



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Beginning of the End (Like 3:1-22)

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In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap 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 the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Historical Specificity:

It is as if Luke is challenging the reader to check his sources. Assuming Luke is penning this gospel primarily for Gentiles, this seems highly plausible. Luke provides more than sufficient data in which to anchor his observations. The Roman Empire kept accurate records making verification quite easy for anyone with

question. These dates being accurate, we can then deduce the approximate time frame by virtue of our understanding of John the Baptizer. The son of a Levite would enter into ministry at the age of 30 or sometime thereafter. At the same time, given John is 6 months older than Jesus, odds are this event occurs when Jesus has reached 30 years of age or sometime after.

Luke refers to three men as "Tetrarch" (meaning ruler of a quarter). Herod the great divided his kingdom between three sons, Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Philip. Luke refers to two of the sons and one Lysanias. Luke's usage of the political term "Tetrarch" is historically correct.

John's commissioning:

We are not provided with details save the statement "...the word of the Lord came to John in the wilderness..." Fact is, we are provided a paucity of data regarding John's instruction in terms of The Faith. Undoubtedly, his father Zacharias grounded him more than adequately in the scriptures.

A Prophecy Fulfilled:

In fact, two prophecies: Isaiah 40:3-5 and Malachi 4:5.

Momentous days are dawning though few recognize it. Close onto 700+ years have transpired since the first prophecy and 400 years of revelational silence. Some have begun to deduce the nearness of Messiah's advent (i.e. the Essenes).

Symbolic language employed:

The prophecy spoke of a great leveling in symbolic terms, not to be embraced in literal-geo-physical terms. The leveling referred to was in terms of one's approach to God, Jew and Gentile (the reference to "all flesh"). Herein lays a hermeneutical consideration: whenever one encounters terms such as this, one must immediately resort to the Old Testament for an understanding. This is especially true when reading the book of **The Revelation**. One might conclude the leveling aspect of **all flesh** in the prophecy is encapsulated in the rite of water baptism.

The crowds are quite probably drawn to John because of his unique conduct and dress, along with his message. Curiosity generally draws a crowd in most any culture.

Those seemingly responsive to God are drawn by the message, yet John is moved to challenge some who have come to him.

BIBLE STUDY

TUESDAY @ 8:00 A.M., ROOM 100 RYAN BUILDING

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Luke doesn't make clear the challenge is directed toward the Pharisees and Sadducees¹. Obviously, by this time, the conduct of John and the response of the people have come to the attention of the political and religious leadership and the two main religious parties are deputized to investigate.

It is interesting to recognize the two parties who come represent the "spiritual" (Pharisee) and the "natural" (Sadducee), whereas within the next 18 months the political will also take note.

The spiritual party believes in miracles whereas the natural does not. (Nothing has changed, has it? We face the same issue today whether in our neighborhood or here in the legislative context.)

Note John's Warning:

John addresses the Pharisees and Sadducees regarding the "coming wrath". The word John uses implies the wrath is just about to begin. It is a strong word of warning. The fact of John's prophetic presence in terms of Isaiah 40 and Malachi 4 suggest "the time is short" (hence, my title for the study). John emphasizes this note of warning when he says "...the axe is already at the root..." The background of this warning is anchored in Deuteronomy 32 and a host of prophetic admonitions as their history developed.

Cutting them off at the pass:

For centuries, the nation had assumed an elite and exclusive status before God. They were "Abraham's seed", as if genetics counted with God. John abruptly informs them God can raise up children from rocks! How's that for a challenge to Jewish manhood! This was a neither response they could not manage nor countenance and, as such, did not "...have ears to hear..." Years of stubborn rebellion tend to harden the heart and mind.

But, some were sensitive:

Some had "...ears to hear..." and asked appropriately "...What shall we do?" (This, reminiscent of Acts 2:37). Notice the range of questioners: the crowd, tax collectors, soldiers (agents of temporal government) and the religious. John's response is anchored in Micah 6:8: do justly, love mercy, walk humbly and focused on the personal and internal.

A New Message:

John's counsel was such as they had never heard before prompting them to think he, John, might be the Messiah. At the same time, Luke informs us that the "expectation of the people" was oriented

toward Messiah again signaling the Spirit of God's preparatory work. (We remember Simeon, Anna, and the Essenes). Luke says the people were questioning "in their hearts" (not asking him) with John responding to their questioning. This suggests God the Spirit's informing John of their concerns.

Humility personified:

John's ministry is as the brief flaming of the candle. He is only the forerunner, the announcer and he willingly, graciously fulfills that role. Humanly speaking, John exemplifies the role of the Holy Spirit as it pertains to the Lord, Jesus².

John's Future:

Luke then advances historically to inform us of John's soon destiny.

Somewhere and at sometime not noted in the text John confronted Herod relative to his unlawful relationship with Herodias. Herod in response and for reasons not quite clear, imprisons John. That Herod cared little for Jewish law is evidenced in his blatant conduct regarding Herodias. Two things seem to be in play here: 1) Herod's curiosity regarding John³, and 2) Herod's succumbing to Herodias' pressures⁴. At this juncture Herod is between a rock and a hard place, but a dilemma of his own making.

Jesus' Baptism by John:

Baptism was not typically part of Jewish ritual save in the case of gentile converts. John introduces baptism as a sign of one's repentance for sin (a leveling). Obviously, Jesus had no need for such an act, which John recognized. Yet, Jesus, as our ultimate representative and the 2nd Adam, underwent this ritual for two reasons: 1) Our representative, and 2) as an opportunity to demonstrate, **objectively**, the reality of the Trinity as the event unfolded. This heavenly certification at the initiation of Jesus' public ministry will be repeated once more as Jesus initiates the final phase of his public ministry.

A Clearly Shrouded Mystery:

For 2 thousand years the saints have wrestled with this issue, the tri-unity of God. The term TRINITY is not a biblical term, but one aptly applied to the reality we see displayed in the text of scripture. Our God is ONE manifesting himself in three personas, each persona having all the attributes of the ONE God.

Easy to believe. Hard to understand.

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(This, alone, makes our God distinct from the god of Islam.)

¹ Matthew 3:7-10

² John 16:14

³ Mark 6:20ff

⁴ Matthew 14:3