

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 12-6-2021

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 3:7-18

<sup>7</sup>John said 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? <sup>8</sup>Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>9</sup>Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” <sup>10</sup>And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” <sup>11</sup>In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” <sup>12</sup>Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” <sup>13</sup>He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” <sup>14</sup>Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

<sup>15</sup>As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup>John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” <sup>18</sup>So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

**<sup>7</sup>John said 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?”**

Unlike in Matthew’s version of these events, in Luke’s version John the Baptist addresses the crowds themselves as a “brood of vipers;” in Matthew’s version, by contrast, John addresses the Pharisees and Sadducees in this way. Also in contrast to Matthew and Mark, Luke spends no time describing John’s diet and clothing, but rather focuses entirely on his message. Luke, as we will see, gives us much more detailed content of John’s preaching than the other gospel writers. For Matthew and Mark, John’s identity as one similar to Elijah is an important point. Therefore, they focus on his clothing of camel’s hair and a leather belt (see 2 Kings 1 for the parallel with Elijah). They also focus on his diet of locusts and wild honey. Luke, however, narrows in on John’s message, not his choices in clothing or food.

**<sup>8</sup>Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>9</sup>Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”**

Verse 8a is a key to understanding John’s ministry and message: the people are not just to repent outwardly by submitting to baptism, but are to bear fruits as evidence that they really have changed and reformed. Likewise, the people are not to focus solely on their heritage as descendants of Abraham, but again are to bear good fruit in their lives. John uses the imagery of an ax hacking down barren trees and of an incinerator disposing of such useless trees to point out the futility of ancestry or baptism or any other outward or superficial factor, pointing instead to the need that the people had to truly repent and bear good fruit in their lives.

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The crowds ask how they are to bear this fruit. John gives them concrete examples: Sharing food and clothing with those who have none. Surprisingly, tax collectors and soldiers—two groups that would have been despised for their collusion with Rome—come to be baptized and ask how they are to bear good fruit. John instructs them to stop defrauding people and to live honestly instead.

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All of the preaching John did in his ministry prompted many to wonder if he was the Messiah. Indeed, his message is similar in places to the message of Jesus that will come later in the gospel. Here, however, John rejects this speculation and promises that he is merely the one to point toward the coming Messiah. John emphasizes his own unworthiness, the difference between John’s baptism and the baptism Jesus will bring about, and also the role of Jesus as one who will gather in the good harvest of righteousness John is encouraging, but who will also dispose of the leftover and worthless things.

**Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. What do you think is the difference between John’s calling the religious leaders a “brood of vipers” versus his calling all of the crowds a “brood of vipers?”**
- 2. How is John’s baptism similar to our baptismal rites? How is it different?**
- 3. What do you think it means that Jesus will “clear his threshing floor, gather the wheat, and burn the chaff?”**