statement of a desire to live righteously, whether or not one has sinned. (Of course, all mankind has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God [Rom. 3:23].) Therefore, Jesus has Himself baptized by John for at least three reasons: first, to validate John and his ministry of the need for repentance in one's relationship to God; second, to validate and fulfill the law in regards to its demand for righteousness; and third, to identify with all mankind who are separated from God by sin. By identifying with mankind, Jesus will, on the cross, become the sacrificial lamb for the sin for all mankind, and thus take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

3:22 Apparently, only John and Jesus heard the Father speak. An important observation of this verse is that all three Persons of the Trinity are present: God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Note that God refers to Jesus as “My beloved Son.” The power and importance of this statement cannot be overemphasized. The Father did not say, “My incarnated Son,” “My Son who teaches truth,” or “My Son who will die for mankind’s sin.” God says, “My *beloved* Son.” This statement emphasizes the relationship between the Father and the Son: it is a relationship of pure divine love, eternal intimacy, and holy oneness. The Godhead is inseparable in its harmony, perfection and will. The Trinity, therefore, is described as “One God, three Persons.” The relationship between the Father and the Son is one of perfect unity. Throughout His ministry, therefore, Jesus will only refer to God as “My Father.” This is extremely significant in terms of the love message found throughout the gospels. There is an intimate relationship between the Father and the Son that is characterized primarily by love. The Apostle John will emphasize this relationship in his gospel. It is this relationship of love that transcends all human description, and can only be imagined by mortal man because it is eternal and infinite. Therefore, every joy Jesus experienced during His earthly ministry was experienced by the Father. Every taunt, every confrontation His skeptics, every hostile encounter with the Pharisees, and every rejection by the scribes was experienced by the Father as well. When Jesus is ridiculed and scorned at His trial by the Sanhedrin, spit upon and scourged to the edge of death by Roman soldiers, nailed mercilessly to a cross and hung in shame like a common criminal, His Father not only watched, but experienced. At this point in human history, God the Father would have had every justification for completely wiping all mankind off the face of the earth. Yet He didn’t. Instead, the Father listened to the plea of His beloved Son, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And out of love, from that moment on, God the Father so honored His Son’s request by offering forgiveness of sin to all who would accept Jesus as His beloved Son.

23 When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli,

24 the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph,

25 the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Hesli, the son of Naggai,

3:23 That Jesus began His ministry after His baptism is clear in verse 23. Therefore, the temptation that will follow in the next chapter is actually a part of His ministry; that is, to resist the power and ploys of Satan. Note, too, that Luke clearly states Joseph was not Jesus’ natural father. Jesus’ real father has been named in the previous verse.

3:23-38 The genealogy that Luke traces probably represents Jesus’ physical genealogy through His mother’s ancestors. There are a number of significant points about Luke’s genealogy.

First, it represents the “seed line” leading to the Messiah; that is, the *physical line* descending from Adam through David, as opposed to Matthew’s

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 Melchi, 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 Admin, 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 Heber, 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 Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan,

38 the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

genealogy, which is the legal—or royal—line descending from David. (This might explain the different names of Joseph's father in the two genealogies.) This seed line, therefore, is most likely the genetic, physical line that descends all the way from Adam to Jesus, and may actually be Mary's genealogy. Only by God's loving intervention and providence did this seed line survive throughout the history of the Jews. Satan himself attempted to destroy God's plan for the Messiah by having Cain kill Abel. Abel was the second born to Adam, but was of the seed line because "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain" (Heb. 11:4), and because "(Cain's) deeds were evil, but (Abel's) were righteous" (1 John 3:12). Also, the nation of Israel itself constantly put the seed line at risk throughout its history by internal corruption and idolatry. Only God's love persisted against the attacks of Satan and the self-destructive behaviors of the Israelites. God, therefore, always preserved a remnant that would remain faithful to Him. It was therefore through God's love and providential care that the seed line was preserved.

Second, the genealogy fulfills the prophecies that the Messiah would be a descendant of David. Mary, therefore, was a direct descendant of David through David's son Nathan (v. 31). (In Matthew's genealogy, *Solomon* is named as the son of David through whom the seed line passed, thus making Joseph the legal, or royal, descendant of David [Matt. 1:6].) Against all odds, therefore, including the destruction of Jerusalem in 386 BC, and the subsequent exile of the Jews to Babylon, God's hand preserved the seed line.

Third, Luke in particular would be the one to trace the seed line all the way back to Adam (before there was a Jewish nation). Matthew's genealogy, on the other hand, goes back only to Abraham, the father of the Israelites. This would be Luke's way of indicating that the Messiah came for *all* mankind, including the Gentiles.

Fourth, few if any of those listed in the genealogy had any idea that they would play such an important role in the line that would produce the Savior of the world. They might have known they were descendants of David, but there were many other descendants of David that were never part of the seed line.

Questions for Your Personal or Group Reflection

1. John had a purpose in God's plan. What was that purpose and how does his purpose relate to the purpose God has for your life? That is, what did John do that every believer should do in regard to Jesus Christ?
2. What actions can you take with your life to "make ready the way of the Lord"? What changes do you need to make in your life to "fill in every ravine" and make every "hill...brought low"? Is there a habit that needs to be stopped? Or better yet, is there a practice that needs to begin, such as Bible study, a consistent prayer life and, more importantly, a good, healthy look at your relationships?
3. In verses 10-14, John instructs his followers to do certain things in regard to bearing "fruits in keeping with repentance." First of all, what does it mean to repent? Second, once you've repented, how is that to be worked out in your relationships with others? Third, is it enough just to say that you are a "born-again Christian" and put a fish sticker on your car, or go to church regularly, or even tithe? What is the common thread in John's instructions to those who received baptism?
4. John paid a price for confronting leadership with their spiritual corruption and evil. Ask yourself if you are willing to do that. Do you know of any spiritual leaders that need to be confronted with their less than righteous life?
5. Have you been baptized? If not, why? If so, how has your life changed in regards to relationships?
6. Can God say this about you, that He is well-pleased with you? How does the answer to that question tie into the answers for questions #3 and #5?
7. One might glance over a genealogy as something that probably doesn't have any personal significance. Start recognizing its importance by tracing your own "spiritual genealogy." For example, who led you to the Lord? Who led *that* person to the Lord, and so on. And, to whom will you become a spiritual parent? Do you see now that there is a pattern for which you can give God much glory and thanks?

The Disciplex's Commentary
Fill-in Outline for the Disciple
Luke 3

3:1-2 – The background for the ministry of _____

3:3-6 – The message of John the Baptist: _____

3:7-9 – The warnings of John the Baptist: Your repentance must _____

3:10-14 – The instructions of John the Baptist: _____

3:15-17 – The prophecy of John the Baptist: You will be _____

3:18-20 – The imprisonment of John the Baptist: for _____

3:21-22 – The baptism of Jesus: an introduction to _____

3:23-38 – The genealogy of Jesus Christ through the ancestors of _____

The Discippler's Commentary

Answer Outline for the Discippler

Luke 3

3:1-2 – The background for the ministry of John the Baptist

- *As written in the commentary, the discipler may want to review some of the names in verses 1 & 2. It may be helpful to point out the political corruption, greed and wickedness of those listed. Particularly point out that the Herod named here is not the same Herod mentioned in chapter 1. This Herod is Herod Antipas, one of Herod the Great's sons.*
- *And speaking of names, ensure that the disciple does not confuse this John—John the Baptist—with other men named John, such as John, the son of Zebedee, who was Jesus' disciple and who wrote the Gospel of John and the letters. (For some, it may be necessary to explain that the name "Baptist" has nothing to do with the modern-day denomination.)*
- *Make sure that the disciple sees the contrast between the unrighteousness of those named and the righteousness of John the Baptist.*

3:3-6 – The message of John the Baptist: repentance

- *It is vitally important that the disciple understands the significance of John's message regarding "repentance for the forgiveness of sins." The word "repent" actually means "to turn around," implying a change of direction in one's behaviors and habits, especially in terms of relationships. Without repentance for sins, there can be no real appreciation for the cross of Christ, no real appreciation for the concept of grace, and therefore, no real salvation through Jesus Christ.*
- *Have the disciple look up and read Isaiah 40:4-6. Explain the meaning of straight "paths" and filled "ravines." Relate that concept to getting one's life right with God. Relate how this passage is a "messianic" passage and refers to the royal kingship of the Messiah.*

3:7-9 – The warnings of John the Baptist: Your repentance must bear fruit

- *Explain the meaning of the phrases "You brood of vipers," "wrath to come," and "We have Abraham for our father." Apply them to today's Christian culture where so many call themselves "born again" but "do not bear fruit in keeping with repentance," particularly in terms of relationships.*
- *Go into some detail here concerning the phrase "bear fruit in keeping with repentance." The typical young disciple will name things like attending church, tithing, reading Scripture, et cetera. While all these things are good, the main focus should be on relationships. The next few verses should help with that.*

3:10-14 – The instructions of John the Baptist: treat others with love

- *Have the disciple identify the three groups and three questions asked of John concerning "Then what shall we do?" Have the disciple identify the main theme in John's responses.*
- *But don't stop there! Have the disciple identify people in his or her own life where the principle of treating others with love needs to be done to bear fruit. Have them identify friends, co-workers, fellow students, and especially family where treating others with love is the hallmark of the Christian disciple, thus bearing fruit in keeping with repentance. Ensure that the student understands that short of treating others with love, there is no true repentance, and confession and repentance become merely a religious exercise to make one feel better.*

3:15-17 – The prophecy of John the Baptist: You will be baptized with fire (the Holy Spirit)

- *Now the disciple is confronted with another ministry of the Holy Spirit. If the disciple hasn't figured it out already, make sure that he or she knows that to be "baptized with fire" refers to the Holy Spirit. This was first seen at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3). Being baptized with the Holy Spirit means to receive the Holy Spirit by placing one's faith in Jesus Christ; that is, to believe. To be "led by the Spirit" means to be guided by the Holy Spirit to make the right moral and godly choices. To be "filled with the Spirit" means to boldly declare the wondrous acts of God through Jesus Christ. (The last ministry—to "walk by the Spirit"—is not discussed in this commentary, and is found only in Galatians 5:16 and 25. To "walk by the Spirit" means to live one's life in a manner that is marked by the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control—all of which are reflected in relationships. See Galatians 5:13-26.)*
- *Disciplers need to ask their disciples if they have been "baptized" by the Holy Spirit. If they have received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, they have been baptized by the Spirit. Many disciples may say, "Well, I think I have, but I don't feel any different." Ensure that being baptized by the Spirit is not a matter of feeling, and there may be no emotional experience involved. It is simply a matter of believing, and therefore, the fact of being baptized by the Spirit is a matter of faith based on the word of God. The best way to tell if a person has been baptized by the Spirit is a change in behavior involving relationships, and a desire to know more about Jesus Christ and His kingdom.*

3:18-20 – The imprisonment of John the Baptist: for confronting unrighteous leaders with their unrighteousness

- *The sordid details of John's imprisonment and subsequent death are not found in Luke. Therefore, the discipler, if asked, may refer to Matthew 14:1-12.*
- *Ask the question, "Why didn't Jesus, with His power, rescue John?" There is an important lesson here. First, John's ministry was ending and Jesus' ministry was beginning. Second, John had completed the mission for which he was sent by God. Third, God does not rescue us when He has something better waiting. Death is not the enemy—sin is the enemy.*

3:21-22 – The baptism of Jesus: an introduction to the Trinity

- *Point out here the presence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism.*
- *Explain to the disciple why Jesus went to John for baptism.*
- *It is important here to point out what the Father says about His Son, Jesus: "You are My beloved Son...." Ask the disciple, "What else could the Father have said about His Son?" And, "Why is the term 'beloved' so important?" Point out how the Father's description characterizes the relationship between the Father and the Son.*

3:23-38 – The genealogy of Jesus Christ through the ancestors of Jesus' mother Mary (the "seed line")

- *It may be helpful to point out that there are two genealogies for Jesus, the other being found in the Gospel of Matthew (1:1-17). Share with the disciple why there are two, and what each one represents. Point out that Luke's genealogy goes all the way back to Adam, while Matthew's goes back only to Abraham.*
- *In terms of application, how does a Christian have a "spiritual genealogy"? Ask the disciple to trace his or her spiritual genealogy.*
- *Make sure the disciple understand the concept of the "seed line." This concept is very, very important when studying the genealogies of Jesus, as well as the genealogies found in the Old Testament. It also helps to understand God's interaction—and intervention—with the nation of Israel.*