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Luke 3:1-14 | "The Baptism of Repentance"

INTRO: Luke begins this chapter with **6 Historical Reference Points** to tell you when John began his ministry.

I. THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. (v. 1-6)

THE TIMING OF JOHN'S MINISTRY (v. 1-2a)

A. (v. 1-2a)

1. "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,..."

- a. *Tiberius* was the stepson of, and successor to, Caesar Augustus (Lk 2:1) and therefore the 2nd Roman Emperor.
- b. Caesar Augustus made *Tiberius* the imperial power around 11-12 A.D., but he did not become sole Emperor until August 19, 14 A.D., and ruled from 14-37 A.D.
 - 1) Thus, "in the fifteenth year" of his reign would have been between **August 19, 28 A.D. and August 18, 29 A.D.**, which would place the crucifixion of Christ in 32 A.D.
- c. "reign" - Gr. *hegemonia* - "hegemony; world mastery; world dominion"

2. "...Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea,..."

- a. Pilate ruled from 26-37 A.D. and was headquartered in Caesarea Maritime (on the coast north of Joppa).

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- 1) After Herod the Great died, his kingdom was divided to his sons. His son Archelaus ruled Judea, but was hated by the people and he did such a bad job that Rome had to come in take control and put in a governor, Pontius Pilate.
 - 2) Pilate would take Roman soldiers to Jerusalem during the 3 major Feasts, and that is why he was there for the crucifixion of Jesus. If the crucifixion would have taken place 2 weeks earlier, Jesus would have been crucified in Caesarea!
 - b. There is a plaque that was discovered with the name Pontius Pilate on it in Caesarea, and there is a copy there today (the original is in the British Museum.)
 - 1) There are always those critics that want to disprove the Bible, but they are still being kept silent as the Bible still stands.
 - c. Pilate had the power of life and death in his district as a representative of the Roman Empire.
- 3. "...and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee,..."**
- a. The is *Herod Antipas*, who ruled over Galilee from Tiberius (4 B.C.—34 A.D.), but was eventually deposed by the Roman Government.
 - 1) Son of Herod the Great.
 - 2) Took his brother Philip's wife Herodias.
 - b. "*tetrarch*" - Gr. "*ruler of the fourth part; governor*"

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4. **"...and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis,..."**

- a. This is Herod *Philip*, who ruled from 4 B.C.—34 A.D.
 - 1) Son of Herod the Great.
 - 2) Half-brother of Herod Antipus.
 - 3) First husband to Herodias until she left him for Antipus.
- b. He ruled East of the Jordan River and was headquartered in Caesarea Philippi, which was named after him because he built the city.

5. **"...and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene,"**

- a. Little is known about him except that he ruled over Abilene, which is North-West of Damascus.

6. **"...Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests,..."**

- a. *Annas* was the High Priest from 7-14 A.D., and at that time was unseated by the Roman Government. However, he was still recognized as the High Priest by the people.
- b. *Caiaphas* was the High Priest from 18-36 A.D. because he was appointed by Rome.
- c. **NOTE:** This was one of those rare times when there were 2 High Priests.

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THE MINISTRY OF JOHN (v. 2b-6)

B. (v. 2b)

1. "...*the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.*"

a. "unto" - Gr. preposition *epi* - "upon"

1) G. Campbell Morgan: "Here is the qualification for preaching. The message of God comes upon a man. It is a great thing that he be prepared in every way; but preparation leaves a man unable to preach until the word of the Lord falls upon him. That is the keynote to the marvel of this ministry." (Luke III. 1-20, pg. 48)

b. "in the wilderness"

1) John's parents probably died while he was young (Lk 1:7, 18), and Luke tells us that he "was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel" (Lk. 1:80).

2) **Q** = Where did the word of God come?... To John in the wilderness!

a) Not upon the seven hills of Rome.

b) Not in the Temple in Jerusalem, thus showing the spiritual condition of the nation.

c) **NOTE**: The word of God passed the Emperor, passed the governors and

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tetrarchs, passed the High Priests, and came upon a man prepared of God in the wilderness!

- d) **KEY:** God uses the most unlikely people so that He gets the glory!
 - i. Cf. **1 Corinthians 1:26-29** - "*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.*"

C. (v. 3)

1. "And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;"

- a. "baptism" - Gr. *baptisma* - "immersion; submerging"
 - 1) In the O.T., there were ritual *immersions* that largely had to do with ceremonial uncleanness.
 - 2) These *immersions* were mandatory for converts to Judaism.

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- a) It was a symbol that pagans were going to give up their old way of life and their old religion, and they were going to follow a new way of life and new religion.
 - b) **KEY:** John is treating the Jews like pagans!!
 - 3) **NOTE:** The root word for "*baptism*" was used to describe the act of dipping a piece of cloth into dye to change its color, thereby changing its identification.
 - 4) **KEY:** The basic meaning of the act of *baptism* is identification with a person and/or message and/or a group.
- b. John was preaching "*the baptism of repentance*" to the Jewish people.
- 1) **NOTE:** *Baptism* does NOT bring remission of sins, but *the remissions of sins* is connected to the REPENTANCE, which is what the baptism was about!
 - a) The type of *Baptism* that John was preaching was that of *repentance for the remission of sins*.
 - 2) Baptism is an outward symbol of what already has happened inwardly.
 - a) We are not baptized to *be* saved; we are baptized because we *got* saved!

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II. THE MESSAGE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. (v.7-20)

JOHN'S MESSAGE TO THE MULTITUDE (v. 7-9)

A. (v. 7)

1. ***"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?"***

a. Q = Who is John's message for?... the *multitude*!

1) Matthew tells us that John also said this specifically to the hypocritical religious leaders (**Matt. 3:7**), yet this was his message to EVERYBODY!!

2) This is not the customary introduction to a sermon: "O you bunch of snakes!"

a) John isn't interested in preaching a soft message or tickling ears.

b. *"who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*

1) This is the reality of the human condition apart from Jesus Christ.

a) Cf. **John 3:36** - *"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."*

b) Cf. **Ephesians 2:1-6** - *"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked*

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according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:"

- 2) John was just speaking the truth to prepare their hearts for the Messiah, Who would bring grace!

B. (v. 8)

1. "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance,..."

- a. The word "repent" means "to change your mind," which will then change your actions.
 - 1) In other words, *repentance* is a change of mind and change of direction.
 - a) You've been thinking wrong and running away from God.
 - b) *Repentance* is to change your mind and turn around towards God!

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- b. *Repentance* involves godly sorrow, not just a worldly sorrow.
 - 1) Cf. **2 Corinthians 7:10** - "*For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*"
 - a) The sorrow of the world:
 - i. Sorry I got caught.
 - ii. Sorry about the consequences.
 - b) Godly sorrow:
 - i. A sorrow that you've offended God.
 - ii. A sorrow that leads you to change your mind about sin, God, and your direction.
 - iii. A sorrow that causes you to run from sin into God's loving arms.

- 2. ***"...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."***
 - a. The Jews thought they were okay because they were physical descendants of Abraham (**John 8:37-45; Rom. 2:28-29**).
 - 1) There are many people that think they are okay because they go to church, or are part of a Christian family.

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b. "these stones"

- 1) The Apostle John tells us in His Gospel that John the Baptist's ministry was in *Bethabara* ([John 1:28](#)), which means "*House of Crossing Over.*" This was the area where Joshua and the Nation of Israel crossed the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land.
- 2) **NOTE:** It was at this place that Joshua had the people take 12 large stones out of the river and place them on the riverbank as a testimony of those crossing into the Promised Land by faith! ([Joshua 4:4-8](#))
 - a) **Q** = Could these be the stones that John was referring to?... Speculation, but interesting!

C. (v. 9)

1. ***"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."***
 - a.

JOHN'S RESPONSE TO THEIR QUESTION - "What shall we do?" (v. 10-14)

D. (v. 10-11) The General Public

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1. "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."

a. In other words, "Be a blessing to others!"

1) Cf. [James 1:27; 2:15-16](#) - *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. ... If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"*

2) Cf. [Matthew 5:38-42](#) - *In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."*

E. [\(v. 12-13\) The Tax Collectors](#)

1. "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you."

a. In other words, "Deal honestly!"

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- 1) John is basically telling those that work for the IRS to only take what's right and not extort the people.
- 2) In those days, the Tax Collectors were employees of the Roman Government, and they would extort the people beyond what the government was taxing.
 - a) If the Roman Government told them that each person was to give 5 shekels in taxes, the tax collectors would charge 10 shekels, giving the government 5 shekels and keeping 5 for themselves.
- 3) **NOTE:** This was contrary to why they even took the office!

F. (v. 14) The Soldiers

1. ***"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."***
 - a. *"the soldiers"*
 - 1) In this context, the soldiers would be Jews who worked as mercenaries in the Roman military.
 - a) These Jewish soldiers were given occupying authority by the Roman Government, so they were untouchable by the Jewish people. If the Jewish people attacked them, then the Roman Government would punish them for attacking one of its soldiers.

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- b) These Jewish soldiers could exact things from the occupied people and commit acts of violence, forcing their victims to do things they wished not to do. This is how these Jewish soldiers would supplement their income.
- 2) John is basically telling them, "Be just and content!"
 - a) John is telling them to do the exact opposite of what had driven them to become mercenaries.
- b. *"Do violence to no man"*
 - 1) This is one of those instances where the KJV is an unfortunate translation.
 - a) *"violence" - Gr. diaseiō - "to shake; to make tremble; to terrify; to agitate; intimidate"*
 - b) In this instance the NKJV is better, *"Do not intimidate anyone"*.
 - 2) **NOTE:** There are those that would use this verse to say that it is always wrong to fight in a war. However, that is not what this verse is saying, and that is not really what the Bible teaches either.
 - a) God ordered the Israelites to go to war with other nations many times. (**Josh 4:13; 1 Sam 15:3**)

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- b) When Jesus comes again, He will come to slaughter the AntiChrist and his armies in a victorious battle. ([Rev. 19:11-21](#))
- c) War is a terrible thing. Some wars are more "*just*" than others, but war is always the result of sin ([James 4:1](#)).
 - i. Solomon declared, "*There is...a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.*" ([Ecc. 3:8](#))
 - ii. In a world filled with sin, hatred, and evil ([Rom. 3:10-18](#)), war is inevitable.
- 3) **NOTE:** Christians should not desire war, but God has established human government as an instrument to keep other nations from doing great harm to the innocent is by going to war ([1 Sam. 15:18](#); [Rom. 13:1-4](#); [1 Peter 2:17](#)).
- a) **GotQuestions.org**:¹ "It is an error to say that God never supports a war. Jesus is not a pacifist. In a world filled with evil people, sometimes war is necessary to prevent even greater evil. If Hitler had not been defeated by World War II, how many more millions would have been killed? If the American Civil War had not been fought, how much longer would African-Americans have had to suffer as slaves?"
- 4) **KEY:** The most important thing we can be doing in a time of war is to be praying for godly wisdom for our leaders, praying for the safety of our military, praying for quick resolution to

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/war-Bible.html>

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conflicts, and praying for a minimum of casualties among civilians on both sides.

- c. **NOTE:** John did not condemn the tax collectors’ and soldiers’ professions, but told them to do their jobs honestly and not to hurt people. They could remain in their vocations and serve God.