

The Beginning of John the Baptist's Ministry

Luke 3:1-9

- A. People in power at the time (3:1-2)
- B. John's message fulfilled prophecy (3:3-6).
- C. Strong words for those seeking baptism (3:7-9)

A. People in power at time (3:1-2)

1. (vs. 1) “Now” we begin “in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar.” Tiberius was the “Roman emperor (if dated from the death of Augustus, he ruled fr. August 19, 14 AD to March 16, 37 AD.” (BDAG). Generally, “Caesar” is the family name and “emperor” is ruler of an empire. Of course, both terms often apply to the same person. He was the third of twelve Caesars, preceded by Julius and Augustus whose decree brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem to be registered as recorded in Lk. 2:1-5.

Tiberius
Claudius
Caesar
Augustus,
simply called
Tiberius (14-37
A.D.)



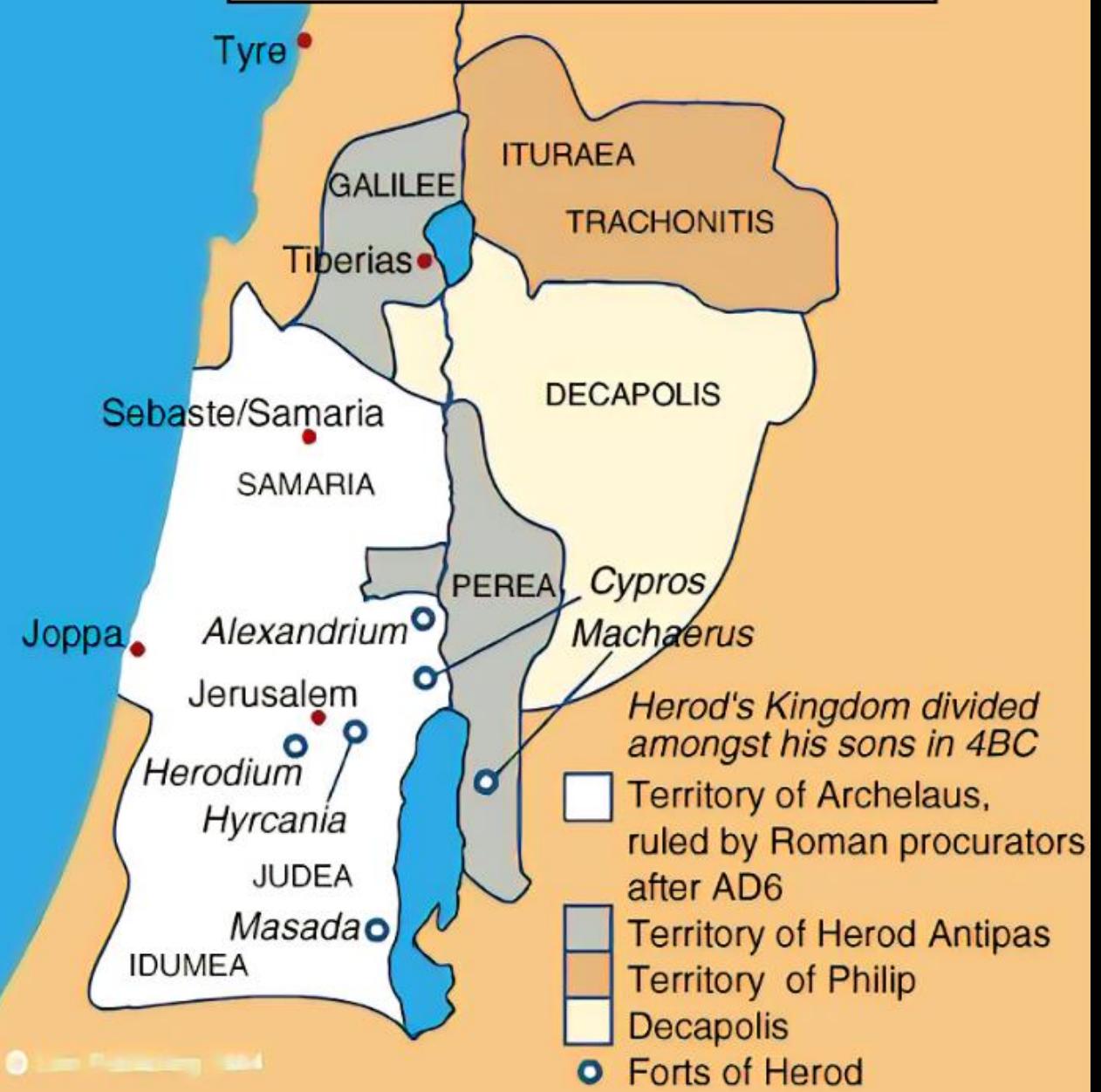
1. (cont.)

- At the same time that “Tiberius” was in power, “Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea,” the same person who “played the decisive role in Jesus’ trial and gave the order for his crucifixion. Mt 27:2ff; Mk 15:1ff; Lk 3:1; 13:1 (this is the only place in our lit. where a detail is given fr. his life outside the Passion Narrative.)” (BDAG) See the exchange between Pilate and Jesus in **Mt. 27:11-26**.
- Further, “Herod was tetrarch of Galilee,” this is Herod “Antipas, the son of Herod the Great (Mt.

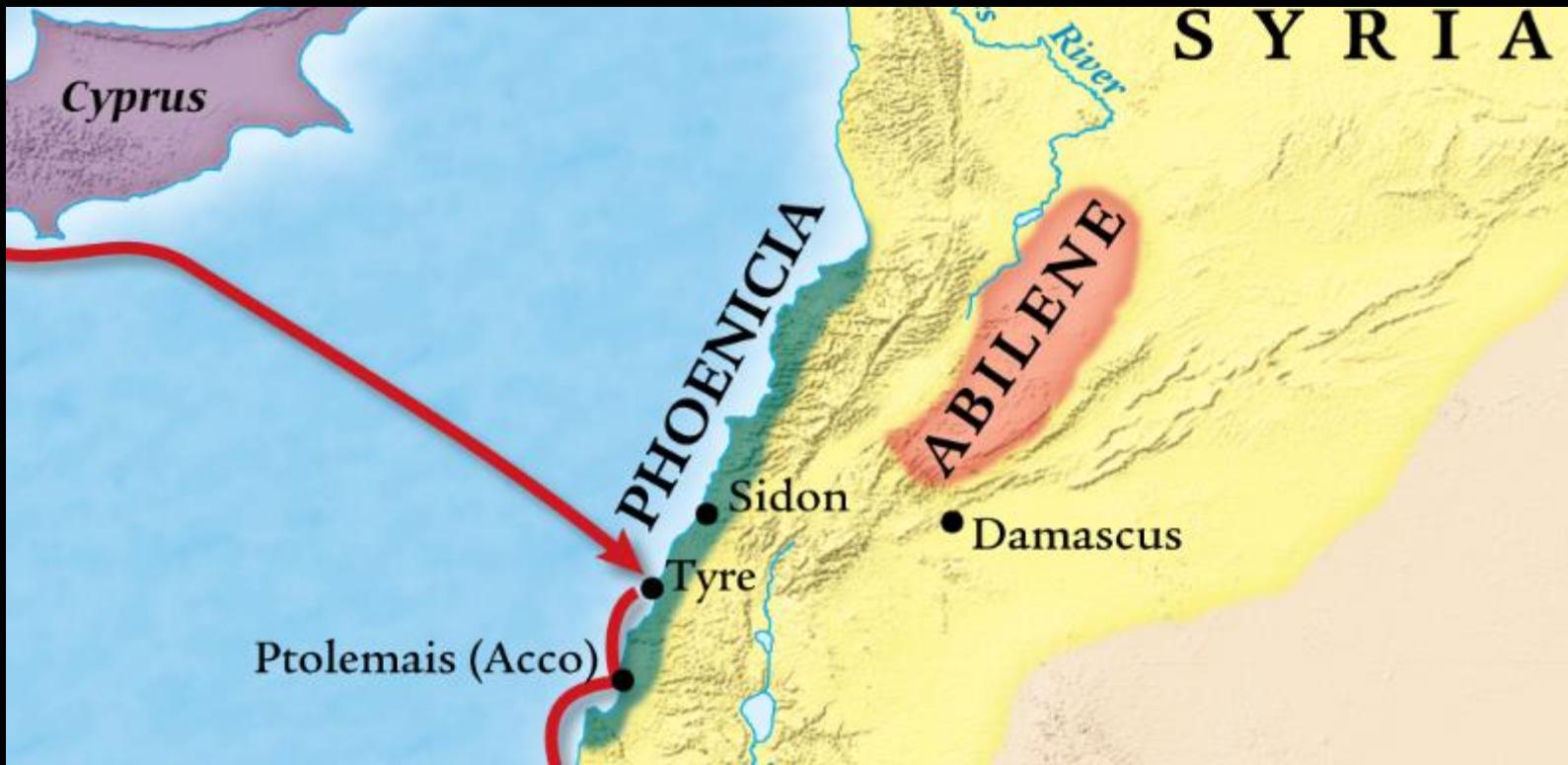
1. (cont.)

- 2:1) ruled over **Galilee** (tetrarch = ruler of one-quarter of a given territory) (Ryrie).
- Further “and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of **Ituraea** and **Trachonitis**” (cf. Map). This Philip was “Another son of Herod the Great, he ruled over **Ituraea**, NE of Galilee and E of Mount Hermon. Abilene, where “Lysanias was tetrarch” was “a small kingdom on the E slope of the Lebanon mountains, NE (better, NW) of Damascus” (cf. Ryrie).

Herod the Great's Kingdom



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2. (vs. 2) All of this was “in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.” Annas (AD 6–15) and his son-in-law Caiaphas (AD 18–36) served as high priests during this time. Annas served by influence as the originator this priestly dynasty, but Caiaphas held the official position. “Caiaphas...played an important role in the condemnation of Jesus.” Both of them emerge as troublemakers in the early church (Ac. 4:6).

➤ Luke mentioned all of these key historical figures to get to this statement: “the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.”

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➤ Where had John the Baptist been since we heard about him last, some 30 years earlier? Luke said, “And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel” (Lk. 1:80). That is a lot of prep time, but now John was ready for his ministry. “John was ordained to be a Nazarite from his birth. Lk. 1:15” (SBD Nm. 6:1-21). “Dwelling by himself in the wild and thinly-peopled region westward of the Dead Sea, he prepared himself for the wonderful office to which he had

➤ (cont.) been divinely called. His dress was that of the old prophets—a garment woven of camel's hair, 2 Kings 1:8, attached to the body by a leathern girdle. His food was such as the desert afforded—locusts, Lev. 11:22, and wild honey. Ps. 81:16. And now the long-secluded hermit came forth to the discharge of his office. His supernatural birth, his life, and the general expectation that some great one was about to appear, were sufficient to attract to him a great multitude from every quarter' **Mt. 3:5-6."** (SBD) His unusual appearance and mannerisms brought cruel

➤ (cont.) criticisms. In Mt. 11:18, Jesus said, “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’” At the same, in the next verse (19), He added, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

Both were approved of God and did His will.

B. John's message fulfilled prophecy (3:3-6).

1. (vs. 3) “And he came into all the district around the Jordan” (river) that is. What was his message? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Ac. 16:31)? It was not. Instead, he was “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” John was living in the dispensation of the Mosaic Law. He was sent to Israel, just as Jesus was, Who said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt. 15:24). He later broadened that purpose – “I have other

1. (cont.) which are not of this fold” (Jn. 10:16). John apparently did not live long enough to get involved in that ministry, having been imprisoned (Lk. 3:20) and then dying a martyr’s death (Mk. 6:27-28). Jesus came to the nation, but they rejected Him (Jn. 1:11). But certain individuals did respond (vs. 12). John’s appeal was likewise to the nation. He was “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Matthew recorded his message in this way: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 3:2) exactly as Jesus did, “Repent, for the kingdom of

1. (cont.) heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:14-15). In both cases, Jesus and John the Baptist wanted the people to behave properly under the Law, so that the Davidic kingdom could come on earth (2Sam. 7:8ff; Lk. 1:32). That meant that where there were infractions and shortcomings; they needed to turn from those things – repent! So, forgiveness in Lk. 3 is not forensic or positional, that is, it is not about eternal destiny, but rather about enjoying fellowship with God on earth and avoiding judgment. In the OT, God granted this type of fellowship with Israel apart

1. (cont.) the question of whether or not they had eternal life. See and read **2Ch. 7:8-22**. Also confer the Palestinian Covenant (Dt. 29:1-29 – **30:1-10**).
 - The ministry of John the Baptist seemed to meet with a good response as we saw before (Mt. 3:5-6; cf. Mk. 1:5).
 - Paul explained John's ministry in Ac. 19:4 like this: “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” Well, did they? It does not appear so (Mt. 27:23) *failing to believe.*

2. (vv. 4-5) John's ministry was predicted in Is., "as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet." This is what Isaiah said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT. 'EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROADS SMOOTH.'" This describes a construction project, but it is a figure for spiritual renovation in preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

3. (vs. 6) After the work of the forerunner is complete, Isaiah said, “AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.” What salvation? *The focus is on the Millennium here*, but both Jews and Gentiles will be in it. Earlier, when Simeon saw “the Lord’s Christ” (Lk. 2:26b), he had indeed seen His “salvation” (2:30) or the means of individual spiritual salvation from sin *and corporate salvation of the nation of Israel as in the expression “thus all Israel will be saved” (Rm. 11:26a).*

A. Strong words for those seeking baptism (3:7-9)

1. (vs. 7) John the Baptist was rather blunt and to the point: “So he *began* saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” In Mt. 3:7, this was directed toward the religious leaders. This might hark back to the snake of the garden of Eden who was not truthful and was a deceiver. Maybe John was not fully confident that these people were serious. In fact, Lk. 7:30 says, ‘But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose

1. (cont.) for themselves, not having been baptized by John.”
2. (vs. 8) Act in accordance with what you profess, and don’t put stock in your heritage or ancestry: “Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves.” If you say you’re turning from sin, do it. Your lineage means nothing in this regard.
3. (vs. 9) The talk of repentance without turning from sin, lines up Israel for temporal judgment which did happen with Titus the Roman in AD 70.