



**Ron Comoglio, Alabama State Minister**  
Ron.Comoglio@capitolcom.org  
PHONE: (334) 476-9333  
WWW.CAPITOLCOM.ORG

**“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” Luke 3:1-2**

### **Luke 3:1-14 - John Prepares the Way for the Lord**

As we have seen before (2:1), Dr Luke the historian gives very specific time references in his accounting of events. Read 3:1-6. Fifteen years into the reign of Emperor Tiberius, the successor to Caesar Augustus, John the Baptizer begins his public ministry. We see that Pontius Pilate (a character who plays a large role in Christ’s crucifixion later) is now the Roman-installed governor of Judea, the southern portion of Palestine, while Herod the Great’s grandsons rule portions as tetrarchs (meaning their jurisdiction was a fourth of the overall kingdom).

Verse 2 begins with a sly comment about the religious hierarchy: Annas and Caiaphas were both high priests, an arrangement not allowed in the commandments which instituted the Levitical priesthood. This is because Annas was removed from the priesthood around 15 A.D. by the Roman procurator of Judea, Valerius Gratus; possibly a political move.<sup>1</sup> A succession of priests held the position, including four of Annas’ sons and his son-in-law Caiaphas, because their service was agreeable with the Roman authorities. However, Annas held the title *de facto* with the people, likely due to his age and influence. Suffice to say, there are issues with the Jewish leadership of the day, too.

More importantly, the last part of verse 2 has the powerful statement “the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” Not to a Caesar, or a high priest, but to John. God raises up the last of the Old Testament prophets of Israel in this kin of Jesus of Nazareth and sends him out to the wilds of the Jordan River, east of Jerusalem. For the Jewish people the appearance of a prophet of God is a huge deal, generating a lot of excitement. There he proclaimed a warning message of repentance, symbolized by a cleansing baptism ritual. This fulfilled a prophecy originally from Isaiah 40:3-5 and applied to John by all four gospel writers. John’s message is one of the herald, who goes before a ruling monarch to ensure the road is passable and secure. By calling for repentance, he is ensuring the hearts of the people are ready to receive the Lord and His salvation.

Capitol Commission state ministers are pastor-missionaries who in session teach weekly verse-by-verse Bible studies for all those in our state capitols. The Bible studies are hand distributed to each legislative office, are available online at [capitolcom.org](http://capitolcom.org), and shared across the Capitol Commission community. This ministry is an extension of the church seeking to proclaim the gospel message and help believers mature through Biblical expositional instruction. Prayer is foundational to this ministry, consistent with proper submission to governmental authority (Rom 13:1-7) and obedient to the command to pray for our appointed leaders (1 Tim 2:1-4).

Our desire is to witness God’s work in transforming hearts.  
Capitol Commission is a non-political and non-lobbying 501(c)(3).

The image portrayed by John is described in Matthew's gospel: "Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist" (Matt 3:4) which directly correlates to the description of the prophet Elijah as given in 2 Kings 1:8. This itself fulfills the last word from the Lord recorded in the Old Testament, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." (Malachi 4:5). Recall the angel's words to his father Zechariah that John would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah". John's appearance is intentional and loaded with meaning, which Jesus Himself confirmed in His testimony about John later (Matthew 11:11-14).

At verse 7 we see a marked tone shift in the message (read v 7-14). First, we learn that crowds are streaming out of the cities to hear John and be baptized as repenters. But his words attack many attending! This may strike us as unusual since preaching should be attracting crowds, right? Except John's intent is not to create a movement for himself but to play his divine role as advance team to the King of kings. This is why his response to Jesus' appearing as recorded in John was "He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30). His job was to bear witness to the Light (John 1:6-8). To do this he must first convince them of their need to repent; if they are self-righteous in their own minds they will not recognize that. So John verbally attacks them as a nest of vipers and shoots down any claims to righteousness by virtue of being Jewish (descendants of Abraham). His words even carry a threat, saying that any tree not bearing fruit will be burned in the fire, a theme which Jesus will carry forward often as well.

This tactic generates very real concern, from the listeners in general and specifically from two hated groups to that culture. The general crowd is told that good fruit (righteous actions) begin with sharing what they have, whether it is clothing or food, to meet people's basic needs. Then in verse 12 we hear that tax collectors are in the crowd—these are Jewish men who betrayed their cultural roots to work directly for the Romans, and were notoriously lacking in ethics—and who are cut to the heart. John simply tells them to only do their job and not to extort above the law for their profit. Then the second hated group, the occupying Roman soldiers, inquire about their chances, to which John replies, stop robbing the people by force or lies and be content with your wages. Note he does not tell either group to resign their jobs, only to be truthful in their duties. True to his call, John is intent on reforming the people in advance of Jesus' public ministry.

### Applications

1. Our personal righteousness should be a very real concern before we stand before our Maker. Do you depend on what you have done for that, and do you think you can earn enough to merit God's approval? Is there another way to achieve good fruit that is acceptable?
2. John fully understood his role relative to the kingdom, recognizing Jesus must increase while he decreased. Do you see how this applies to we who follow Him today? How is Jesus increasing in your sphere and how are you decreasing for His glory?

1. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.2.1-2

**My desire is to highlight Jesus Christ to you. Toward that end, I am available to discuss any biblical topic or question you may have. I especially want to ensure all who read the studies understand how Jesus Christ is distinctively important to the entire world and to each of us individually. Lastly, all Bible studies are available at Capitol Commission's Alabama page: <https://capitolcom.org/state/alabama>.**

**"Lunch With Luke": Plan to attend our in-house Bible Study during session: Tuesdays at 11:00 am in Room 123 of the State House. Bring a beverage, a light lunch will be provided.**

---

**A key facet empowering our ministry is prayer, especially prayer for our elected leaders. 1 Timothy 2:1-4 commands Christians to obediently pray for all in authority. A tool for America's churches to help consistently pray for you, our elected leaders, is available to all via: [www.Pray1Tim2.org](http://www.Pray1Tim2.org) - Select Alabama and sign up for daily email reminders, courtesy of Capitol Commission.**

**Share this link with your home church!**