

The Story of the Life of Christ – Lesson 7 8 A.D. to 26 A.D.

In Lesson 6 we studied the circumcision of Christ in Bethlehem and His subsequent dedication on the 41st day in the Temple in Jerusalem. We also saw the excitement that was caused in the Temple by the testimony of Simeon and Anna. Then we studied the story of the Magi who came from the East because of the Star of Bethlehem and the prophecy which it fulfilled. We saw how that after their visit, Joseph and Mary took Jesus and fled to Egypt before the slaughter of the infants in the small village of Bethlehem. They then returned to Galilee sometime during the reign of Archelaus which lasted from 3 B.C. to 6 A.D.

The next episode of Jesus' life is found in Luke:

Luke 2:40 **And the child grew and became strong *in the spirit*;¹ he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.**

This tells us something about the unusual nature of Jesus as a child. He was taught by the Holy Spirit and became filled with wisdom far beyond that which He could have acquired of any Jewish teacher. When it subsequently says that “the grace of God was upon Him” it means that God’s grace flowed out of Him in His outlook on life. The point here is that He was the dispenser of grace, not the recipient. He was the embodiment of God’s grace.

Luke 2:41 **Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover.**

According to the Law of Moses there were three Feasts which required attendance. They were Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Leviticus 23, 2 Chronicles 8:13). Although many Jews adhered to the ancient requirement, the majority didn't. More than a million Jews would attend Passover in those days according to Josephus,² but that was far from even a quarter of all the

¹ *To the NIV translation I have added the phrase “in the spirit” which is in the Textus Receptus but not in what I regard as the unreliable Codex Sinaiticus on which the NIV is largely based.*

² *Josephus reported that the High Priests counted a quarter of a million lambs sacrificed in the time of Nero (circa 60 to 70 A.D.) which is thought by some skeptics to be unreasonably high. Josephus estimated that at least ten pilgrims would have been present for every lamb sacrificed which would have meant 2 ½ million pilgrims. Even if we accepted the contention by some that the report by the High Priests to Nero was exaggerated to impress the Emperor, I think an actual number of a million attendees is more than defensible. Josephus also reported in his history Wars of the Jews, that the Romans counted 1.1 million dead after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. It had been attached and besieged at Passover so many who might have normally attended Passover would have avoided the city that year. The normal population of Jerusalem was about 80,000.*

Jews living at that time. It required a considerable amount of time and expense just to attend Passover and not all of them could afford to come every year.

Luke 2:42 **When he was twelve years old,³ they went up to the Feast, according to the custom.**

These days the age at which most Jewish groups have their sons become “bar-mitzvah” is thirteen. “Bar-mitzvah” means “a son of the commandment.” That means that, according to tradition, they are eligible to read and comment upon the scriptures. According to Edersheim in those days the legal age was customarily anticipated by one or even two years in the matter of going up to the Temple.⁴ Thus, this was the first time that Jesus was eligible to attend the lectures that he attended on this occasion. He was undoubtedly dismayed at the lack of understanding in the high councils of Jewish religious thought.

Luke 2:43 **~~After the Feast was over~~ *When they had fulfilled the days, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.***

Literally, the first part of this verse should be translated “when they had fulfilled the days.” This is an important difference because, although the Feast of Unleavened Bread (commonly called Passover) lasts a full week, attendance was only required on the first two days. This is according to Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Book 1, Chapter 10: “Only on the two first days of the Feast of Passover was personal attendance in the Temple necessary. With the third day commenced the so-called half holy days, when it was lawful to return to one’s home, a provision of which, no doubt, many availed themselves. Indeed, there was really nothing of special interest to detain the (*ordinary*) pilgrims. For, the Passover had been eaten, the festive sacrifice (or Chagigah) offered, and the first ripe barley reaped and brought to the Temple and waved as the Omer of first flour before the Lord. Hence, in view of the well-known Rabbinic provision, the expression in the Gospel-narrative concerning the ‘Parents’ of Jesus, ‘when they had fulfilled the days,’ cannot necessarily imply that Joseph and the Mother of Jesus had remained in Jerusalem during the whole Paschal week.”

Interestingly, according to the chronology given in the Scripture, as it turned out, Jesus’ parents would have found Him in the Temple on the seventh day, the last day of the special lectures given about the meaning of the Feast. The first two days at the Feast would have transpired before they had left. Then there was their one-day journey before they discovered Jesus was missing. Then there was one day to travel back to Jerusalem. Then there were three days looking for Jesus. That meant they found him on the seventh day. I expect it was as the last lecture was ending.

³ *According to my chronology, Jesus would have been 12 years old from January 29, 9 A.D. to January 29, 10 A.D..*

⁴ *Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, 1883, i. 235 and note.*

Luke 2:44 **Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.**

Among other things this tells us that among the people who had travelled with them to Jerusalem from Nazareth were relatives. We have every reason to believe that Mary's sister Salome, who had been lost to her, lived at that time in Capernaum. We shall see their reunion in an upcoming lesson. However, we have no reason to doubt the account of Hegesippus,⁵ quoted by Eusebius ⁶ that described Clopas ⁷ as the brother of Joseph. It was probably his family that made up the relatives who had travelled with them to Jerusalem.

Luke 2:45 **When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.**

This would have taken an additional day bringing the day to the fourth day of the Feast.

Luke 2:46a **After three days they found him in the temple courts,**

It is provocative to notice that twenty-one years before the time we see a shadow of the Cross. Here, as later, Jesus was sought for after Passover but not found until after three days.

Luke 2:46b **sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.**

Edersheim gives us some insight into the scene that Joseph and Mary came upon:

Edersheim, *Life*, Book 1, Chapter 10: "There were occasions on which the Temple became virtually, though not formally, a Beth ha-Midrash (*seminary*). For we read in the Talmud, that the members of the Temple-Sanhedrin, who on ordinary days sat as a Court of Appeal, from the close of the Morning to the time of the Evening-Sacrifice, were wont on Sabbaths and feast-days to come out upon 'the Terrace' of the Temple, and there to teach. In such popular instruction the utmost latitude of questioning would be given. It is in this audience, which sat on the ground, surrounding and mingling with the Doctors, and hence during, not after the Feast, that we must seek the Child Jesus."

⁵ *Hegesippus (circa 110 A.D. to circa April 7, 180 A.D.), was a Christian chronicler of the early Church.*

⁶ *Eusebius of Caesarea (circa 260/265 A.D. to circa 339/340 A.D.) was a Roman historian, exegete, and Christian polemicist of Greek descent. He became the bishop of Caesarea Maritima about 314. As the "Father of Church History" he produced four books. They were The Ecclesiastical History, On the Life of Pamphilus, the Chronicle, and On the Martyrs.*

⁷ *Clopas' wife was mentioned as one of the women who stood at the foot of the cross with Mary, Mary's sister, and Mary Magdalene (John 19:25).*

Considering that Jesus had come to fulfill the meaning of Passover, it would not have been strange if He was seeking to find out if the religious leaders understood the significance of Passover themselves.

We know that the officiating High Priest at that time was Annas (High Priest from 6 A.D. to 14 A.D.). He later became the main instigator in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. One can only wonder if Annas heard the twelve-year old Jesus that day and later remembered Him after he had begun His ministry.

Luke 2:47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Undoubtedly many of those learned men were taught things that day that they had never understood before.

Luke 2:48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

As if they were the parents of a normal child, Joseph and Mary had been frantic with worry. They seem to have forgotten that Jesus was not a normal child.

Luke 2:49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

Among other things, this seems to demonstrate that in His incarnation Jesus had laid aside His omniscience. In His incarnation He didn't understand how, after everything His parents had been told at His birth about who He was, they could have had any doubt about where He would have been or be worried about His safety. Undoubtedly during the five days on His own in the city, He had found someone in Jerusalem who had listened to His answers and were hungry to hear Him talk more. Some of them had probably invited Him to stay with them and dine with them.

Luke 2:50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Although Mary and Joseph had been told who He was, they had never fully understood the life He was meant to live nor the death He was destined to die.

Luke 2:51a Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

Although He was the Son of God, and his parents were ignorant human beings, Jesus exercised humility before their authority as parents. This lasted for the next eighteen years until His formal ministry began at thirty years of age.

Luke 2:51b But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

The fact that Luke says she “treasured all these things in her heart” makes it sound like Luke heard this description of Mary’s intimate feelings from her own lips. That is quite possible since Luke must have accompanied Paul to Jerusalem in 51 A.D. for the Council of Jerusalem where Mary was living (probably with John). Mary would have been at least in her late sixties at that time.

Luke 2:52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Concerning this period of Jesus’ growth, the Messianic prophecies of Isaiah gave us a little more detail:

Isaiah 50:4-5 “The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back.

The Ministry of John the Baptist

Now, we advance ahead to the ministry of John the Baptist. The scripture does not really tell us when John began his ministry. We know that John was from a priest’s family and thus was expected from birth to be a priest. He was dedicated to the service of the LORD from birth. Both the Law of Moses ⁸ and the regulations of David ⁹ seemed to indicate that twenty years was the age at which a young man was considered capable of assuming the responsibilities of a priest. We know that John was born 6 months before Jesus, which would have been in 5 BC. I think that we can conclude that he probably began his ministry in about 16 A.D., ten years before he baptized Jesus in the Jordan River.

Matthew 3:1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert (*desert*) of Judea

The term “Desert of Judea” does not appear anywhere else in the Old Testament, the New Testament, or the Works of Josephus. Therefore, it seems likely that this should be rendered as “desert of Judea.” In other words, this term referred to the “desert” (uninhabited) areas of the Roman province of Judea. It included more than just the specific area between the Dead Sea and the Judean Mountains which, a thousand years later, was called the “Desert of Judea” by crusader era theologians. The desert in Judea also included the lower Jordan River Valley north of Jericho. It included the Fords of the Jordan.

⁸ *Exodus 30:12a,14 “When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the LORD a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. --- All who cross over (are counted), those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the LORD.”*

⁹ *1 Chronicles 23:27 “According to the last instructions of David, the Levites were counted from those twenty years old or more.”*

Matthew 3:2-3 **and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”**

The Greek word translated “repent” is μετανοέω {me-tä-no-e'-ō}. It means literally to “change your thinking.” There is no element of feeling sorry in it. It only means turning your way of thinking to the right way. Feeling sorry for your previous thinking might follow, but it is not part of the required repentance.

The phrase “the kingdom of Heaven” occurs 32 times in Matthew. It only occurs in this Book in all of scripture. The other 31 times it was used, it was used by Jesus. It does not refer to a place or a time, but to a way of thinking based on the absolute truth of God.

John the Baptist was telling them to be prepared for the ultimate revelation of God in the person of the Messiah, the Son of God.

Matthew 3:3 **This (John the Baptist) is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”**

Matthew informed us that the ministry of John was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah:

Isaiah 40:3 “A voice of one calling in the desert ‘Prepare the way for the LORD. Make straight in the wilderness a highway ¹⁰ for our God.’”

Matthew 3:4a ~~John’s clothes were made~~ **Now John wore a garment ¹¹ of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist.**

The garment made of camel’s hair probably referred only to John’s outer robe, not the garments he wore next to his skin. According to 1 Kings 1:8 the outer robe and leather belt were the same uniform that Elijah wore. This seemed to be recognized as the uniform of a prophet.

Matthew 3:4b **His food was locusts and wild honey.**

¹⁰ Significantly, John the Baptist baptized along the “highways” which led to Jerusalem and the Feasts that were held there. One of the places he baptized was at the Jordan River. Another place was at Aenon near Salim (John 3:23).

¹¹ This is the literal translation from the Greek. It is also the translation of the RSV, NASB, LSB, and the ESV. The erroneous translation as the NIV and others have it, could be taken to support the idea that a prophet needed to subject himself to unnecessary discomfort, such as wearing a hair shirt. This was probably only his outer garment. This was a humble garment. It contrasted John with the Sadducees and Pharisees. As Jesus said of their comparison with John the Baptist: Matthew 1:8 “What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes. No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces.”

In Joel 1 and 2 locusts swarms were used as figures for the Satanic attacks on the Messianic line and the promise of the Messiah who would be descended from that line. I find it interesting that the Word of God reversed the figure when describing John the Baptist. By assuring the people that the ancient Messianic promise was soon to be made good, John was “eating” those (locusts) which had been symbolic of the Satanic attack on the line of the Messiah.

As far as eating wild honey is concerned, there may be a connection here with the story of Samson eating honey out of the lion he had killed (Judges 14:8-9). Often, lions were used to symbolize Satan.¹²

Matthew 3:5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.

John did not preach in Jerusalem. He stayed in the desert areas. The people had to “come out” to him. From Jerusalem to the Jordan River was about a 25-mile journey east by road. The “whole region of the Jordan” included all the territory in Galilee and all the way to Mt. Hermon. Matthew was from Galilee, as well as eleven of the twelve disciples. The apostles John and Andrew were also from Galilee and were disciples of John the Baptist who had begun following him as he travelled around the country. We shall see that in the next lesson.

Matthew 3:6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

The Greek word translated “confessing” is ἐξομολογέω {eks-o-mo-lo-ge'-ō} which is more literally translated “acknowledging.”

Matthew 3:7a But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing,

Below is the unflattering picture that the 1st Century A.D. Jewish Historian Josephus gives us of the Pharisees. Josephus had originally been a Pharisee, but by the time he wrote Antiquities, he had become a Christian. The first four critical quotations about the Pharisees are from Antiquities:

Antiquities, Josephus, Bk. 13, Chap. 10, Pp. 5: “However, this prosperous state of affairs moved the Jews to envy Hyrcanus;¹³ but they that were the worst disposed to him were the Pharisees, who were one of the sects of the Jews, as we have informed you already. These have so great a power over the multitude, that when they say anything against the king, or against the high priest, they are presently believed.”

¹² *1 Peter 5:8b “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*

¹³ *A 1st Century BC Maccabean Jewish King.*

Antiquities, Josephus, Bk. 13, Chap. 10, Pp. 6: “What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses.”

Antiquities, Josephus, Bk. 17, Chap. 4, Pp. 2: “For there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favored by God, by whom this set of women were inveigled. These are those that are called the sect of the Pharisees, who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were, and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief.”

Antiquities, Josephus, Bk. 18, Chap. 1, Pp. 3: “Now, for the Pharisees, they live meanly and despise delicacies in diet; and they follow the conduct of reason; and what that prescribes to them as good for them they do; and they think they ought earnestly to strive to observe reason's dictates for practice. They also pay a respect to such as are in years; nor are they so bold as to contradict them in anything which they have introduced; and when they determine that all things are done by fate, they do not take away the freedom from men of acting as they think fit; since their notion is, that it hath pleased God to make a temperament, whereby what he wills is done, but so that the will of man can act virtuously or viciously. They also believe that souls have an immortal rigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again; on account of which doctrines they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatsoever they do about Divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction; insomuch that the cities give great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also.”

This last uncritical quotation is from Josephus' book Wars of the Jews which was written when Josephus was still a Pharisee. It was written 20 years earlier than Antiquities:

Wars, Josephus, Bk. 2, Chap. 8, Pp. 14: “But then as to the two other orders at first mentioned, the Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skillful in the exact explication of their laws, and introduce the first sect. These ascribe all to fate [or providence], and to God, and yet allow, that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does cooperate in every action. They say that all souls are incorruptible, but that the souls of good men only are removed into other bodies, but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment.

This is what Josephus tells us about the Sadducees. All the passages from both Antiquities and Wars are uniformly critical of the behavior of the Sadducees as they were enemies of both the Christians and the Pharisees:

Antiquities of the Jews by Flavius Josephus, Book 13, Chapter 5, Paragraph 9: “And for the Sadducees, they take away fate, and say there is no such thing, and that the events of human affairs are not at its disposal; but they suppose that all our actions are in our own power, so that we are ourselves the causes of what is good, and receive what is evil from our own folly.”

Antiquities of the Jews by Flavius Josephus, Book 13, Chapter 10, Paragraph 6: “What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers. And concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side.”

Antiquities of the Jews by Flavius Josephus, Book 18, Chapter 1, Paragraph 4: “But the doctrine of the Sadducees is this: That souls die with the bodies; nor do they regard the observation of anything besides what the law enjoins them; for they think it an instance of virtue to dispute with those teachers of philosophy whom they frequent: but this doctrine is received but by a few, yet by those still of the greatest dignity. But they are able to do almost nothing of themselves; for when they become magistrates, as they are unwillingly and by force sometimes obliged to be, they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them.”

Wars of the Jews by Flavius Josephus, Book 2, Chapter 8, Paragraph 14: “But the Sadducees are those that compose the second order, and take away fate entirely, and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil; and they say, that to act what is good, or what is evil, is at men's own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to every one, that they may act as they please. They also take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades. Moreover, the Pharisees are friendly to one another, and are for the exercise of concord, and regard for the public; but the behavior of the Sadducees one towards another is in some degree wild, and their conversation with those that are of their own party is as barbarous as if they were strangers to them. And this is what I had to say concerning the philosophic sects among the Jews.”

Returning to the discussion about John the Baptist.

Matthew 3:7b **he (John) said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”**

John understood that the Pharisees and Sadducees were not coming out to hear him to learn. They were coming out to find a way to suppress him. Jesus later described how they had reacted to the teaching of John:

Matthew 11:18 “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’”

Matthew 21:32 “For John came to you (*the Pharisees and the Sadducees*) to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.”

The literal Greek in Matthew 3:7b is: “You offspring of poisonous serpents.” Jesus used the same term Matthew 12:34 and 23:33. Since we know that a reference to serpents usually referred to “that old serpent the devil” (Revelation 12:9), it was really the same thought as John 8:44 when Jesus told the Pharisees: “You belong to your father, the devil.”

Matthew 3:8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

If they really changed the way they thought (repentance), they would change what they were doing.

Matthew 3:9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

The Pharisees thought that the promise of God meant that everyone who was born Jewish (of the lineage of Abraham) were the family of God. To really become a part of the family of God required more than just a physical birth. It also required a spiritual birth (being born again). That spiritual birth required a free will decision to trust in God. If it didn’t, God could have just created a people for Himself from mindless stones and saved Himself a lot of trouble.

Matthew 3:10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

The time was coming close (70 A.D.) when the nation of Israel would be judged according to its production of the fruits of faith.

Matthew 3:11a “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry.

John’s ministry was only backed up by the power of his preaching.¹⁴ Water baptism, the only thing he could do, was only ceremonial. The baptisms he conducted only symbolized the professed washing away of the sinner’s old way of thinking. The one that would come would back up His ministry, not only with powerful preaching, but with great and powerful miracles.

Matthew 3:11b He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

¹⁴ “John 10:41b “And many people came to him (Jesus). They said, ‘Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true.’”

The baptism of the Holy Spirit wasn't ceremonial, it was real. In that baptism, the Holy Spirit takes the one who has turned his heart to the LORD by faith and puts him "in Christ" and therefore in the Father's favor forever.

The baptism of fire referred to the judgment which would fall on that generation of Jews who rejected Christ.

Matthew 3:12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

The threshing floor was usually in a windy place. In the process of threshing, a winnowing fork would throw up the chaff and the grain which was still attached to the chaff. The repeated violent action would separate the heavy grain from the light chaff. As it was repeated, the separated chaff would be blown away by the wind. The unbelieving Jews would be the useless chaff which would be blown away by the winds of history. The believing Jews were those who would be gathered into "the barn" which symbolized the favor and presence of God forever.

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Now we switch to Mark's Gospel and his account of the ministry of John. Mark's Gospel doesn't mention the birth of Christ but begins with the ministry of John the Baptist.

Mark 1:2a It is written in Isaiah the prophet the prophets:

I have substituted the translation from the Textus Receptus. This is another great example of the superiority of that text. The Codex Sinaiticus has "Isaiah the prophet" although the two texts next quoted are from both Malachi and Isaiah. Clearly, "the prophets" of the Textus Receptus is the accurate original text.

Mark 1:2b "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" –

This was quoting Malachi 3:1.

Mark 1:3 "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

This was quoting Isaiah 40:3.

Mark 1:4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The region of Judea north of where the Jordan flowed into the Dead Sea was totally uninhabited (deserted). This was the “desert region” referred to here. It included the “Fords of the Jordan” which was a few miles northwest of Jericho.

Mark 1:5a The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

As opposed to Matthew, Mark only mentioned the people of Judea and Jerusalem and not Galilee. I suppose that was natural because Mark lived in Jerusalem, in Judea. He was merely reflecting the experience of his own region when he was very young.

Mark 1:5b Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

John would have been baptizing at the fords of the Jordan about six miles from Jericho. This location was where Joshua and the Ark crossed the Jordan in Joshua 3 and 4. It was also on one of the main highways in the Middle East, where many of the pilgrims and travelers on their way to and from Jerusalem journeyed on the way to and from the Feast of Tabernacles during the end of the dry season.

Mark 1:6 John ~~wore clothing made of~~ was clothed with ¹⁵ camel’s hair, with a leather belt ¹⁶ around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

See my comment on this in Matthew 3:4 on page 6 above.

Mark 1:7 And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

Notice that in Matthew 3:11 John said he was not worthy to “carry his sandals.” Here Mark had recorded a different expression. This only indicated that John repeated these sentiments of humility more than once. Mark chose to record a different expression of John’s comparative unworthiness.

Mark 1:8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The Gospel of Mark was mainly addressed to Gentile believers, so he omitted the “baptism of fire” in Matthew’s account which had been addressed to the Jewish nation and referred to their coming judgment.

In the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 3 began with dating the most important event in the life of John the Baptist in Luke 3:1-2. We will study that in the next lesson. However, in parallel with the

¹⁵ *This is the literal translation. It is also the translation of the KJV, NASB, ESV, and RSV. This probably referred only to John’s outer garment or robe.*

¹⁶ *2 Kings 1:8 Elijah wore this uniform.*

Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Luke described the ministry of John the Baptist which as we surmised earlier had been building for about ten years.

Luke 3:3 *And he went into all the country around the Jordan,*¹⁷ *preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

Note that it does not say “then” here. In the Greek it uses the word καί {kī} which means “and” instead of the Greek word τότε {to'-te} (see Matthew 3:13, 4:1) which means “then” which is the demonstrative adverb of time. Thus, the action described does not necessarily follow the time frame described in the previous verse. That time included 16 A.D. to 26 A.D. during which John baptized many people. John baptized Jesus near the end of that period in late 26 A.D. We will study more about that in the next lesson.

Luke 3:4-6 *As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God’s salvation.’”*

In comparison to Matthew and Mark, Luke gives a longer quotation from Isaiah. Matthew and Mark only quoted verse 3 of Isaiah 40. Luke quoted verses 3 through 5. The additional verses spoke of straightening the roads and the ways to God. They make clear that much of John’s ministry was to clarify the confusion that the Pharisees and Sadducees had brought by teaching their manmade traditions instead of the Word of God.¹⁸

Luke 3:7a *John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him,*

This seems to refer only to those “coming out” from Jerusalem. We know that many of John’s listeners were either going to or from the feasts in Jerusalem. We know from Matthew 3:7 that these crowds were sometimes made up of the Pharisees and Sadducees and their followers. The most important ones usually lived in Jerusalem or Jericho. They evidently had come out to the Jordan to see the teacher that the pilgrims going to the festivals were always talking about.

Luke 3:7b-9 *“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

¹⁷ *The lower Jordan Valley was rainless and uninhabited.*

¹⁸ *Mark 7:7-8 “They (the Pharisees) worship me (Jesus) in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”*

Since this is nearly identical to Matthew, see my comments on Matthew 3:7b-10 above.

Luke 3:10 “What should we do then?” the crowd asked.

The exchange in Luke 3:10-14 is unique to Luke’s account. The people wanted to know what some of the fruits of repentance would be. The Greek word translated “repentance” is μετάνοια {met-an'-oy-ah} which means “change of mind.” It refers to taking on God’s way of thinking.

Luke 3:11 John answered, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.”

What John told them was just an application of the old Law from Leviticus, which Jesus also taught later:

Mark 12:31 “The second (*most important law*) is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”¹⁹

Luke 3:12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

The tax collectors were a subset from among the people who were generally despised. They were essentially collecting taxes for the Roman government. Throughout the Roman Empire the government would sell contracts to local tax collectors for the right to collect tariffs, duties, and taxes according to the laws which had been passed. The Romans would get their revenues from the tax collectors up front. For the tax collectors to make money, they had to collect more in taxes than they had paid for the right to collect them. It was built into the system that they were expected to collect a little more than what they had paid for the rights. However, anything that they could squeeze out of the taxpayers above what was their legal right was pure profit. Many of them abused the latitude they were given, and as a result they had a bad reputation for abusing their power, particularly against the lower classes who generally had no standing to object.

Luke 3:13 “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

John said, just as Jesus said later,²⁰ that there was nothing wrong with legal taxes. However, forcing people to pay more than was legal was stealing from their neighbor.

¹⁹ This is from Leviticus 19:18.

²⁰ Luke 20:22-25 “‘Is it right for us (the Jews) to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’ He (Jesus) saw through their duplicity and said to them, ‘Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. He said to them, ‘Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.’”

Luke 3:14 Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

These soldiers were another subset of Jewish society. Obviously, these weren’t Roman legionaries. The Roman legionaries marched under the idol of the Roman eagle which was forbidden by Jewish laws. The Jews, who were soldiers, served in mercenary units or under Jewish kings like Herod Antipas or Herod Phillip. They were evidently notorious for running a kind of protection racket against the civilians.

Luke 3:15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.

From the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-28, the Jews had reason to believe that the Messiah would come within their lifetime. Some might even have remembered the signs and rumors that had circulated about the birth of the Messiah some thirty years before.

Luke 3:16 John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

This is nearly identical to Matthew 3:11 and Mark 1:7-8. See the comments I made there about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the judgment to come on the Jews.

Luke 3:17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

This is nearly identical to Matthew 3:12. See the comments I made there.

Luke 3:18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

Over the course of ten years John the Baptist tried to “make straight paths” for the people so that they could get past the false teaching of the religious leaders.

Luke 3:19-20 But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

This imprisonment happened almost a year and a half after the rest of the events in this chapter. We will study this imprisonment in more detail in a later lesson.

Map of Lower Jordan River Valley

