

JOHN THE BAPTIST CALLS FOR REPENTANCE, 8 pgs

Lk.3:1-3 *The Bible is a most wondrous book.* Francis Schaeffer said it this way *It starts at the beginning and goes right through to the end.*

People tend to think of the Bible as a religious book. Is it?

Before we look at our starting passage, let's consider the times and a brief history of the Hebrew nation. God originally chose the descendants of Abraham to be his people. He gave the land they occupied to them. Yet **as we open the New Testament we find that all that land had been appropriated by the Roman Empire.** In fact before the conquest of Israel by the Romans, they had been conquered by the Assyrians and Babylonians. The reason - they refused to remain loyal to God but worshiped and served other gods. So God gave them over to other nations to be ruled over.

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar [over Rome] ⁽¹⁾, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea ⁽²⁾, and Herod being **tetrarch** of Galilee ⁽³⁾, and his brother Philip **tetrarch** of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis ⁽⁴⁾, and Lysanias **tetrarch** of Abilene, ⁽⁵⁾ during the high priesthood of Annas ⁽⁶⁾ and Caiaphas ⁽⁷⁾, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah ⁽⁸⁾ in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins ... **Mt.3:1-3***

How would you characterize this opening? It is an account of what happened. It reports matters fully embedded in normal verifiable history: when; where; who was governing, their offices and jurisdictions; It distinguishes this John the baptist from others by the same name (such as the apostle John), ties in John's Jewish ancestry (elaborated elsewhere in the Gospels) with what he is known to have spoken about and why. It is the real world context in which God is working and not some "other" "religious" or "spiritual" reality.

Where was John from? Who was he? When the angel told Mary that she would have a son and explained how God was going to bring this about, he included ... *your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God, **Lk.1:26-45**.* So we find out that John is about 6 months older than Jesus.

[Both pregnancies were supernatural: Mary was going to bear a son without having relations with a man; Elizabeth had been unable to have children; after she was too old God also gave her a son "against nature".] There is a **Governing principal** here. God has the capability to bring about seemingly impossible things in the real world. It also reveals that withholding children from Elizabeth was part of an overall plan that encompassed the lives of John and Jesus. Events that are "spiritual" or "supernatural" in nature are nonetheless real and embedded in natural history. **Propitiation** for example refers to the appeasement of God's anger so that he may look upon us sinners with favor. It took place on earth at the cross (Golgotha) when Jesus gave up his life for the benefit of his people. **The events that led to the accomplishment of propitiation are couched in normal space-time history.**

DIALOGING WITH THE PASSAGE

There are at least 3 steps necessary for correctly handling Bible passages:

- (1) What does the passage say? [requires an accurate translation and definitions]
- (2) What does the passage mean by what it says? [requires an accurate interpretation and definitions]
- (3) Examine yourself by asking what does this passage call me to believe, do, avoid, or stop doing? ie. what is an appropriate response to (attitude toward) this passage? [requires that we believe God and act accordingly]

Implication: We are responsible for understanding and believing the truth as well as working at the task we are given.

What was Mary's response to what she was told by the angel about the conception of Jesus? What was Joseph's to the angel's words? Same question for Elizabeth and John's father, Zechariah.

John drives home his purpose with 3 word pictures: a picture of highway construction in preparation for a visit by a great dignitary like a king. *As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, The voice of one crying in the wilderness: (Isa.40:3-5),* [This tells us that John is announcing the fulfillment of an OT prophecy in which he has a part, not off the top of his head, but as a matter of the authority of Isaiah's prophecy.] **What responsibility accompanies this prophecy?** *Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, the crooked shall become straight, the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God, Lk.3:4-6*

Through cross-referencing such as this, one can trace this idea that *all flesh shall see the salvation of God* as meaning God's salvation will encompass all peoples, though not every individual (*for God so loved **the world**, Jews and Gentiles*) ... **Jn.3:16**

Simeon blessed God when he saw baby Jesus at the Jerusalem temple and said *my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of [on display for] all peoples [openly, publicly], a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel, Lk.2:25-32*

How did the Jews miss this? At the very conception of the Jewish nation, God said to Abram ... All the families on earth will be blessed through you (Gen.12:3). This turned out to be one of the problems in the early church. Certain Jews were insisting that Gentiles be circumcised and keep the law in order to qualify as Christians. Paul addresses this in Galatians. ⁶... *Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous ...* ⁷ The real [spiritual in contrast to natural] children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God. ⁸ What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would make the Gentiles right in his sight because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, All nations will be blessed through you. ⁹ So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith ... ¹⁴ Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith ... ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you. Gal.3: [see also Rom.3:29-30]

The Bible often expresses its message in figurative language like metaphors and idioms. That's why we must question the passage. **What's the subject of John's proclamation? REPENTANCE** What does that mean? Why is it necessary? The answers are not hard to find.

1st picture: highway construction Lk.3:4-6

John's message is not about highway construction and as such the passage is not meant to be taken literally, *every mountain and hill shall be made low* is referring to **humility**. **The subject is the urgency and necessity to prepare your heart** to receive the Messiah and enter the kingdom of God by repenting of your sins – changing your attitude and response to God. **Mt.3:2** puts the message this way, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand ...* [Notice how clear the message is.] To repent is to cast ourselves upon God's mercy which he offers in the form of forgiveness. **Lk.3** speaks of the *repentance* John was referring to as being *for the forgiveness of sins* which is necessary for reception of *the salvation of God*.

Saved from what? **Mt.3** describes it as *the wrath to come [the coming judgment]*. Sins are offenses against God and cannot merely be dismissed or offset by good deeds. Only the righteous may enter the kingdom because it comes with **judgment**. That is the door.

John's message is a warning Mt.3:1-8

¹In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ²Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand ... ⁵Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him [hyperbole], ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷But when John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, You brood of vipers [poisonous snakes] ! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit in keeping with repentance ... [the test of repentance is genuineness which reveals itself in a changed life]

Passages in the Bible carry implications beyond what is actually stated. These are not hard to figure out. For instance, **what is the purpose of sounding a warning?** *Jonah ... called out, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown! And the people of Nineveh believed God ... The word reached the king ... and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes [he believed the warning]. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh ... Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way ... Who knows? God may ... relent and turn from his fierce anger [a possibility, not a certainty], so that we may not perish, Jonah 3:1-10*

Notice that they understood Jonah's message to mean that within a given time frame the city of Nineveh was actually going to be destroyed and its people killed, soon and **there was no guarantee that God would spare the city even if they should repent**. Here God's restraint is evident. He doesn't enjoy punishing the wicked. **He sounds the warning to give them the opportunity to repent.** *¹⁰When he saw ... how they turned from their evil way [repented, the whole point of warning], God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*

John's confession Jn.1:15-35

... when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, *Who are you?* ²⁰John confessed ... *I am not the Christ* ... ²⁸These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing ... ³⁵The next day again John ... looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, *Behold, the Lamb of God [that is, the sacrificial lamb that God was preparing to bear the penalty of our sins is right here in this location and he walks among us] ...*

Jesus' comment on his own mission Jn.3:10-20; 35-36

¹⁴ as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (**Num.21:8**) , so must the Son of Man be lifted up [referring to his crucifixion] , ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him [referring to himself in the 3rd person] may have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world [not the Jews exclusively] , that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but [rather, **God sent his son**] in order that the world might be saved through him [purpose] . ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already [has already been found guilty] , because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God ... ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey [equivalent to "believes in"] the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him .

The Bible is interlaced with cross-references. In order to understand what Jesus is referring to by Moses "lifting up the serpent," we must look back into the OT for the background. I will go even further back to pick up the thread. God sent Moses to Egypt to release the Israelites from pharaoh's cruel slavery. But soon after their miraculous deliverance by means of 10 plagues that broke the Egyptian economy and destroyed Pharaoh's military might, they insulted God (**Ex.16**).

²the whole congregation of the people of Israel **grumbled against Moses and Aaron** in the wilderness, ³and the people of Israel said to them, *Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.* ⁴Then the LORD said to Moses ... *I am about to rain bread from heaven for you ... that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not ...* ¹⁷And the people of Israel ... gathered [manna], some more, some less ... *whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. [this is a big deal that needs elaboration, it is on par with the God's keeping their clothes from wearing out for 40 years as they crossed the wilderness. It is just as much a miracle as the provision of manna in the first place for 6 days with it rotting every night except what they gathered for the seventh day's meals. **There is a stacking of miracles here** that multiplies the awesomeness of what God is doing and points straight at the Sabbath. **Dt.8:4**]*

The provision of manna, leading of the multitude by a pillar of fire during the night and a pillar of cloud during daylight, and many other things constituted a very gracious response to their whining. It also acted to test their faith and condition them to supernatural governance of God. Yet 2 years later when the people arrived at the land God promised to give them, they refused to enter because they

didn't trust God to keep his promise and deliver the land to them. So God caused them to wander in the desert for 40 years while that entire generation died off, **Num.13-14**.

²² none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have **put me to the test** these ten times and **have not obeyed my voice**, ²³ shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who **despised me** shall see it, **Num.14:22-23**

Now near the end of their 40 years of wandering in the desert, the incident Jesus spoke of in **Jn.3** occurred, **Num.21:4-9**. ⁵And the people spoke against God and against Moses, Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food [referring to manna]. This complaint was a **nasty insult and repudiation of God's mercy** that had sustained the people through their wilderness wanderings. ⁶Then the LORD sent [poisonous snakes] among the people, and they bit [them], so that many people of Israel died. ⁷And the people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you [confession]. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people [intervened on their behalf]. ⁸And the LORD said to Moses, Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live ... [Their confession was not accepted at face value. God was still angry. He doesn't remove the snakes, but he gives the people a way to avoid being killed by them.]

God's anger is not like ours. **He doesn't have a chronic inability to restrain his irritation toward us.** He isn't unstable, ready to erupt in rage at the drop of a hat. No, his wrath is a function of his holiness. It is a just and principled opposition to sin. This is the incident Jesus was referring to. It wasn't the 2nd time the people God rescued from slavery grumbled against him, nor the 5th. It was at least the 10th time recorded that they had **expressed their regret for following this god**. He has been very patient and slow to anger with these people. And God, even in the midst of his anger, gave them a way to escape death and prophesied that the coming and crucifixion of the Messiah would bring eternal life to all who believed, **Jn.6:29-63**

2nd picture: orchard management Mt.3:7-10

¹⁰ Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **Subject?** Judgment **Test?** The quality of the change in their lives.

3rd picture: grain management Mt.3:11-12

I baptize you with water for repentance [as a symbol of or testimony to your actual repentance], but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. **Subject?** Judgment

John's Imprisonment Mk.1:14-15

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, *the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.* **What is the Gospel?** It is **God's pledge to receive everyone** into his kingdom **who turns to Jesus** for forgiveness of sins.

In prison, John became confused (Lk.7:18-23).

It is no wonder that John became confused. **He expected the kingdom of God to manifest immediately and differently**, almost everyone did.

*John, ¹⁹ calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another? So his disciples went to Jesus and asked him. ²¹ In that hour Jesus healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up the poor have good news preached to them. And **blessed is the one who is not offended by me.***

What does it mean to be offended by Jesus? It means you don't want to hear the truth. You refuse to hear the truth about your guilt before God and requirement to turn to Jesus for forgiveness.

John is beheaded Mt.14:3-11

³ Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, ⁴ because John had been saying to him, It is not lawful for you to have her ... ¹⁰ He sent and had John beheaded in the prison ...

John Reminds us of 2 problems we all face

- (1) The uncertainty of the next moment
- (2) The certainty that there will be a final moment for us on this earth

The Jewish religious authorities had Peter arrested for healing a cripple man, jailed him overnight, and questioned him the next day. Peter said *¹⁰ let it be known to all of you ... that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by him this man is standing before you well ... ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved, **Acts 3:1-10; 4:1-22***

THIS JESUS IS NOT SOME SORT OF PERSONALIZED THERAPY. HE REIGNS AS LORD OVER THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE FOREVER. Everyone will confess his lordship and bow to him gladly in joy or in shame and fear.

⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in

heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, **Phil.2:**

EVENTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CONTINUE TO UNFOLD

Mk.1:14-15 [context: after John's arrest, Jesus continues his message] Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, saying [1] At last the time is fulfilled [planned (prophesied) events have been unfolding and are rapidly playing out in history] Here is the thread for a Cross Reference Study: **Rom.5:6** at the right time; **Gal.4:4-5** when the fullness of time had come; **Eph.1:7-10** as a plan for the fullness of time; [2] and the kingdom of God is at hand [explanation of what the time is fulfilled means]; [3] repent and believe in the Gospel [appropriate response or response called for].

What is John's call to repent?

Is it an invitation? Jesus said, Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens [What burden is greater than the load of guilt we bear?] , and I will give you rest [by carrying your burdens for you] ... **Mt.11:28**

A warning? [We saw that it was in **Jn.3:10-20; 35-36.**]

A command? Paul, standing before the Areopagus in Rome said ²⁹ ... we shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. ³⁰ God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent [of their sins and turn to him], **Acts 17:**

Billy Graham always closed his crusades with the following hymn. It is an appropriate response to John's invitation addressed to Jesus.

Just as I am, without one plea [no defense, no excuse] but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot [cleaning up my life is not a prerequisite], to Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, tho' tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt [in turmoil and conflicted], fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind [in terrible condition]: sight, riches, healing of the mind, yea, all I need in Thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve [take care of all my real needs]; because Thy promise [of salvation] I believe, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, Thy love unknown hath broken ev'ry barrier down [partition that always separated people from God]; now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come.

Jesus guarantees ... whoever comes to me I will never cast out ... **Jn.6:37**

In the OT, God always remained apart from the people. The curtain in both the tabernacle and later

the temple isolating the most holy place assured this. But Immanuel has come and walked among us. Upon the death of Jesus God tore that heavy veil in two opening the way for Mankind to approach God.

The Bible is a most wondrous book. It is written for Fallen MAN as well as for Redeemed MAN. *It starts at the beginning and goes right through to the end.*