

Commentary on Luke's Gospel

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SECTION 2 (3.1-4.44).

The Launching of the Messiah: The Spirit-filled Ministries of John and Jesus And The Defeat of Satan (3.1-4.44).

When we come to chapter 3 we enter the second stage in Luke's message. It commences with the ministry of John, the one who is to prepare of the way, and expands into the fullblown ministry of Jesus as the Anointed Prophet of Isaiah, and both are full of the Holy Spirit (1.15; 4.1). We can analyse this section as follows:

- a The powerful Spirit-filled ministry of John is described (3.1-14).
- b One is coming Who will send the Holy Spirit and will produce wheat for the harvest and cleanse His threshing floor (3.15-18).
- c John is rejected by Herod for teaching what he does not like (3.19-20).
- d The Holy Spirit comes on Jesus, and God declares that He is His beloved Son, and His anointed Prophet 'in Whom He is well pleased' (3.21-22).
- e Jesus is the son of David (the anointed King), the son of Abraham (the One through Whom the promises are to be fulfilled), the son of Adam (the seed of the woman who is about to break the serpent's head), the son of God (the second Man, the last Adam, fully human in the same way as Adam, partaking as he had done in the image and likeness of God before the Fall), the One Who will fulfil God's purpose in creation (3.23-38).
- f Jesus faces his temptations as to his Messiahship and defeats the Tempter who describes Him as the Son of God (Jesus 'breaks his head' with the word of God) (4.1-12).
- e Jesus, having as the Son of God defeated Satan, goes out in the power of the Spirit and is glorified of all (4.13-15).
- d Jesus reveals Himself from the Word of God as the Spirit anointed prophet of Isaiah 61.1-2 (4.16-21).
- c Jesus is rejected by the people for teaching what they do not like (4.22-30).
- b Jesus reveals Himself as the Coming One by His power over evil spirits, (cleansing His threshing floor). They declare 'you are the Holy One of God' but are rebuked. The people are amazed at His activity and the word spreads (4.31-37).
- a The powerful Spirit-filled ministry of Jesus is described (4.38-44).
- The section ends with 'And He was preaching in the synagogues of Judaea' (4.44).

Thus in 'a' and its parallel we have the contrasting Spirit-filled ministries of John and Jesus. In 'b' we have the huge impact of the Coming One described, and in the parallel something of that impact. In 'c' and parallel we have the rejection of Jesus and John because their teaching is not acceptable. In 'd' we have Jesus anointed by the Holy Spirit for His ministry and declared by God to be His chosen Prophet, and in the parallel the Word of God declares Him to be the Spirit anointed Prophet. In 'e' we have Jesus revealed as the fulfilment of all the past, the final fulfilment of God's purpose on creation, and in the parallel, having defeated Satan, as going out and being glorified by all. In 'f' and central to the whole is Jesus' defeat of Satan in the wilderness.

Chapter 3. The Ministry of John and the Genealogy of Jesus.

This chapter is split into two sections. The first describes the powerful ministry of John. The second introduces the Coming One in terms of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Him, together with a genealogy linking Him with David, with Abraham, with Adam, and with God.

The passage is a mixture of Aramaic influence and solid Lucan phraseology, which we might expect from information received in Aramaic and taken by Luke and represented in Greek.

The Powerful Ministry of John Is Described (3.1-14).

Many years have passed and the ministry of John the Baptist, whose birth was described in chapter 1, begins. It is set very definitely in its historical context, and commences with confirmation that he was fulfilling what the prophets had promised. His was a ministry that very much demanded a moral response, and which offered the forgiveness of sins for those who faced up before God concerning their need to have a change of heart and mind (to 'repent'). It was based on the prophetic descriptions of the Holy Spirit falling like rain on men and women and producing fruitfulness in their lives (Isaiah 32.15; 44.1-5; 55.10-13), something that he declared was about to come, and was very much based on the need for men and women to 'bear fruit'.

Thus as can be seen it was fulfilling the angels description of the purpose of his ministry, to 'turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God' (1.16) and 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people'.

He acted out this pouring out of the Spirit in prophetic mime through a baptism in water. This did not signify ritual washing (that was the error of Josephus), for in ritual washing men washed themselves, and besides, there is no hint in his ministry of such a significance. Rather it signified the Holy Spirit falling on men like refreshing and lifegiving rain producing fruitfulness, and he continually demanded to see that fruitfulness, and paralleled his drenching (baptizo) of them with water with the overwhelming pouring on them (baptizo) of the Holy Spirit.

Both the opening verse and the general context reveal that John sees himself as introducing the last days. Luke sets him in the context of the power of Rome, and reveals him as the one who is preparing the way for what is to come, the coming of the Messiah and the great anointed Prophet of God. And John sees this as very much introducing the last days, for his eyes are firmly fixed on the final judgment. All must now face up to a choice. One is coming Who will 'drench' men with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Then those who respond and are fruitful will be gathered into His barn, but those who refuse to hear and do not respond will be burned like chaff in unquenchable flames. In spite of his stress on coming judgment, in the end his message is to be seen as one of declaring the coming of the Salvation of God (verse 6). It is to be seen as 'the Good News' (verse 18). Against the background of fiery judgment is the description of a new beginning for all who respond to the Messiah

We can compare this great contrast between the surviving righteous and the destruction of the unrighteous with the similar contrast in Isaiah, who reveals the aftermath, 'For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make will remain before Me --- all flesh will come to worship before Me, and they will go forth and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against Me, for their maggots will not die, their fire will not be quenched, and they will be an abhorrence to all flesh' (Isaiah 66.22-24). And to the similar contrast in Daniel, 'and there will be a time of trouble such as never has been since there was a nation until that time, but at that time your people will be delivered, every one whose name will be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt' (Daniel 12.1-2). It is the time of the end. But like Isaiah John makes no mention of the resurrection, and like Isaiah he speaks of unquenchable fire. The warning of Jeremiah 4.4 is to be fulfilled, 'Circumcise yourselves to

the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart (repent), you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury go forth like fire and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings’.

The first nineteen verses of this chapter can be analysed as follows:

- **a 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 the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.**
- **b And he came into all the region round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance resulting in (unto) remission of sins.**
- **c As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,
“The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
Make you ready the way of the Lord, Make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low,
And the crooked shall become straight, and the rough ways smooth.
And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.**
- **d He said therefore to the multitudes who went out to be baptised by him, “You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, “We have Abraham to our father”, for I say to you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.”**
- **e “And even now the axe also lies at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bring forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”**
- **d ‘And the crowds asked him, saying, “What then must we do?” And he answered and said to them, “He who has two coats, let him impart to him who has none, and he who has food, let him do the same.” And there came also public servants to be baptised, and they said to him, “Teacher, what must we do?” And he said to them, “Extort no more than that which is appointed you.” And soldiers also asked him, saying, “And we, what must we do?” And he said to them, “Extort from no man by violence, nor accuse any one wrongfully, and be content with your wages.” ’**
- **c And as the people were in expectation, and all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John, whether haply he were the Christ. John answered, saying to them all, “I indeed baptise you with water, but there comes he who is mightier than I, the latchet of whose sandals I am not worthy to unloose. He will baptise you in the Holy Spirit and in fire, whose winnowing-fan is in his hand, thoroughly to cleanse his threshing-floor, and to gather the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.”**
- **b With many other exhortations therefore preached he good tidings to the people.**
- **a But Herod the tetrarch, being reprovved by him for Herodias his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things which Herod had done, added this also to them all, that he shut up John in prison.**

It will be noted that in ‘a’ the authorities of this world are described as in contrast with the word of God going forth from John, while in the parallel their representative shuts up John (and the word of God) in prison. In ‘b’ John goes out preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and in the parallel he preaches good tidings to the people. In ‘c’ we have a prophetic description of the mighty working of God preparing for the Coming One, leading up to salvation (a concept which in the Old Testament includes judgment on the ungodly), and in the parallel we have the mighty working of the Coming One who both saves and judges. In ‘d’ there is the warning to bring forth fruits meet for repentance and in the parallel those fruits are described. In ‘e’ we have the central point of warning concerning those who

refuse to become fruitful. His central message is a fearsome warning of judgment.

3.1-2 '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 the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.'

Once again everything is put in its historical context. Augustus has died and now Tiberius is the Emperor. But here Luke overwhelms us with information. He describes first the ruler who is over all, Tiberius, and then describes all the rulers who have authority under him in the regions in and around Palestine, in descending order. Here is the might of Rome as carried into effect by its satellite 'rulers'. There is Pontius Pilate, praefectus of Judaea; Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee (and Peraea); Herod Philip, Tetrarch of lands north east of Galilee, with his capital at Caesarea Philippi; Lysanias, Tetrarch of Abilene which was even further north; and the High Priests of Jerusalem, who ruled under Pilate's authority. Rome is seen as in control everywhere.

As we know from inscriptions Pilate was a 'praefectus', or 'prefect', a man of equestrian rank set over a troublesome province that required military expertise. Tacitus calls him 'procurator' which was certainly the title used from the time of Claudius. But he may have been reading back a title that Pilate never strictly had (it indicated the same status, although emphasising more the financial side of things).

A 'Tetrarch' is a minor king over a small territory. This Lysanias has been long evidenced by inscriptions (a fact often ignored in order to suggest that Luke was in error. But as often he proves to be correct in the end).

Annas was no longer High Priest as far as the Romans were concerned. They had replaced him. But in Jewish eyes a High Priest could not be deposed, and they would still look to Annas as High Priest, as well as to Caiaphas, the current High Priest, and Annas still had a great deal of influence over Judaea's affairs, for he was Caiaphas's father. Note that in the Greek 'High Priest' is singular acknowledging that there was effectively only one High Priesthood.

Every High Priest who took part in the Day of Atonement was thereafter seen as a High Priest until death, even if he was a one off substitute because the current High Priest had in some way been rendered unclean and therefore unable to participate. He might never officiate again, but he was still called High Priest to the end of his days. Thus Luke is quite right to call Annas High Priest. Indeed at this time there would be a number of 'High Priests', but Luke only mentions the two who were actually influencing events.

One purpose of this opening was undoubtedly to date the time of the appearance of John and Jesus on the scene. It was 'in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar.' The problem for us is as to whether this refers to when he began his co-rule with Augustus over the provinces, or when he finally began to reign supremely on his own. The latter is the more probable, being the normal basis used elsewhere, which would give us a date around 27-29 AD.

We note here how Luke's opening descriptions have slowly increased in impressiveness. In 1.5 it was 'in the days of Herod the king'. In 2.1-2 it was in the days of 'Caesar Augustus' and of Quirinius his appointed instrument. Now we have the full works, Caesar and all his authorities in and around Palestine. The mention of Lysanias prevents us from simply seeing it as a description of those whose lands will be affected by Jesus' ministry. There is here the deliberate intention of bringing out the power of Rome which ruled the world into which John and Jesus came. And it is significant that Israel's 'spiritual' leaders are placed firmly on the side of Rome. Nothing could have been truer, although they would no doubt have preferred total independence as all men do.

But now with John a new authority breaks onto the scene, the authority of the word of God (rema theou). The great panoply of power previously described is to meet up with an irresistible force, the power of the word of God which is to sweep through the whole Empire. The ‘word of God’ (here rema theou (as possibly in 4.4) but usually logos theou) is a theme of Luke in both the Gospel and in Acts. It signified God speaking through His servants, and included the witness of the Old Testament. It comes to John here while he is in the wilderness, so that he might proclaim it (compare 7.24). It is the word which God puts into the hearts of His prophets. It is also the word on which man feeds. ‘Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God’ (4.4). (Thus Jesus too received the rema theou in the wilderness if the last phrase is the original). In 5.1 the people will press on Jesus to hear the word of God (logos tou theou). In the parable of the sower in 8.11-15 the seed is the word of God. In 8.21 Jesus declares those who hear the word of God to be His mother, His sisters, and His brothers. In 11.28 those who hear the word of God and keep it are blessed rather than His earthly mother who bore Him. In Acts 4.31 the word of God is proclaimed boldly to the Jews, in 6.7 it ‘increases’, in 8.14 it is received by the Samaritans, in 11.1 the Gentiles have received the word of God, in 12.24 it grows and multiplies, in 13.5 it is preached in Salamis, in 13.7 it is preached to the proconsul of Cyprus, in 13.44 almost the whole of the city of Pisidian Antioch come together to hear the word of God, in 13.46 the word of God must now go even more abundantly to the Gentiles, in 17.13 the word of God is being preached in Berea where it is thoughtfully compared with the Scriptures, in 18.11 it is effectively proclaimed in Corinth, in 19.20 the word of God grows mightily and prevails. And finally the message of the Kingly Rule of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ will be proclaimed in Rome (Acts 28.31). And of course on top of this are the many times when it is simply called ‘the word’ or ‘the word of the Lord’ or similar. Thus from John to Corinth and onwards the new ‘word of God’, which is based on the old, is received and proclaimed, and acts powerfully. From this beginning with John ‘the word of God’, the message of deliverance which centres on Christ, and fulfils the Scriptures, will go forward continually until it is effectively established in Rome.

3.3 ‘And he came into all the region round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins,’ .

And as a result of receiving ‘the word of God’ John came into the region round about the Jordan in order to proclaim it. He preached the need for a ‘turning to God’, a ‘change of heart, mind and will’ (metanoia - translated ‘repentance’), so that men’s sins could be forgiven, linking it with his baptism in water which proclaimed the forthcoming pouring out of the Holy Spirit like rain. Note that to Luke repentance is the gift of God and closely connected with the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5.30-31; 11.15-18).

The Greek word literally means a ‘change of mind’ but was used to translate the Semitic idea of ‘turning’ to God, involving a change of direction and often sorrow of heart (1 Kings 8.47; 13.33; Psalm 78.34; Isaiah 6.10; Ezekiel 3.19; Amos 4.6). It is common also on the lips of Jesus both as a noun and a verb (e.g. 5.32; 10.13; 11.32; 13.3, 5; 15.7, 10; 24.47). On this point both Jesus and John are in agreement. It reflects the contrite heart that comes to God for forgiveness and renewal (Psalm 34.18; 51.17; Isaiah 57.15; 66.2).

While it is true that John comes from a priestly family, his chosen background is that of a prophet. In his clothing, his food and his chosen environment of the wilderness he follows Elijah (verse 2; Mark 1.6; Matthew 3.4; compare 2 Kings 1.8; 1 Kings 17.3-4). And like Elijah he stands to give warning to the powers of his day (verses 14, 19). And his message too is a prophetic one. We should therefore see his baptism in the same light. While we may see water in terms of washing, the people of the land who heard John would have seen it very much in terms of rain coming down on the land, and of rivers and water courses that produced life. And that was the prophetic message, especially of Isaiah who provides the Scriptural background to John’s ministry (verses 4-6. See Isaiah 32.15; 44.1-5; 55.10-13). John’s message too was that soon the Holy Spirit would come down on men, and He would come down on

those whose hearts were prepared by turning to God from sin, and living accordingly. And through their commitment by baptism to His effective working, indicating their desire to partake in the coming outpouring of the Spirit, they would receive the forgiveness of sins. But the repentance and forgiveness did not await the future outpouring of the Spirit. They were effective now in readiness for it.

We must beware of thinking that the Holy Spirit was not already working. John is filled with the Holy Spirit (1.15) and preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit. But the work of the Holy Spirit that he sees as to come is something different. It is the great outpouring described in the prophets (Isaiah 32.15; 44.1-5; Joel 2.28; Ezekiel 36.25-27) which will commence in John 20.22 and Acts 2, and which will shake the world. But as is clear in the ministry of Jesus (4.1, 14; 10.21 with 17; 11.13; 12.10, 12; Matthew 12.28; John 3.6; 4.10-14 with 24; 7.37 in contrast with 38) the Spirit is already working, as indeed He has always worked (Psalm 51.10, 11; 139.7; 143.10).

It is significant that apart from in Acts 22.16, which can in fact be interpreted differently, baptism is never directly connected with washing, while Peter emphasises that it has nothing to do with the removal of the defilement of the flesh - 1 Peter 3.21. So contrary to what is often said it is totally unlike Jewish religious washings, which were only ever a self-washing of the body preparatory to waiting on God for cleansing, and had to be performed continually. While it has been likened to proselyte baptism it is not really similar, for proselyte baptism was for removal of ritual uncleanness and then simply introduced the person to the continual chain of washings which would maintain his cleanness, which would inevitably follow. John's baptism was nothing like this. It was once for all, marking the recipient, if his heart was true, as one of God's chosen. The cleansing that it represented was not that of washing but of the working of the Holy Spirit within (the 'washing of regeneration'). In the Old Testament it is only blood sprinkled water ('pure water') that was seen as cleansing and had to be applied to another, not washing water. Note how the priestly Ezekiel likens the coming of the Spirit to being sprinkled with clean (cleansed) water (Ezekiel 36.25-27).

John's baptism was administered by him and was initiatory and final. It was linked with the coming drenching in the Holy Spirit and indicated that the person who received it had been made right with God through turning to God and receiving forgiveness. It indicated the commencement of a new life, a turning from the old to the new. And he warned that if it was participated in lightly it would result in being drenched, not with the Holy Spirit but with fire and judgment. Thus its prime significance must be seen as representing the coming work of the Holy Spirit, which was already happening to a limited extent through the Spirit-filled John.

'All the region round about the Jordan.' This would include lands both sides of the Jordan, as he moved from place to place. But he was very much seen as connected with the Jordan. It was where he baptised, and it was symbolically connected with the new age that had begun when Israel crossed the Jordan (Joshua 3.7-4.1), something re-enacted by Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2.8, 14). It was a symbol of God's power as He was again beginning to act on behalf of His people (2 Kings 2.12), as it had been of the spirit of Elijah coming on Elisha (2 Kings 2.15). Now John had the Spirit and power of Elijah (1.17). John tells us that for a time Jesus preached alongside John although He sought not to be seen as a rival (John 3.22-23; 4.1-3).

3.4-6 'As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet.

- a "The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
- b Make you ready the way of the Lord,
- c Make his paths straight.
- d Every valley shall be filled,
- d And every mountain and hill shall be brought low,
- c And the crooked shall become straight,

b And the rough ways smooth.
a And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Note the chiasmic structure here. In 'b' and parallel we have the play on 'way', in 'c' and parallel on 'smooth', while 'd' and parallel are identical but contrasting thoughts. This is as well as the parallels of the poetic rhythm.

The above is fairly similar to (but not the same as) Isaiah 40.3-5 LXX, 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God, every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be brought low, and all the crooked ways will become straight, and the rough places plains, and the glory of the Lord will appear, and all flesh will see the salvation of God, for the Lord has spoken'. But as findings at Qumran remind us, the differences probably indicate that it was not a direct citation from there, and could easily rather be a translation from an original Hebrew text. (This is true wherever there is a similarity to LXX but with differences). Luke, however, like us, would use any suitable versions that were available.

It will be noted that 'and all flesh will see the salvation of God' is not present in the Hebrew text, which reads 'and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it (the glory of the Lord) together'. But the whole of the remainder of Isaiah 40 demonstrates that the revealing of the glory of the Lord there is in fact for the purpose of salvation (verse 10-11, 28-31), and thus that those who see His glory will see His salvation, for His glory will be revealed in salvation. Thus the significance is the same.

Luke is here following the example of Mark 1.3, but expanding on it, and cites with regard to John the words of Isaiah in Isaiah 40.3-5. These words referred to one who was to prepare the way for God to act. (The community at Qumran applied this verse to their task of studying the law in the wilderness). It was normal in Isaiah's day for the approach of great kings to be prepared for by smoothing the way before them. There were to be no ups and downs for a great king. The valleys would be filled in, the mountains levelled, the road would be made straight and all obstacles and unevenness removed. And both Isaiah and John saw this in spiritual terms, the removal of the obstacles of men's sins and the preparation of men's hearts ready for God to act.

We can compare how later men are to be 'brought low' (14.11; 18.14), for good or bad, and the crooked will be made straight (13.10-17, the Greek terms are different but have the same significance) which was itself a picture of what Christ had come to do. For the mountains being levelled we can compare Zechariah 4.7 where such an event is connected with the Spirit and refers to the removal of all obstacles on behalf of Zerubbabel. And we can compare how today we speak of the removal of a person's rough edges in order (in our view) to make him a more fulfilled person. The word used for 'crooked' occurs in a moral sense in Acts 2.40; Philippians 2.15; 1 Peter 2.18, where the idea is of perverseness, or of being overbearing. The word for 'smooth' is used of walking morally in Proverbs 2.20 LXX where the way for the righteous man is to be smoothed. Thus the words are indicating the total transformation of men and women as explained in 1.17.

'The voice of one crying in the wilderness.' It has already been made clear that John's preparation has taken place in the wilderness (1.80; 3.2 and compare 7.24). The wilderness was in Jewish tradition the place where men could go and meet God. We can compare Moses (Exodus 3.1-6) and Elijah (1 Kings 19.4-18) who both met God in the wilderness and received His word there. And John too had met God there and received His word (3.2).

'All flesh will see the salvation of God.' We may interpret this as being explained by the words of Simeon in 2.30, 'my eyes have seen the Salvation of God', thus meaning that all kinds of men (all flesh) will see in Him their Saviour. All kinds and classes will become aware of God's message of salvation. Of course in the end seeing salvation and seeing the Saviour both mean

the same thing for God's salvation is only found through Christ.

But the thought might be that all flesh everywhere will see His salvation, some to their benefit and others to their dismay (Revelation 1.7). For when His glory is revealed and His salvation comes, the elect will be gathered in (Matthew 24.31) and the remainder will be subjected to judgment.

3.7-8 'He said therefore to the multitudes who went out to be baptised by him, "You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, "We have Abraham to our father", for I say to you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham." '

The psalmists liken men to vipers because of the venom of their mouths (Psalm 58.4; 140.3) and because of their deafness in the face of entreaty (Psalm 58.4). Thus he is warning his listeners not to be like their fathers. The idea here was also of the snakes who fled from the cornfields when the stubble was burned. So what he is saying is that it is useless for his hearers to be like snakes who merely flee from the flames, but are deaf to entreaty. They are rather to undergo a real change of heart and mind. For the wrath to come is not so easily avoided. They are to bring forth fruit which is worthy of indicating that their hearts and minds are truly changed (truly repentant) which will indicate that God has rained on them, as his baptism indicates. Serpents were always looked on as worldly wise (Matthew 10.16). That might mean that he saw the purpose of some of those who came to him for baptism as a clever way of getting blessing without true response.

Furthermore they are not to assume that because they can claim Abraham as their father all will be right. Being a son of Abraham is of no value unless they walk like Abraham. Indeed let them recognise that God could even make the stones that they could see round about them into sons of Abraham. This idea may spring from Isaiah 51.1 where they are told to seek the Lord and look to the rock from which they were hewn and the quarry from which they were dug, namely Abraham their father. Thus Abraham is there seen as a rock. It would then be a sarcastic statement that they should recognise the folly of their position. Coming from Abraham means no more than coming from the rocks around them, unless their hearts are like Abraham's. Thus being a son of Abraham counts for nothing unless they walk in his ways (compare Galatians 3.6-9, 29; Romans 4).

He may also have been influenced by the similarity between abnayya (stones) and benayya (children) in Aramaic thus saying sarcastically 'from these abnayya God can raise up benayya' (John would be speaking in Aramaic), just as he had previously raised them up from the rock that bore them. And those raised up from the stones would have the same standing before God. It was not physical birth from Abraham that counted, it was spiritual birth. It was in a sense prophetic. For God would in future raise up sons to Abraham from among the Gentiles who became his sons through faith (Galatians 3.29).

So he makes clear that his baptism will be totally ineffective unless their lives and hearts are changed. Those who would come for baptism must have begun (or have determined to begin) fruit-bearing lives or their baptism will mean nothing.

3.9 "And even now the axe also lies at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bring forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

For his baptism is no protection against the axe of God. Rather they must recognise that God's axe is ready to start work, and that He is ready to start cutting at the root of all the trees which do not produce good fruit (compare 13.7-9 and see Isaiah 10.33). And once He has cut them down He will cast them into the fire. Fire is a favourite description of judgment throughout Scripture. Its searing heat destroys until nothing is left.

Alternately the term for 'axe' may indicate a wedge put in place at the base of the tree ready

to be driven in so as to bring the tree crashing down.

‘Hewn down and cast into the fire.’ Compare Jesus’ words in Matthew 7.19. This whole picture is in Jesus’ mind there. He had probably heard this message of John and demonstrates that He had approved of it.

It is noteworthy that this picture of judgment is central in the chiasmus which covers 3.1-20 (see above). On one side of it come John’s stern and vivid warnings, especially vivid to an agricultural people. On the other comes their response as their consciences are awakened.

Before, however, we think of him as a blood and thunder preacher we must remember firstly that the only aspect of his teaching that we have is what the Gospel writers have chosen to give us for their own purposes, and that secondly most of his teaching is paralleled by Jesus Who also says much more severe things. The reason that the writers especially bring out this side of his ministry is because they are seeking to bring home the fact of the emergency of the hour.

John Is Approached By Jews, By The Outcasts And by Soldiers (3.10-14).

3.10 ‘And the crowds asked him, saying, “What then must we do?”

The crowds were moved and asked what they could do about it. John’s reply is straight and practical. He does not just tell them to be more thoughtful unselfish and considerate (which he might have done) he lays on the line examples of how they can be so. (He could have said, You must love your neighbour as yourself’, but instead he applies it practically).

3.11 ‘And he answered and said to them, “He who has two coats, let him impart to him who has none, and he who has food, let him do the same.” ’

They are to show true and practical love for their neighbours. If they possess two coats and someone else does not have one, they are to give them one (compare 6.29; Mark 6.9). If they have food and someone else has none they are to give them some. The emphasis here is on practicality. It is saying that need must be met by supply, not by pious thoughts and words. It is no good saying to people ‘be warmed and filled’. They are to warm and fill them (see James 2.15-16). This will similarly become an example of love in the early church (Acts 2.44-45; 4.32).

3.12-13 ‘And there came also public servants to be baptised, and they said to him, “Teacher, what must we do?” And he said to them, “Extort no more than that which is appointed you.” ’

The tax and custom collectors then came and asked what they should do. These would be looked on by most as unclean and as outcasts, almost worse than Gentiles, but John did not say, ‘Leave your treasonable job’ (which many would have said), he told them rather not to use their office to cheat people. They should collect only what was due and take only the agreed amount for themselves that was reasonable. He recognised that in that world tax-collectors were necessary. Better then to have honest ones than dishonest ones. It also demonstrates his lack of emphasis in ritual uncleanness, which makes it even less likely that his baptism was in any way connected with that idea.

His words were very necessary. The chief tax collectors (Luke 19.2) bought the right to collect taxes over a certain area for an agreed sum, and were then entitled to keep whatever they obtained. The tax-collectors then worked for and were responsible to the chief tax-collector. It was commonplace for such tax collectors to seek to extract far more tax than was due, often using the soldiers who went with them to beat and bully people (and worse) into handing over more than was due. Then they would cream off a surplus for themselves and their helpers. They became very rich (Luke 19.2) and very much hated, especially in Palestine which resented any taxes but their own religious ones.

3.14 ‘And soldiers also asked him, saying, “And we, what must we do?” And he said to them,

“Extort from no man by violence, nor accuse any one wrongfully, and be content with your wages.” ’

We are probably intended to see the ‘soldiers’ as covering all types of soldier in Palestine. The soldiers may have included auxiliaries in the local legions recruited from non-Jews in the area, who were often interested in Judaism with its ancient books and wisdom, and were especially interested in this new prophet who had arisen, or they may have been Jewish soldiers of Herod Antipas. We must also not discount the possibility of Romans soldiers, remembering the interest of the Centurion in 7.1-10 and Cornelius in Judaism and the Gospel, for those are the only soldiers we are ever told of who responded to the word. These soldiers would thus indicate to Luke’s readers the fact that Gentiles were not turned away by John. Whoever they were they asked what they should do, and they were told that they must treat people fairly and honestly, not try to use their position to extort money from them or falsely accuse them, and be content with the wages that they received for their jobs. This does not mean that they were never to ask for a rise. It meant that they must not use their jobs to supplement their wages dishonestly.

It is noteworthy that they were not told to cease being soldiers. It was recognised that in a sinful world soldiers (and in our day police) are necessary. What matters is that they should be soldiers who are genuinely righteous so as always to act with honour, and only to act where really necessary. That world was certainly in need of Christian soldiers, and still is.

One Is Coming Who Will Send the Holy Spirit So As To Produce Good Grain For the Harvest and To Cleanse His Threshing Floor (3.15-18).

3.15 ‘And the people also were in expectation, and all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John, whether haply he were the Christ.’

The words of John stirred the people and aroused their expectations. A recognition that the last days were coming filled their hearts. So they even began to ask themselves whether he might possibly be the promised Messiah (compare John 1.20, 25; Acts 13.25). A note of uncertainty and wishfulness is indicated in the Greek text (mepote with the optative).

3.16-17 ‘John answered, saying to them all, “I indeed baptise you with water, but there comes he who is mightier than I, the latchet of whose sandals I am not worthy to unloose. He will baptise you in the Holy Spirit and in fire, Whose winnowing-fork is in his hand, thoroughly to cleanse his threshing-floor, and to gather the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.”

John denies that he is the Messiah completely and effectively. He points out that he merely baptises with water, an act of symbolism which indicates to God that the person is seeking to be transformed by the Spirit. But that is all that he can do. One, however, is coming Who is far mightier than he is, One Whose sandals he is not fit to unstrap. Unstrapping sandals was seen as the task of a the meanest of slave, even of a non-Jewish slave (the feet were dirty and smelled). It was the one task that the disciple of a Rabbi could not be expected to demean himself to do. Yet, in the case of Jesus, John does not even see himself as worthy to do that.

‘One Who is mightier.’ We have already seen that Jesus was called ‘The Great’ without any limitation (1.32). Now He is ‘the Stronger One’. We can compare this with 11.22 where Jesus as ‘the Stronger than he’ defeats and renders powerless Satan. There is a building up of new titles in order to describe the Coming One. John is a prophet, even another Elijah, but he pales into insignificance beside this ‘Stronger One’. There has never been anyone on earth who compares with Him.

And when He comes He will of Himself ‘drench’ men and women with the Holy Spirit and with fire (baptizo = inundate, overwhelm, drench and is here used as if fire was a liquid). In the text the association of the two is as close as can be, ‘drench in the Holy Spirit and fire’.

The meaning of this is then immediately made clear. He will act as the divider of the people (compare Matthew 7.13-14; 13.49-51; 25.31-46; Isaiah 66.22-24; Daniel 12.1-2). With His winnowing fork, the fork used to toss the coarse grain into the air so as to separate the wheat from the chaff by means of the prevailing wind, He will separate them, gathering the righteous into His barn and destroying the non-righteous in burning and consuming flames. And it will be no good hoping that somehow it will not happen and that there may be a way of escape, for the flames which He will use are unquenchable.

That fire here primarily refers to the fire of judgment rather than fire of purifying would seem to be emphasised by the fact that fire all the way through refers to judgment. Vipers flee from fire. The unfruitful trees are burned in fire. The chaff is burned up with fire, and that in close association with 'baptise in the Holy Spirit and fire'. But for the righteous it could also indicate a fire of purifying. There is something ominous about the fact that the same Holy Spirit can be a Spirit of life and purifying and a Spirit of burning and destruction (Isaiah 4.4). For part of the cleansing results from the removal of the unclean. When the gold is purified in the flames, the dross is removed and destroyed. (In the Old Testament the fires also both refined and destroyed. When His fires came some passed through them and were purified, others were destroyed in the same fires).

So the choice put before them is clear. They must either respond to the Spirit's working in their lives, or face the judgment of God. If they do the one it must and will result in changed and transformed lives, if they do the other their end is destruction. If someone cavil at the mention of the Spirit's work in connection with John's preaching we have only to remember that John preaches as one who is full of the Holy Spirit. Thus any effectiveness he has comes through the Spirit's working.

In the chiasmus these verses about the people, the tax collectors and the soldiers are paralleled with the earlier quotation from Isaiah in verses 4-6. Here then is the way in which the way must be prepared, here is what must be carried into effect. Here is how they may 'see the salvation of God', for that salvation is found in the One Who is coming.

The idea of the Messiah as baptising in the Holy Spirit probably came to John from Isaiah 52.15 where the Exalted One of verse 13 will 'sprinkle the nations', conjoined with Ezekiel 36.25-27 where the sprinkling indicates the work of the Spirit in men's hearts. He may then have connected this with Isaiah 32.15; 44.1-6. If the Spirit of Moses could be passed on to the seventy elders, and Elijah could be involved in arranging the passing on of his Spirit to Elisha (2 Kings 2.10), it is not a large step to the Messiah, Who is the Son of the Most High, passing on His Spirit to all His people, for all His people were going to be prophets (Joel 2.28-29).

John is not so unlike Jesus as is often suggested. It is easy when looking at the teaching of Jesus to only see the teaching that we like, but if we ignore His teaching on judgment we misrepresent Him. For Jesus' teaching on judgment is even more severe than that of John. All the most fearsome of teaching comes on His lips (10.14; 12.4; 13.28; 16.23-24; Matthew 5.21-29; 11.24; 13.49-51; 18.7-9; 25.46; Mark 9.43-48)

3.18 'With many other exhortations therefore preached he good tidings to the people,'

This verse parallels 3.3 in the chiasmus. In 3.3 he preached the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Here he continues in many different ways to give them the same message with ever more powerful illustrations, 'preaching good tidings' (of the forgiveness of sins to those who come back to God) to the people, and the need for obedient response to God and His word. In these words is summarised a ministry that may have gone on for quite some time, even years. And in it he won many disciples, many of whom would become full disciples of Jesus (John 1.19 onwards), while others would await the arrival of the Good News when Jesus had risen from the dead (Acts 19.1-6).

It is important to recognise that John was a proclaimer of Good News, not just of judgment,

for the truth is that he pointed to Christ. He did not just speak of judgment. Indeed the purpose of his ministry was in order to save men and women from the consequences of their sin. His Good News was that by turning to God from their sins they could find forgiveness and begin to live lives that were pleasing to God. It was that God was now acting positively and would shortly act even more positively in the coming of Jesus the Christ. His purpose was that all men might 'see the salvation of God'. The Apostle John tells us that he pointed to Jesus as 'the Lamb of God' Who would take away the sin of the world (John 1.29). His warnings were simply the background to this purpose. His baptism which represented turning to God for the remission of sins demonstrated what was his central aim. It was the transformation of men and women by the Spirit. And that was Good News, and especially Good News about Jesus.

John Is Rejected By Herod (3.19-20).

3.19-20 'But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother's wife, and for all the evil things which Herod had done, added this also to them all, that he shut up John in prison.'

Finally we come to the last verse in the chiasmus which parallels the opening verse (3.1). Here we discover what those great rulers can do. The word was always surrounded on all sides by powerful people who would seek to suppress it. We have had such people listed in 3.1, and now the first of them will begin his evil work, later to be followed by the High Priest and then Pilate. But here Herod, whom John reproved because he openly sinned by taking his brother's wife Herodias, and for many other wrong things that he did, added to his crimes by shutting John up in prison. So does John's ministry come to an end, although not its influence, for his brave disciples will visit him in prison and pass on his message.

Herod's sin was a gross one. He had seduced the wife of his brother and stolen her from him, both forbidden under Jewish law (Leviticus 18.16; 20.21). It was, of course adultery at the same time. Both he and Herodias left previous marriages in order to marry each other. Since Herodias had been married to Herod's half-brother, Herod Philip, and was the granddaughter of Herod's father and daughter of another half-brother of Herod, she was in effect Herod's wife, sister-in-law and niece all at the same time.

But it must have seemed to many in the outside world as though, in the death of John, the wonderful career of a blazing star had come abruptly to an end. It boded ill for the future. It seemed clear that in this Roman world prophets did not last long. It looked as though the world's authorities had won again and that God's work had been effectively extinguished. But what none realised was that he had lit a touch paper that would cause an explosion which would reach to the ends of the world (Acts 1.8). And Luke's purpose in mentioning this here is so that John can now be left behind because the brighter star has arisen. John's work has been accomplished and eventually he will go to his rest. Yet it is also a forewarning of what will happen in the future. The rulers of this world did not welcome the prophet of the Most High, how much less will they welcome His Son. So John's ministry provides a brief summary and warning of what the career of Jesus will also be like from start to finish.

However, there is also another aspect to this. Luke wants any non-Christian reader to see that Christianity revealed itself as subject to those who were in authority over them, and that in general those authorities approved of them. Herod was an exception here for personal reasons. But even he will eventually be glad to see Jesus and will eventually send Him back to Pilate without laying any charge against Him (23.6-12). Meanwhile it has been made clear that Jesus has rejected any temptation to take over world-rulership.

The Holy Spirit Comes on Jesus As The One Who Is The Son of David, The Son of Adam, and the Son of God (3.21-38).

With this incident Luke turns his concentration to Jesus and His ministry. While what now happens does so through John's ministry John is not mentioned, nor is Jesus' actual baptism.

We have another typical Lucan silence. John's ministry is now to be put behind us, and we move on to the Greater than he. In this passage we see the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus with words that reveal Him to be both God's beloved Son and His beloved Servant, and this is followed by a genealogy which connects Him not only with David, but with Abraham, with Adam and with God. He is the Son of David, He is the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, He is the last Adam, He is the Son of God.

This is one of two occasions in Luke when God attests Him from heaven, the other is the Transfiguration (9.35) where the voice says, 'this is My Son, My Chosen, listen to Him'. These occur at crucial points in His life, here at the commencement of His ministry, the Transfiguration at the time when the course of His ministry changes and He sets His face towards Jerusalem knowing that He will die there. We can compare the appearance of Jesus to Paul in Acts. John tells us of another example of a voice from heaven in John 12.28 when Jesus was facing the anguish of what lay ahead.

Many gain the impression that Jesus was baptised privately by John but we view this as unlikely, especially as a baptism in the Jordan by a famous prophet probably meant that privacy was impossible. Part of the significance of John's baptism was an open testimony to participation in the coming pouring out of the Spirit, and if by His baptism Jesus was expressing His oneness with God's believing people it required public recognition. What is more possible is that only He and John saw the likeness to the dove and heard the voice (Matthew 3.16-17; John 1.32-33), or at least appreciated its full significance.

It would be difficult to overemphasise the importance of this moment. It is the moment when the work of salvation for the world first began to unfold as the Holy Spirit descended on the One Who would be responsible for bringing that salvation into fruition, sending Him out on His way to reveal God openly to men, and finally to die on a cross and rise again to His glorious throne.

The passage can be analysed briefly as follows, selecting out the important points which are not obvious from the text itself:

- **a Jesus is the King and Servant Who is anointed by the Holy Spirit for His ministry (21-22).**
- **b The genealogy of Jesus from Joseph to David. Jesus is the Son of David, God's chosen King (23-31b).**
- **b The genealogy of Jesus from Jesse to Abraham. Jesus is the son of Abraham, God's chosen Servant (32-34b).**
- **b The genealogy of Jesus from Terah to Adam. Jesus is the Son of Adam with whom God was not well pleased (34c-38b).**
- **a Jesus is the Son of God (38b).**

In this case it is recognised that the central divisions may appear somewhat arbitrarily determined. We will seek to justify them shortly. Theologically, and in the light of the voice at His baptism, they would appear to be justified. Our purpose in presenting the analysis here is simply in order to help to bring out in seed form what the significance of the genealogy might be.

The Baptism of Jesus (3.21-22).

Apart from here there is nothing in any of the Gospels which explains why Jesus began His work when He did. There must have been something that prompted Him to leave the carpenter's shop and His family in order to engage in His God-given mission. And we have the explanation for it in what happened after His baptism. We have here the moment of Jesus' call to his future work, and the anointing which takes Him into His prophetic ministry (4.18; Acts 10.37-39). It will be noted that John's name now drops out, and even Jesus' baptism is seen as having happened in the past. The concentration here is on His receiving of the Holy Spirit,

and on what the voice from heaven said, of His anointing for His work as not directly connected with His baptism. His baptism was part of the old way, in the coming of the Holy Spirit on Him begins the new way.

3.21-22 ‘Now it came about that when all the people were baptised, Jesus also having been baptised, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon him, and a voice came out of heaven, “You are my beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.” ’

Note that Luke’s concentration is on what happened after the baptism of Jesus, even more so than in Matthew and Mark, rather than on the baptism itself. What is primary in his purpose is that Jesus was praying, and that the heaven opened and the Holy Spirit came down on Him in a bodily form like a dove, and that the voice from heaven then authenticated Him as the Son of God and the Servant of God Who was satisfying to Him in every way (Isaiah 42.1). The time of the Spirit which John’s baptism pointed to had initially arrived.

But he does point out that Jesus was baptised, even if only as a past event. This baptism of Jesus was necessary. It indicated Jesus’ full approval of what John was doing and was seen by Him as the right thing to do. As He says in Matthew 3.15. ‘Thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness (to do what is fully right in every way)’ The emphasis that Luke places on the fact that He was baptised ‘all the people having been baptised’ (in the phrase it is the intention that matters not its strict correctness. It was not forbidding that any more be baptised) confirms that His baptism was unique. He was baptised, not for His own sake, but because He summed up in Himself the whole of believing Israel. He did so because He was here as the supreme representative of Israel. It was right that believing Israel should be baptised and so, once they had been baptised, He was baptised along with them as their representative. He was identifying Himself with them. (But it would certainly have been a great blow to John’s ministry if the news had got about that his godly relative had refused to be baptised by him).

This baptism of Jesus is only a difficulty to those who read John’s baptism incorrectly. Those who see it as signifying a washing from sin necessarily find it difficult to understand (even though through His life He had partaken in the offering of sacrifices, for example at the Passover, and in other ritual activities, again because He was here as the King and Servant representing all Israel). But when we recognise that John’s baptism symbolised rather the working of the Holy Spirit in those who were baptised, and their desire for participation in the coming outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it becomes perfectly understandable. For after His baptism the Holy Spirit did come on Him with a view to Him pouring out the Holy Spirit on men. ‘This is He Who baptises in the Holy Spirit’ (John 1.33).

Yet the baptism of John was undoubtedly generally a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and the purpose of the Holy Spirit’s coming was seen as in order to cleanse, transform and renew. How then did this fit in with Jesus? Firstly we must remember that the significance of the baptism in individual cases depended on the spiritual state of the individual concerned. A certain number of those who came to John (although unquestionably a small minority) were not ‘turning to God’ in the sense in which most were, for they had already turned. The Holy Spirit had already worked in their hearts even before they came. And they were already clean through the means that God had provided, and were walking righteously with God. And yet they more than all would come to be baptised by him in expectation of the coming of the Holy Spirit. They would come because they fully agreed with all that John was doing and wanted to be a part of it, and identify with it, and because they were grateful for God’s saving goodness towards them, and because they wanted to participate in the future promised work of the Spirit (and no doubt had they still been alive those Spirit blessed servants of God, Zacharias and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna would also have come). They were entering into the repentance of believing Israel, but were not at this stage repenting themselves, for they had done that previously.

But even that is not the full explanation, for with Jesus there was more, and Luke gives us his answer at the end of the Gospel when he says of Him, 'He was numbered with the transgressors' (22.37 compare Mark 15.28). Here in His baptism He was indicating that He was taking on Himself the sins of others, He was being 'made sin' (2 Corinthians 5.21), He was identifying Himself with believing Israel who had flocked to be baptised by John, and He was baptised on their behalf and what He then received He received on their behalf so that He might dispense it to them (verse 16). In being baptised He was as much acting as representative for believing Israel (Isaiah 49.3), as He would be in His death (Isaiah 53). He was walking where they walked, and going through what they went through, so that He could act for them in things pertaining to God (see Hebrews 2.17).

Only Luke points out that He was praying. But few would doubt that all the Gospel writers knew that He was praying at the time. It is what people do when genuinely partaking in such a religious ordinance. And would be more so with Jesus than with anyone. But this mention of praying is typical of Luke. He regularly speaks of the need for people to pray (6.28; 10.2; 11.2; 18.1, 10-11; 21.36; 22.40, 46), and of Jesus Himself praying (5.16; 6.12; 9.18, 28 ff; 11.1; 22.41, 44-45; 23.46). The fact that Jesus so constantly prayed at crucial times in His life should bring home to us the importance of prayer, especially at crucial times in our lives, and remind us that prayer is essentially in order to enable us to serve God and bring about His purposes, as the Lord's prayer makes clear. It also brings home that having become Man, He was dependent on His Father. He did all in consultation with His Father. Just as He had previously found it necessary to be in His Father's House (2.49), so now He must be in His Father's presence. All He did He did in association with the Father (John 5.19, 30, 36).

'The heaven was opened.' This is simply a phrase that signifies that the heavenly is about to affect the earthly. It does not necessarily indicate that anything was seen. It was a 'spiritual' opening of heaven. The point being made is that heaven was about to act in earth's affairs and that what resulted came from God and not from men. Note that this happened after His baptism. After His baptism Jesus prayed, and then the Holy Spirit came. It is God's response to His identification of Himself with His people. It is not the direct consequence of His baptism. It is the consequence of what He is.

'And the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon Him.' Luke here makes clear that something happened that could be seen. He wanted it known that what Jesus experienced there was something real and tangible. It was not just something that he had 'read in'. What precisely was seen the eyewitnesses found difficult to define apart from the fact that it was 'like a dove'. This may signify something with a vaguely dove-like shape, or it may simply indicate something visible coming on Him 'like the dove returned to the ark, signalling that God's judgment was over', without the shape being defined (Genesis 8.10-11). Or the one might have been the deliberate representation of the other. For Israel the dove was ever the symbol of the end of the Noahic judgment, and it became a symbol Israel used of themselves.

The dove was also a symbol of gentleness. Whereas the serpent was the symbol of shrewdness and subtlety, the dove was the symbol of not causing harm to anyone (Matthew 10.16). Thus it indicated that the Spirit that had come on Jesus was not with warlike intent, or with the aim of preparing Him for battle as it had the Judges, but that He came in gentleness with the purpose of blessing mankind. It was a vivid portrayal of the fact, as men would learn later, that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah had come as a Lamb arriving to be slain (Revelation 5.5-6). And this was apposite in that the dove not only symbolised gentleness, it also symbolised mourning (Isaiah 59.11; Nahum 2.7).

So we learn here that God's past time of judgment has ended and that, just as with the remnants of the human race when the dove returned to Noah, so the human race will now have a new opportunity of salvation, and that the Messiah Who has come has not come with warlike intentions, but in order to bring peace (Isaiah 6.6-7; 11.1-9; Zechariah 9.9-10) and yet

along with it mourning (Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12.10-13.7). Luke constantly makes clear that along with the spreading of the word comes trouble and tribulation (e.g. Acts 14.22), as already depicted in what happened to John (verse 19).

But why does Luke stress that the Spirit came ‘in bodily form’ like a dove? It is in order to stress the true physical nature of Jesus, and the physical nature of what He was receiving. It puts paid to any suggestion that the physical body of Jesus was possessed by the spirit of the Messiah that was somehow superior to the physical, for what came on Jesus was physical. It was to Jesus as true natural, physical man that the Spirit of God came in similar true, natural and physical fashion. The point is being made that what Jesus was endowed with was not ‘other earthly’ and strange to human flesh, even though it came from above, but was a gift that conformed with His humanity. Through God’s working the Spirit Who inspired Him did so in His humanity. As through the coming of the Spirit at birth God was made man, so in His coming at His baptism God was made prophetically inspired physical man.

But while noting this we must recognise that the significance of what happened gained its importance from the fact of what had happened. The mighty Holy Spirit of God had anointed Jesus for His task as Messiah, Servant and Prophet to Israel and the world (Acts 4.26-27; 10.38). He was revealed as the Branch from the roots of Jesse, the Spirit anointed king (Isaiah 11.1-3; Acts 4.26-27), the Spirit anointed Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42.1; Acts 4.27), and, as He Himself will later point out, as the Spirit anointed Prophet (4.18; Acts 10.38).

‘And a voice came out of heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved, in You I am well pleased.” ’ And all this was attested by the words that came from heaven. ‘You are my Son’ comes from Psalm 2.7 where the words were addressed to the future worldwide king who could ask Him for dominion over the world (2.8), (was that what Jesus was praying for, dominion over men’s hearts?), who was the anointed of God (Psalm 2.2), here also described as ‘the Beloved’ in order to stress His uniqueness. The point is being made that He is ‘the Only Son’, the Beloved One (see 20.13 where precisely the same phrase is used). ‘The beloved, in You I am well pleased’ reflects Isaiah 42.1, and especially as quoted in Matthew 12.18, referring to the coming servant of YHWH. But we must recognise that Matthew may well have varied the saying, replacing ‘chosen’ by ‘beloved, in order to relate it to what this voice said at His baptism.

There are no firm grounds, however, for seeing this either as an adoption, a begetting or a crowning. It is rather a confirmation from God of Who and What He is. His declaration that Jesus is His beloved Son ‘with Whom He is well pleased’ demonstrates that He is already His Son in every way, as had been revealed at His birth and this is then confirmed by the following genealogy (verse 38). This anointing is in fact actually revealed in 4.18 (and Acts 10.38) as being for service as the great Prophet of the last days promised by Isaiah 61.1-2. We have no reason to read into it anything else, unless it ties in with that.

But in noting the connections with Scripture we must not lose the wonder of the words. Here was the One on Whom God looked as His only beloved Son, and as He declares His love for Him, He also declares how satisfactorily He has up to this point fulfilled His task, for His Father can say of Him, ‘in You I am well pleased’. Up to this point nothing has marred Him in the living of His perfect life according to the will of God (compare Hebrews 10.5-10), which will make Him fit to complete His task to be the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29). This comment sufficiently emphasises that the words spoken are looking back to His *already successful career as beloved Son and Servant*.

Note On The Alternative Reading, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten you’.

The only important manuscript in which this reading is found is D and as is well known the readings in D can be somewhat erratic. It is also found in a number of old Latin versions, in Irenaeus, and Justin (both of whom tend towards D) and Origen. It hardly seems necessary to

argue against this reading as it is so poorly attested, and that in so limited a part of the world. But unfortunately there are always some who become concerned about it, which is why we mention it here. It probably arose because a learned but tired scribe, on writing 'You are my son' continued with the well known words of the Psalm without paying too much heed to the text he was copying, and did not realise what he had done, or because while copying he was carried away by his own thoughts. Alternately he may have believed in an adoptionist Christology (that Jesus was adopted as the Messiah at His baptism by the spirit of the Messiah taking on his body) and simply have altered the text.

The reason that some have tried to find arguments to sustain it is mainly due (but not only so, it is also used to boast certain theories which have not found general acceptance) to an attempt to favour an adoptionist Christology, by seeing Jesus as adopted as the Messiah at His baptism. But in view of the fact that Luke uses it of Jesus after His resurrection in Acts 13.33 as justifying His resurrection, it is clear that he did not see it as being adoptionist. There the 'begetting' by God indicates His being acted on within His purposes, and thereby acknowledged as his Son.

Further, in view of the fact that Luke probably had Mark's text before him it seems extremely unlikely that he would have chosen an alternative text to Mark, especially in view of his usage of it in Acts 13.33. So unless some remarkable evidence turns up this poorly attested alternative reading should be seen as telling us more about the scribe than the Greek text.

End of note.

Jesus is The Son of David (the Messiah), the Son of Abraham (the Servant), the Son of Adam (truly Man), the Son of God (revealing the image and likeness of God) (3.23-38).

There now follows a genealogy of Jesus, making important connections. Our first concentration here must be on its significance for Luke. We can consider its 'problems' later. Some have expressed surprise that the genealogy appears here, but in fact it fits perfectly into its setting. Jesus has just been anointed as the Prophet of God. He has been declared to be both Messiah and Servant. So the natural question for the reader is, 'Who was He?' By this genealogy Luke links Jesus to the house of David, to being the seed of Abraham, to being descended from Adam, and to being in the image and likeness of God.

There is little doubt about the genealogy of Jesus being readily available. The Jews were very concerned to trace their ancestry, and prove the purity of their descent, of which they were very proud. Those who would be active in the priesthood had to prove their ancestral right to do so, while any seeker after civil office would be required to prove true descent. The house of David would certainly come not a whit behind in maintaining evidence of their own privileged position. They may not have been actually ruling, but the family would maintain its pride in their right to do so, and ensure and prize the maintenance of the records that proved it. We have in fact evidence of others who also sought to prove Davidic descent by this means. Thus we should not be surprised to find that such information was available from different viewpoints.

3.23a 'And Jesus himself, when he began to teach, was about thirty years of age,'

Note here how the genealogy is connected with the commencement of His teaching ministry. His qualifications for His teaching ministry are being described. He was 'about' thirty years of age. Luke has a tendency to attach 'about' to time notices (1.56; 2.37; 8.42; 9.28; 22.59, 23.44; Acts 5.7; 10.3; 12.1; 13.18; 19.34). This shows a commendable desire for accuracy. It is probably no coincidence that thirty years of age was when Levites entered their full ministry (Numbers 4.47). Jesus was seen as having reached the recognised age of religious maturity, as being in full readiness, and as strong enough physically and mentally for the task that was before Him.

It is very noteworthy that neither He nor His Father had seen His period of carpentry and looking after His family as unimportant. It had been preparing Him for His destiny. It was only in His Father's appointed time that His call came. But the important thing was that He had used His time prior to His call wisely in order to prepare for it. He had learned much of patience and careful treatment of delicate material at His carpenter's bench, and in dealing with His customers. It would be extremely useful to Him in His ministry. None would be able to accuse Him of not understanding what the daily grind, or the problems of family life, were like. We too must learn to be patient, while at the same time being ever responsive to the will of God. While we must certainly 'make the most of the time', we must also remember that God is not in a hurry. It is a matter of holding the two in balance, the one lest we become lazy, the other lest we become discouraged.

If taken strictly this age would confirm His birth as being in 3-1 BC. 3 BC would tie His birth in with the 'enrolment' on Augustus' twenty fifth anniversary of his reign. But it causes a problem for the dating of Herod's death. However, in view of Luke's 'about', and the probable intention of linking His age with the commencement of Levite service, the exact age cannot be stressed, and we would be unwise to use it for arguing about any dates within a few years.

The genealogy demonstrates that Jesus is descended from David, but also that He is descended from Abraham and Adam, He is of royal blood of the house of David, He is of the seed of Abraham, He is a true son of Adam. Thus He is in the royal line, the line of promise, and the line of the human race. The carrying back of His genealogy to Adam may justly be seen as connecting Him with the whole of mankind, and therefore with Gentile as well as Jew. All mankind is seen as summed up in Him.

For purposes which will become apparent we will divide the genealogy into sevens (including Jesus' name in the first seven).

- **3.23b-24a 'Being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai.'**
- **3.24b-26a 'The son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath.'**
- **3.26b-27a 'The son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel.'**
- **3.27b-28a 'The son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er.'**
- **3.28b-30a 'The son of Jesus, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Symeon, the son of Judas.'**
- **3.30b -31a 'The son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan.'**
- **3.31b-33a 'The son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab.'**
- **3.33b-34a 'The son of Admin, son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac.'**
- **3.34b-35a 'The son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber.'**
- **3.35b-37a 'The son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah.'**
- **3.37b-38a 'The son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam.'**
- **3.38b 'The son of God.'**

It must be agreed that the result of dividing into sevens is remarkable. Jesus heads the list and the first line, David heads the seventh line (the divinely chosen king), Abraham heads the

ninth line (the one who received the promises, three times three, total completeness), and God, Who clearly stands alone, the twelfth line (as the God of the twelve tribes). We might also note that Enoch, 'the seventh from Adam' (Jude 1.14), heads the eleventh line. Apart from these comes Adam at the end of the list as the first man and as the son of God. From Jesus to Adam there are seventy seven names (the number of divine perfection intensified, compare Genesis 4.24).

(If Admin (or any other name) is omitted (with D, 28) then Jesus heads the list, and David heads the seventh line of the list. Zerubbabel, Abraham, and Enoch ('the seventh from Adam'), all of whom were distinguished in the service of God, each close a group of sevens. There are seventy seven names in the list (divine perfection intensified), and Jesus begins the list and God ends it. The basic idea is the same. If Irenaeus seventy two names were taken we would have the fact that Jesus and God were separated by seventy names, but his list probably resulted from wrong omissions).

It must, however, be stressed that what follows does not mainly depend on the division into sevens, it arises from the genealogy as a whole. The sevens simply give it more emphasis.

By this genealogy the hand of God behind history is declared in a number of ways, for by the 'divine pattern' lying behind the genealogy the uniqueness of Jesus as the 'seventy seventh' from Adam is made clear, His descent from David and Abraham, and from Enoch (known as 'the seventh from Adam') as well as Adam, is stressed, and He is linked directly with God, with Him heading the first and God heading the last line in the table, and with 'Of God' standing alone in glorious splendour. In view of the words spoken from heaven at Jesus' reception of the Spirit, declaring Him to be both Davidic King and Servant, the connection with David and Abraham is significant. Abraham was the prime example of the Servant of the Lord, for which see Genesis 26.24, and his connection with the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 41.8 as God's friend.

The connection with Adam is especially significant as is evidenced in that the genealogy goes back to him. Yet Luke could have stopped there, so that we have to take into account a significance for 'of God' which makes it more than just a list of descent. A number of connected lessons come from this connection.

- 1). The connection with Adam stresses Jesus' perfect humanity. He is the seventy seventh from Adam. If Enoch the seventh from Adam walked with God and was not because God took him, what can be said of the seventy seventh from Adam?
- 2). It may be that the intention is also to depict Him as 'the last Adam', the fulfilment of what Adam should have been, and as a contrast with the one with whom God was not well pleased. Jesus was his replacement, the first man born of Adam of whom it could be said 'in Whom I am well pleased', and Who will pass that on to others. 'The first Adam became a living being, the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit' --- the first man was from the earth, a man of dust, the second man is from Heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of Heaven, so are those who are of Heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of Heaven' (1 Corinthians 15.45-49).
- 3). The genealogy opens with '(Jesus) being as was supposed the son of Joseph', the implication being that in fact He was not, He was the true Son of God (1.35), while it closes with 'Adam, the (adopted) son of God'. In between comes the whole of history. Thus a new period in history is seen as beginning, receiving its life from a new source. The first 'son of God' failed. Thus the implication is that a new Son of God has had to enter the world to accomplish what the first one failed to do, the establishment of the everlasting Kingly Rule of God.
- 4). Finally the term 'Of God' standing uniquely alone would confirm the words of the angel to Mary that Jesus will be the Son of God. Jesus was 'of God'. The fact that this

immediately precedes the temptation story where the idea of the Son of God is prominent suggests that 'son of God' here is intended to have more significance than just as a description of Adam.

It will be noted that Adam being seen as the son of God as the last item, parallels Jesus being seen as the son of Joseph as the first item. In both cases it is a sonship not by natural birth but by adoption, In the first case Adam is declared to be 'Of God', and then in the second case there is a reverse situation where it is the one adopted Who is, as every reader knows, the Son of God announced by the angel (1.35). Luke says, of Jesus' relationship to Joseph 'being as was supposed the son of' making clear that the relationship is not a natural one. No one doubted that the relationship between Adam and God was not a natural one. Thus Jesus and God are seen as unique among all in the genealogy, the One as the Son with an adopted father, but really being the Son of God, and the Father as having an 'adopted son', but with Jesus being His real Son. This links them together in their uniqueness. It brings out too the awfulness of sin. The one who was adopted by the Father sinned against Him. The One Who was adopted by an earthly father was without sin towards him.

Some have argued that the Greek indicates that Jesus is directly and physically connected with Heli (through Mary), with being 'of Heli' indicated by the definite article, while Joseph is simply brought in because he was Jesus' 'supposed' father, as depicted by his not having the definite article, the only name in the list apart from Jesus not to have it.

How the reader sees the genealogy will determine how he sees the description 'Of God' (in the Greek 'son' is understood). If he sees the genealogy as leading down to Adam as the prototype of Jesus, then he will see Jesus as the perfect Man, 'the second Man', the last Adam, fully human in the same way as Adam, partaking as he did in the image and likeness of God before the Fall. If he sees it as leading down to 'Of God' he will interpret it in the light of what has gone before as a reminder that Jesus is the Son of God. Some may see both.

That we may be justified in seeing this arrangement of 'sevens' as in Luke's mind is clearly brought out by Matthew who deliberately and openly (Matthew 1.17) contrives to divide his genealogy of Jesus into groups of fourteen (whether seven times two or according to the gematra of David). Luke (or his source) may therefore have done something similar with sevens. Such use of numbers was commonplace in the 1st century AD, and would be spotted by the discerning reader, who would be looking for it.

Note On The Differing Genealogies Of Matthew And Luke.

It is often asked why there should be two genealogies of Jesus. A number of possibilities can be considered:

- 1) That we have here the genealogy of Joseph in Matthew and that of Mary in Luke, in the latter of which, assuming Mary to be an only child, her husband takes her place in the line of descent in order that he might inherit with her (see Numbers 36.1-12), thus making Joseph the son of Heli by marriage, and preserving the name. If Luke wanted to give the genealogy through Mary it can be argued that this would be the 'respectable' way of doing it. It can be claimed that this approach was also necessary in view of the uniqueness of the situation. Normally the wife's line might not be seen as important, but in this exceptional case it would be seen as all important if a direct line to Adam were to be proved in order to demonstrate His humanity.

Against this view is the fact that elsewhere in Luke there is no direct indication of the Davidic descent of Mary, and this might be seen as underlined by the fact that in 1.27 we have the stress that it is 'descent' through Joseph that is important. However it can be noted in reply that in 1.69 Zacharias speaks of Mary's baby as being from the house of David even when he could not be sure that Joseph would go through with the marriage, which suggests that he did see the line of descent as being through Mary.

Furthermore chapter 1 does stress that Jesus is to be born of Mary and not through Joseph, and we may therefore argue that Luke would therefore expect that his readers would see the genealogy accordingly. Seen as further confirming this might be the fact that the Jews never challenged Jesus' Davidic descent even when they claimed that He was Mary's illegitimate son, which suggests that they too knew of the Davidic descent of Mary. We therefore have to choose between the alternatives

It should be noted in this regard that it could only be a genealogy through Mary that could demonstrate His humanity, for only she was the living link.

- 2) That Joseph was begotten by the half-brother of a brother who died, both having different fathers, who raised up seed to his brother's wife according to the custom of levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25.5-10). Joseph would then effectively be the son of both half-brothers, and have two grandfathers, one by natural birth, the other by custom. This would be by using the custom of levirate marriage whereby a brother was responsible to raise up seed for his deceased brother. This is perfectly possible. Two such genealogies could have been maintained and have been correct and socially acceptable.
- 3) That the genealogy in Matthew is, from David onwards, the line of legal descent showing the heirs to the throne. In that case when one in the line died sonless the line would then pass to the nearest male heir. This could have resulted in Joseph, who was descended from David through Nathan, having become heir to the throne by default as the nearest eligible male relative, or because his father had been the nearest eligible male relative in such a situation. Thus he would then for that purpose also trace his line of descent back to Solomon, as well as to Nathan. In view of the importance of the fact that Jesus was seen as the heir of David we would expect to find such a genealogy, which would be especially important to the Jews for whom Matthew was initially writing. This would find some support in the fact that Matthew emphasises the kingship of Jesus, with his genealogy pointedly going back to David through Solomon. It then goes back to Abraham because he has Jewish readers in mind.

Luke on the other hand may have wanted to portray the actual line by birth, because he was concerned with the natural descent from Adam in order to stress Jesus' true humanity. His view was that the Gentile Christians would be more interested in a table of actual descent, rather than in a table of legal descent, as long as it demonstrated that Jesus was a son of David.

Supporting the difference between the two lines would be the fact that Isaiah had distinctly stated that the child who was to inherit the throne of David was not to come from the same line as Ahaz, which was why the miraculous birth in Isaiah 7.14 was mentioned as necessary in the first place. This would discount him as coming through Solomon and Ahaz by natural birth. Further to this is the word of the Lord declaring that no direct offspring of Jeconiah will sit on the throne of David and rule again in Judah (Jeremiah 22.30).

As we have no way of finally proving any one of these solutions we must leave each person to decide for themselves which they feel to be the most likely.

End of note.