

Bible Study Guide: Week of 11-29-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; ⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

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Luke states in chapter 1 of his gospel that he is setting out to write “an orderly account” of the story of Jesus. Thus, Luke tends to give more detail than Mark in his story. Also, he includes historical figures at various points (such as in the nativity story in Luke 2) to help ground his story in the context of world events. His mentioning both Gentile and Jewish leaders also foreshadows the universal appeal of the gospel not just to the Jews but to the whole world. This will be reflected later in the gospel, as well as in the Book of Acts which is essentially the “sequel” to Luke’s gospel.

The particular leaders Luke mentions not only reflect Gentile and Jewish authority, but also help us to date John the Baptist’s ministry to around 29 AD. Tiberius’ reign began in 14 AD and John’s ministry began in Tiberius’ 15th year. Pilate was in power from 26-36 AD. Herod Antipas ruled from about 4 BC to 39 AD. Likewise, Philip, his brother, began his reign around 4 BC and died in 34 AD. Lysanias is a much more obscure figure and we know little about him or his reign. Annas was high priest from 6-15 AD, but continued to exert influence on the office through various relatives, including his son-in-law Caiaphas, who was high priest from 18-36 or 37 AD. In any case, despite these very powerful figures mentioned by Luke, the word of the Lord came not to any of them, but to John son of Zechariah. Likewise, the word of God came not to Rome or Jerusalem, but “in the wilderness.”

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Unlike Mark, Luke tells us nothing about John’s diet or apparel. For Mark, the concern seemed to be showing that John was one “like Elijah” as prophesied by Malachi 4:5. For Luke, John’s identity as one like Elijah seems less important. Instead, Luke’s concern seems to be showing that John is a prophet in his own mold and in his own right. Like prophets of old (Amos, Ezekiel, Isaiah, etc.) the word of God came to John. Likewise, John’s ministry is linked with the hope of salvation and restoration expressed in Isaiah 40:3ff as quoted by Luke here. Isaiah’s original prophecy addressed the hope of God’s people that God would rescue them from captivity in Babylon. This was a 500 plus mile journey through the deserts of modern-day Jordan and Iraq. Even today, this is a desolate wasteland of sand. Isaiah anticipates the construction of a great highway through the wilderness that the exiles will take back to Jerusalem accompanied by God, their triumphant king. John, by contrast, cries out in the wilderness to help the people prepare their hearts and minds for God’s coming among them in Jesus Christ. The last verse here is key to Luke’s theology: “*all* flesh shall see the salvation of God.” More than any of the other gospel writers, Luke shows a concern for the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Why do you think Luke begins his account of John the Baptist by talking about various world leaders?**
- 2. What does “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” mean to you?**
- 3. How are we to “prepare the way of the Lord” in our lives today?**