

Luke 3:1-11 Repent to come under God's rule through the Spirit 12/12/21

Background. For a Gentile to become a Jew there were normally three requirements, baptism, circumcision (for males), and sacrifice. However, baptism was sufficient in itself – it was the sign of leaving an old life (repentance) and beginning a new life (a new birth). A Gentile who converted and became a Jew was regarded as having risen from the dead. However, John baptised Jews. That is, John placed Jews in the category of the Gentiles. Neither being a descendant of Abraham nor circumcision, the sign of the covenant, is of any use. One must reaffirm the covenant by repentance and baptism to share in the coming kingdom. (8-9).

Vs. 1-2. Even with the minimal historical evidence, we can date, from secular sources, when John's ministry was occurring (sometime between AD 27-29).

V. 3. Baptism was a public act but also a message to be preached – repent – acknowledge and turn away from your sins. God will forgive you and help you to lead a new life. [In contemporary Australian terms, only those who are far dinkum should rock up]. John's choice of the river Jordan was probably symbolic. The river was the gateway to the 'promised land' ending the Exodus journey. John exhorts the Jews to enter anew into the ancient covenant (binding agreement) and thereby to inherit the 'promised land' into which the Messiah will bring them (new 'promised land' is not of this world -Jesus said his Kingdom is not of this world Jn. 18:36).

V. 4-6. The loose quote from Isaiah 40:3-5, which refers to the pending Exodus (redemption) of the Jews from Exile to Israel, shows that John saw a new Exodus about to happen. John is a herald, preparing the way for a new Exodus (or redemption) that God will bring about through Jesus, the Messiah (Saviour).

V. 7-14. In response to the warning people asked John what was required of them. Genuine repentance and a public baptism should lead to a new way of selfless living.

Vs. 15-18. John contrasts his ministry from the Messiah's in two ways. He preaches a coming judgement; the Messiah will execute it. He baptises with water, the Messiah with Holy Spirit and fire. The allusion to Pentecost, the giving of the gift of the Holy Spirit because of the atoning death of Jesus, is linked to the destructive fires of judgment (v. 17). There is a present purging and redemption, and a future final judgment with a fully evident salvation. Judgment is a part of the good news – if there is no final end to evil there is no ultimate good news.

Summary. John tells the people to acknowledge and turn from their sins (repent) and to live a changed life showing selfless love to others. John's baptism was a public expression of a repentant heart. Those who sought his baptism as a form of insurance were condemned by John (7f). John's role was to prepare the way for the coming Messiah by arousing a spirit of repentance and expectation (3ff) and to witness to the universal nature of the Messiah's mission (6, 16f).

Response/reflection. Becoming a Christian involves repentance, baptism, and faith in Jesus Christ. Living as a Christian involves a repentant attitude (a constant turning away from sin and evil), constant trust in Jesus Christ shown in living a new life. How can people see our repentant hearts and our trust in Jesus when they hear what we say and look at how we live?

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