

# **The People Respond to John the Baptist's Ministry**

**Luke 3:10-22**

- A. Judgment is imminent (3:9).
- B. The crowds asked, "Then what shall we do?" (3:10-14).
- C. The people wondered whether John was the Christ (3:15-22).

A. Judgment is imminent (3:9).

1. (vs. 9) In vs. 8, apparently the Jews had a habit of claiming some privileged position before God because they were descended from Abraham. But *by itself* that was of very little value (cf. Rm. 3:1-2). John preached a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk. 3:3b). Similarly, Paul said that “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus” (Ac. 19:4a). What was this repentance? It certainly was not merely a change of

1. (cont.) mind, a definition of repentance that comes as a result of the root word fallacy based on the Greek word, metanoia (μετάνοια) literally, “change mind.” No, repentance involved turning from sin. Many Jews were going out to be baptized by John and because it was a baptism of repentance (Lk. 3:3), then the very act of undergoing baptism was a declaration by the candidate for baptism that he was turning from sin in anticipation of the coming of Messiah and His kingdom. John apparently was not very confident that these people were serious, and so he was anticipating

1. (cont.) judgment. Thus, this verse: “Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” The judgment in view here is temporal, that is, on earth in time. It is not eternal judgment, even with the reference of a tree being “cut down and thrown into the fire.” Ryrie says, “Just as unproductive trees are cut down, so the unfruitful nation of Israel could expect judgment.” “The context indicates which meaning the biblical author has in mind. Here, the fiery judgment again looks forward

1. (cont.) to the Jewish War of AD 66–70.” Yes, and it happened in AD 70 when Titus the Roman obliterated Jerusalem and scattered the Jews all over the world. It is indeed the same judgment that Jesus had in mind in Lk. 13:1-5, where repentance has the same meaning as it has here, which see. There can be no earthly kingdom until Israel repents of her sins and recognizes Jesus as her Messiah. Even when Israel acknowledges her Messiah, she will need to repent for the kingdom to come. See Zech. 12:10; Rv. 1:7. That is likely what Peter had in mind in Ac. 2:36 ff.

1. (cont.) The Jews who heard Peter's sermon were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and were thereby saved (cf. 1Jn. 5:1). Those newly saved asked, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Ac. 2:37b) Peter responded, "Repent," that is, turn away from this wicked crucifixion that you did, "and each of you be baptized," do not be embarrassed, but go public with your faith, openly identifying with Christ, being baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins," again not forensic, but within the family of God, "and you will receive the

1. (cont.) gift of the Holy Spirit.” In keeping with this concept, remember that Peter was still holding out hope that the kingdom could come very soon (Ac. 3:19-26). In the book of Acts a delay between salvation and receiving the holy Spirit was not unusual (Ac. 8:14-17; 19:6). The fact that the Holy Spirit came *at all* was another thing that John the Baptist prophesied (Lk. 3:16), further validating his ministry. Incidentally, there is no longer an interlude of time between salvation and receiving the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 12:13).

B. The crowds asked, “Then what shall we do?” (3:10-14).

1. (vs. 10) Having been somewhat alarmed by the allusion to judgment in vs. 9, the people felt compelled to do something so that it would not come or at least be postponed. Toward this end, is there some action that we can take? This sounds very much like Peter’s audience in Ac. 2:37: “Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” The two contexts seem closely related.

2. (vs. 11) The way the statement is phrased, it appears to represent a regular pattern of interaction: “And he would answer and say to them.” This would be that normal kind of interaction between the peripatetic teacher and student of the day, originally referred to Aristotle, but then it fits also the Rabbis in the NT and specifically, John the Baptist (Jn. 1:38).

➤ It was easy to lay claim to repentance, but these claims needed to be validated by action: “bear fruits in keeping with repentance” (Lk. 3:8a). Here are two ways that could be done: “The man who has two

➤ Tunics (a garment worn next to the skin, and by both sexes) is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.” A repentant person with a surplus is to share with the needy person who simply cannot do it alone.

3. (vs. 12) “And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’” Most Jews would not have held out any hope for tax collectors. “The higher (tax) officials were usu. foreigners, but their underlings were, as a rule, taken fr. the native population. The prevailing system of tax collection afforded a collector many opportunities to exercise greed and unfairness. Hence tax collectors were particularly hated and despised as a class.” Jesus was criticized for hanging out with these people (Lk. 7:24). “A strict Israelite was further

3. (cont.) offended by the fact that tax-collectors had to maintain continual contact with non-Israelites in the course of their work; this rendered an Israelite tax-collector ceremonially unclean.” One of the disciples was a former tax collector, namely, Matthew (Mt. 10:3).
4. (vs. 13) Apparently, Jesus regarded their work as honest employment if done properly. That meant, “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.” Repenting in this regard would mean no longer exercising greed and unfairness.

5. (vs. 14) This was about another sore spot in Jewish society: “Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, ‘And what about us, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.’” It is not known who these soldiers were, but clearly, they seemed to want to do what was right. They were “probably were not Romans but Jews whom Herod Antipas employed (cf. Josephus, Antiquities 18.5.1 [18.113]) perhaps to assist tax collectors in their duties. Soldiers were also not

5. (cont.) required to resign but to avoid the sins of their profession, i.e., violent intimidation ('extort'), robbing by false accusation, and dissatisfaction with 'wages' (or perhaps 'rations')."

C. The people wondered whether John was the Christ (3:15-22).

1. (vs. 15) I suppose it is not a surprise that after watching John the Baptist preach to enormous crowds and baptize thousands that the people would develop a sense of expectation and wonder “in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ.” Not to jump ahead at this point, but they should have known that he was not the Christ bec. he performed no sign (Jn. 10:41). Jesus confirmed His Messiahship to John in prison by doing signs (Mt.11:1-6).

2. (vs. 16) John made it clear that he made no claim to be the Messiah and that in fact he was not the Messiah (Jn. 1:19-20; 3:28). Here he shows that he is not the Messiah by presenting the differences in their ministries, first in their baptisms, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Water baptism identifies us with Christ, whereas Holy Spirit baptism actually saves and places us into the church the body of Christ, “whereas

2. (cont.) the baptism with fire refers to the judgments accompanying the second coming of Christ” (RSB).
3. (vs. 17) The superior might of the Messiah is emphasized here. “His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” “Farmers used a winnowing fan or pronged shovel to toss grain into the air and so separate the wheat from the chaff. The barn represents the absolute safekeeping of believers by the Messiah, whereas the ‘unquenchable fire’

3. (cont.) portends the equally permanent judgment of hell.”
4. (vs. 18) Luke makes it clear that his remarks on the ministry of John the Baptist are not comprehensive but a summary, probably touching on highlights; “So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people,” and primarily it was the gospel of the kingdom (Lk. 16:16).
5. (vs. 19) In keeping with his ministry of preaching a baptism of repentance, John also had a ministry of rebuke. “Herod (the Great) publicly identified

5. (cont.) himself as a Jew, although he was not faithful to observe Jewish Law.” “The Herod family follow(ed) in the footsteps of their father” (GQ). So, for John the Baptist to rebuke Herod (Antipas) the tetrarch was to undertake something very risky. “The former wife of Herod’s half brother Philip, her uncle, Herodias, had been persuaded to leave her husband and marry Herod Antipas, thus committing incest (Lev. 18:16). John condemned him for this, and Antipas knew that John spoke the truth (see Mark 6:20)” (RSB).

- 6) (vs. 20) We really shouldn't be surprised that in addition to all of his other wickednesses, "Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison."
- 7) (vs. 21) "Now when all the people were baptized": Apparently, there were no more candidates for baptism, that is, all the people who desired to be baptized were baptized. But there was one more: "Jesus was also baptized." We are not told why here. But Luke finds Him praying: "and while He was praying, heaven was opened" like it was in Ac. 7:56, when Stephen was stoned.

8) (vs. 22) “and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.’” This perhaps anticipates the Spirit coming in Ac. 2. But His arrival here validates who Jesus is and points to His power source in ministry. Jesus lived His life as a man in complete dependency upon the power of the Holy Spirit.