

Preview of Luke

Very little is actually known about Luke, the writer of the book that bears his name. He was not an apostle, and he declares that his "perfect understanding of all things from the very first" was gained from others who "from the beginning were eyewitnesses." The apostle Paul calls him "the beloved physician" Colossians 4:14. The use of the first person pronouns in the Book of Acts indicates that Luke accompanied Paul on parts of his missionary journeys.

The four Gospel records could be called portraits of the person and work of Christ because they present four different poses of one unique personality. Matthew presents Christ as a king; Mark reveals Him as a servant; Luke portrays Him as the Son of Man; and John displays Him as the Son of God.

Luke portrays the Son of Man in beautiful word pictures. He traces His ancestry through Mary, the genuine mother of His manhood, to Adam, the first man. This book contains the most detailed record of Jesus' birth and childhood. Many of the events and parables recorded only in Luke's Gospel have an unmistakable touch of human sympathy. Luke emphasizes, by references both to Jesus' own prayers and to His teachings on prayer that the man Christ Jesus depended upon prayer. Furthermore, Luke emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' ministry. Indeed, one can hardly read the Gospel of Luke without being impressed by Jesus' humanity.

The message of this Gospel focuses on the work that Jesus came to do. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" Luke 19:10. As the perfect Man, He alone could be the perfect sacrifice that would provide perfect atonement for sinful mankind. The study of this Gospel should inspire us to follow the perfect example of the Son of Man, who was also the Son of God. Then we, although sons and daughters of men, can also be sons and daughters of God.

The Forerunner of Jesus Christ

Lesson Scope: [Luke chapters 1 through 3](#)

Note references in brackets refer to Luke 1 to 3 unless otherwise stated

Lesson Focus

Luke introduced his Gospel with a glimpse into the home of Zacharias and Elisabeth. Despite Roman rule, despite the turmoil in the Jewish religious and political system, and despite the four hundred silent years, faith in God radiated from this home. Though barrenness seemed a disgrace to this couple of character and integrity, God was preserving them for the special work of raising John the Baptist.

We have little record of John's childhood, except for the mention that he waxed spiritually strong in his godly home setting. He lived a simple life in the wilderness, his clothing and food identifying him with the poorer classes in society. Yet he was a man in tune with God. God's Word came to him, and he preached to the spiritually hungry Jews who came to him in the "country about Jordan."

Both John's manner and his message jolted his listeners to recognize their need for repentance and fruit bearing, and reminded them of impending judgment. His baptizing united men in commitment to the work of God and in expectation of the revelation of His kingdom.

As foretold by the prophets, God sent John the Baptist as the forerunner of Jesus Christ. John's message of repentance prepared the hearts of men and women to receive their Messiah.

The angel's message to Zacharias broke the silence of the four hundred silent years. It is interesting to read the closing chapter of Malachi, which included prophecies about John the Baptist, and compare that message with the opening words of the New Testament. Two things impress us. God always keeps His promises, and in every age God has a faithful people.

John's work as the forerunner of Christ was larger than just introducing the Messiah. He also needed to help the Jews to recognize their sinful condition and prepare them to receive Jesus as their spiritual deliverer. Really, John laid the groundwork for a work of God that would reach far beyond the Jewish nation to include the Gentiles and the whole world.

John the Baptist's work is practical to us today in that we are called to be witnesses for Christ. We not only call men to repentance and baptism into

the kingdom of God, but we also help them to know about His Second Coming and warn them to flee from the wrath to come. Some may view us as odd or eccentric, but others will respond in sincerity. Let us encourage each other to faithfulness and to boldness as the Lord directs.

Lesson Aim: To learn lessons from the person and work of John the Baptist.

Theme Verse: [Luke 3:3](#). And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Lesson Text

The Man

[Luke 1:13-17](#) But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. ¹⁴ And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

The Ministry

[Luke 3:1-6](#) 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, ² Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. ³ And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; 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. 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; ⁶ And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

The Message

[Luke 3:7-18](#) 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? 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. 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. ¹⁰ And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 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. ¹² Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? ¹³ And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. 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. ¹⁵ And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; 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: 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. ¹⁸ And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

Questions for Study

The Man

1. What made John "great in the sight of the Lord"?
2. List parallels between Elijah and John.
3. What is required to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord"?

The Ministry

4. What were the main points of John's message?
5. In what way has all flesh seen the salvation of God?

The Message

6. What are some roots to which John laid the ax?
7. How did John portray the Messiah?
8. How do we maintain proper attitudes about our work today?

Analyzing the Passage

The name John means "Jehovah favored." An illustration of this would picture an adult bending down to give a special prize to a small child. When God favors us with blessings, it is always a reason for rejoicing, but what a

great blessing this was!

John was to be a Nazarite from birth. This separation as a lifelong calling was also commanded of Samson and Samuel. As a Nazarite, John was a symbol of the holiness of life that the Messiah would personify.

John the Baptist was to be a second Elijah, not only in his person and dress, but also in his work. By comparing Luke 1:17 with 1 Kings 18:37, we learn that preaching and praying is the work of men, but turning the hearts is a work that only God can do in the lives of men who are prepared to receive it.

John preached repentance and amendment of life. The goal of his ministry was to "prepare ... the way of the Lord." He was so effective in fulfilling this calling that "all men mused in their hearts . . . whether he were the Christ or not" (3:15). John, however, kept a humble view of himself and a lofty view of the One whose path he was preparing.

Principles and Applications

The Man

1. John the Baptist was a promised son with a special message (1:13, 14). Though the angel's presence brought fear to Zacharias, his words confirmed the piety of this godly couple. He promised them not only the opportunity to bear a son, but also the privilege to bring blessing to the world through the life of this son named John. God still needs men to do His work today. He is looking for godly parents who will advance the work of His kingdom.

2. John was called to a holy life with divine power (1:15-17). The power of Elijah was not intrinsic, but came from "the LORD God of Elijah." Nor was the Nazarite holiness automatic. Some, like Samson, lost the inner purity that the outward separation typified and soon lost everything. But the angel foretold of John's ministry, through which "many ... shall ... turn to the Lord" (1:16). A personal life of holiness requires divine power. By God's grace, appropriated divine power exerts a life-changing influence on the world around us as well.

3. John's work was to prepare people for the coming of the Lord (1:17). Though the coming of the Messiah was long anticipated, many people were unprepared to meet Him. Years of waiting had dulled their expectations and twisted their understanding of what His work would be. A prophet who would call for repentance and point men to the Lord could prepare men for the coming Messiah. Christ is soon coming again. He is calling us to be His messengers today. Will the souls around us be called to

prepare?

The Ministry

4. John preached repentance for the remission of sins (3:3). His emphasis was very clearly on repentance rather than on baptism. In fact, when John perceived that some were coming for baptism on their own merits, he severely denounced their wretched condition and called for fruits that proved their repentance genuine. We are glad for a godly heritage of faith, but unless we crucify the Adamic nature within us, there can be no forgiveness of sins.

5. John's message was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (3:4-6). Malachi told his people that an Elijah was coming who would turn Israel back to the spiritual vitality of their forefathers. Isaiah prophesied of his "crying in the wilderness," causing men to see the glorious revelation of God's salvation. The message "Prepare ye the way of the Lord" was about preparing the hearts of men. The most pivotal event in history was about to take place, and woe to him whose heart was unprepared (Malachi 4:6).

The Message

6. John was unapologetic in his message (3:7-9). Many in his day prided themselves in being children of Abraham, but John called them the offspring of vipers. He said if the Jews to whom he was preaching would not repent, God could raise up faithful people from the stones! From our perspective, we see hints of God's work at bringing Gentiles to repentance. So today, the question is not God's power, but our faith and men's willingness to prepare their hearts. Let us boldly proclaim the message. We never know if those who respond will be of the "children of Abraham" or the "stones."

7. John defined in his message what man needed to do to be acceptable with God (3:10-14). None who were willing to align their lives to God's standard were told that God would not accept them. John could make "fruits worthy of repentance" practical to every man's experience. Acceptance with God requires no sophisticated formula. Love for God and our fellow men and contentment in everyday life are practical in every age, and they lie at the root of many fruitful trees.

8. John was humble in his view of himself and of his work (3:15, 16). Rather than bask in any comparison to the Messiah, John quickly replied that he was but the announcer of a mighty One who was coming after him. He told the people that the meanest service he could render this great Messiah would be an honor that he was unworthy to perform. How is it with us? Of what value is our service? Christ in mercy is still using mere men to further

His cause. Not because of our worthiness, but because of His infilling and His grace.

9. John's message introduced the person and work of Jesus Christ (3:16-18). John's baptism with water symbolized the Holy Spirit baptism that would characterize the Messiah and His kingdom. The Gospel of John records John the Baptist introducing Jesus as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. Christ would clearly define right from wrong and would both reward His faithful followers and execute judgment on the impenitent.

Answers to Questions

1. What made John "great in the sight of the Lord"?

The work of pointing men to Christ is a great work. This was a part of God's eternal plan to bring salvation into the world. God knew that John would be faithful in fulfilling his calling. The Scripture does not record any negative words about John.

2. List parallels between Elijah and John.

Both were prophets. Their dress and mannerisms were similar and both lived in the wilderness. Both brought God's message of repentance to a people that were spiritually far from God.

3. What is required to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord"?

People need to know that the Lord is coming, but more than that, they must understand their need to prepare. The life of the one who is giving the message must be such that will convince men of the sincerity of the message. Baptism into the kingdom of God not only calls men out of their unprepared condition, but joins them with others who will help to keep them prepared.

4. What were the main points of message?

The way to remission of sins is repentance. Baptism is for those whose lives evidence repentance. Judgment is coming for the unrepentant. Repentance has a practical expression in everyday life. One infinitely greater and holier than I is soon to appear. Prepare to meet Him.

5. In what way has all flesh seen the salvation of God?

Through the work of Christ, salvation is available to all people. This includes Jews and Gentiles. It includes the saints of ages past and for all time to come. God has used and is using men to carry this message to all the world.

6. What are some roots to which John laid the ax?

John laid the axe to the root of religious profession without godly expres-

sions, the root of trusting in heritage for salvation, and the roots of selfishness and discontentment.

7. How did John portray the Messiah?

The Messiah is the mighty one who commands our worship and of whom we are unworthy servants. He will baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. He will establish a clear line between righteousness and unrighteousness. He will protect and reward the righteous and bring judgment on the unrighteous.

8. How do we maintain proper attitudes about our work today?

We first of all need a proper view of the Christ we serve. We must get a view of the great work to be done and of how little we can do. We must realize who gives us the ability to do the bit we are able to do. We will need to instruct our admirers and point them to Christ as well.

Important Teachings

1. John the Baptist was a promised son with a special message (1:13-14).
2. John was called to a holy life with divine power (1:15-17).
3. John's work was to prepare people for the coming of the Lord (1:17).
4. John preached repentance for the remission of sins (3:3).
5. John's message was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (3:4-6).
6. John was unapologetic in his message (3:7-9).
7. John defined in his message what man needed to do to be acceptable with God (3:10-14).
8. John was humble in his view of himself and of his work (3:15-16).
9. John introduces the person and work of Jesus Christ (3:16-18).

Summarizing the Lesson

"For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.... He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:10-12, 15).

Research Guide

1. Read the prophecies of John the Baptist in Isaiah 40 and Malachi 4.
2. Read the other Gospel accounts in Matthew 3 and 11; Mark 1; John 1.
3. Look up "John the Baptist" in Unger's Bible Dictionary.