

Episode: Luke Series No. 3

Narrator: John the Baptist

Primary Scriptures: Luke 3

Story Summary: Life of John the Baptist

Location: Kingdom of Judea

Time: Circa 5 BC – 30 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Luke 3:3, 3:8, 3:16, 3:21-22

John often baptized people in the Jordan River, at least twenty-five miles from Jerusalem. The road from Jerusalem was dangerous, as Jesus illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan, so John and his message must have been powerful forces to entice people to come to him from Jerusalem and surrounding areas. Luke says John exhorted the people and that his message was good news.

The gospel writers took special care to portray John to be like the Old Testament prophets in both his look and in his message. One reason for that: the prophet Malachi prophesied that Elijah would return before the Day of the Lord.¹ The gospel writers wanted their readers to associate John the Baptist with that prophecy.

Though he had a sizable following, John took great care not to be confused with the Messiah, always showing himself as the one preparing the way for someone greater.

Although John was quite clear about his criticisms, he was also quite clear about the answers of how to change. His answers were not only clear, but quite practical. That would have endeared him to the general populace that were not able to meet the requirements of their religious leaders.

John was not worried about currying favor with the ruling elite—when Herod Antipas married his brother's former wife, John criticized him publicly. This eventually resulted in John's death.

With John's immense popularity, it would have been easy for him to resent the rising influence and popularity of Jesus. Instead, John supported Jesus in every way possible, including sending some of his own disciples to follow Jesus. Perhaps John portrayed the ultimate humility when he said about Jesus, "He must become more; I must become less."

The baptism of Jesus by John was the beginning of the end for John. Jesus' ministry took off like a rocket, while John's disciples left him for Jesus. John knew that was fine because his ministry was coming to an end in the very near future.

¹ Malachi 4:5

Discussion Questions:

1. Why would Matthew have portrayed John as wearing rough clothes and living in the wilderness?
 2. John the Baptist is often portrayed as a raving preacher condemning everyone to eternal death. Does that image really fit with John's message and his popularity?
 3. What was John's mission?
 4. Which Herod put John the Baptist in jail and executed him?
 5. Besides John, who else did Herod Antipas threaten?
 6. Some of John's disciples abandoned him. Who did they go follow instead? How did John take that news?
-
1. To invoke the image that John was like the Old Testament prophets.
 3. To prepare the hearts of the people to accept Jesus and his teachings.
 4. Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great.
 5. Much of Jesus' ministry was in Galilee, an area ruled by Herod Antipas. It is likely Antipas tracked Jesus and was paranoid about him.
 6. Jesus. He encouraged it to happen.

Application Questions

1. How can you present the Gospel in such a way that the message is attractive to people?
2. When you confront fellow Christians about what they are doing wrong, do you present possible answers to them about how they can change?
3. Are you willing to confront people who are sinning? If so, how do you confront people in a Christian manner? And how do you guard yourself from sin so that you can retain authority in your confrontations?

Application Questions for Teens

1. John knew that he was not to be the most popular leader to his disciples and listeners, but that he was preparing the way for his disciples and listeners to accept and follow Jesus. Are you prepared to accept the fact that you don't have to be the most popular person among your peers, and that you should instead be a light to others and lead them to Christ?
2. Do you listen to people better when they present their request in a pleasant manner or in an angry manner?
3. At the end of Luke 3, Luke presents some of Jesus' genealogy. Do you know your genealogy and, if so, does that knowledge affect how you think of yourself? Does that limit you or encourage you?