

“Luke 3:7–14 represents a sample of John's call to repentance. It emphasizes the nearness of God's coming wrath. In one sense, it is the negative side of saying the kingdom draws near (Matt.3:2). With the opportunity of promise comes also the risk of judgment for rejecting the promise. Matthew notes the positive experience, while Luke notes the danger. The declaration makes it clear that crucial times are approaching; key decisions need to be made. The best way to prepare is to answer John's call to repentance. One should live in light of an awareness of God's coming and his judgment” (Bock, 314).

John's description of the Christ

The message, power, and confidence with which John spoke led some to wonder if he was the Christ (Lk. 3:15); this causes John to explain the person and work of the One who would follow him.

3:15 Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ,

3:16 John answered and said to them all, "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.

3:17 "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."

3:18 So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people.

3:19 But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done,

3:20 Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.

In Jesus' day teachers were not paid but were “reimbursed” by their disciples through acts of service. It was thought that a disciple should do everything for his master that a slave should do, except untie his sandals (Morris, 107). Such a task was so menial and degrading, that even slaves weren't asked to stoop so low. Yet John recognized that in comparison to Messiah, he was not even worthy to do that. In other words, John saw himself as being so inferior to Jesus that he didn't even qualify to do the most menial task! The most lowly act was too high an honor for him. He was saying, “I am not adequate to be His humblest slave” (Cambridge Commentary).

John then shows Jesus' superiority by contrasting his baptism to the baptism Jesus brings. The baptism of John was of great importance, but he could do no more than baptize with water; that is, he could only provide a *symbol* of cleansing. However, He who would come after Him would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit has caused much confusion and disunity within the church. This is clearly not water baptism for water baptism is contrasted to it. Some see baptism of the Holy Spirit as a “second blessing” coming only to believers who earnestly seek it after salvation. In their eyes, this is the source of power to live the Christian life and is evidenced by speaking in tongues. But the Bible teaches no such doctrine. Nowhere in the Bible is anyone commanded to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit, nor is there a single example of anyone doing such a thing. Rather, this is a metaphor that depicts the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:14; Joel 2:28; Ezek. 36:25-26) which is solely the work of Christ. He alone has the authority to give the Holy Spirit and does so to every believer at salvation (I Cor. 12:13). See my end notes in the study on Acts 1:1-11 for a fuller explanation of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

John also said that Jesus would baptize with fire. This is a metaphor for judgment. Jesus is both Savior and Judge. "Fire" picks up the thought from Luke 3:9 (Matt. 3:10) where John warns that the unrepentant in Israel would be removed and thrown into the fire (hell). The same picture is portrayed in the process of separating wheat from the chaff. Chaff consists of bits of straw and husk which needed to be removed before the wheat could be stored or eaten. To remove the chaff the wheat was pounded on the threshing floor, or wood was drawn over it by oxen (see MacArthur, *Commentary on Matthew*, 72 for details). The mixture of wheat and chaff was then thrown into the air with a winnowing fork. The wheat grains which were heavier fell to the floor and the chaff was blown away by the wind. The wheat was then gathered and placed into barns and the chaff burned with fire. The picture of separation is common in describing the discrimination between the believing and unbelieving when Christ returns (cf. the wheat and the tares in Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43; the dragnet in Matt. 13:47-50; the sheep and the goats in Matt. 25:31-34, 46; and Malachi 4:1-3 which speaks of the purifying of the nation). The unquenchable fire is called "the wrath to come" in Luke 3:7 (Isa. 34:8-10; 66:24; Jer. 7:20). None will escape Christ's scrutiny for He will "thoroughly clear" the threshing floor.

John's successor would divide men; salvation and the Holy Spirit would be the gift to those who believe and judgment to those who do not.

It is interesting to observe that the imprisonment of John (3:20) is mentioned even before the baptism of Jesus. This is probably because by arranging the account in this way, Luke summarizes John's ministry in one spot. This arrangement serves to focus on Christ more explicitly by staying on Jesus' ministry once it is introduced.

Jesus' baptism by John

"Luke 3:21–22 shows that with Jesus' baptism comes the divine confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah – Servant. What His task will be, how He will rule, and how He will deliver are questions that the rest of the Gospel will answer. But the emphasis here is that heaven has spoken. God has revealed His choice. Much as a political party puts its stamp on a presidential candidate, so here God has shown who will accomplish His plan. Having received God's confirmation in the Spirit's testimony, Jesus can prepare for ministry" (Bock, 345).

***3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened,
3:22 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."***

The parallel passage is found in Matthew 3:13-15; it says, "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; *it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.*' Then John consented."

Earlier, John had trouble baptizing the Pharisees and Sadducees because they were unworthy, but now John has trouble in baptizing Jesus for the opposite reasons.

People had been coming to be baptized by John because they identified with his message and anticipated the coming of the kingdom he was preaching. But confession of sin and repentance were necessary first, because sinful man cannot enter the kingdom without having secured forgiveness (Matt. 3:6). For that reason, John's baptism was called a baptism for repentance. John's reluctance to baptize Jesus was because he could detect no sin in Him (cf. Heb. 4:14-15; 7:26-27; II Cor. 5:21). If anything, John needed to submit to Jesus in baptism. But Jesus did not come to confess sin and repent of it. He came to fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:15). Through John's baptism people were committing themselves to turn from sin and trust in God. Jesus could affirm both: He resolved not to sin and He committed Himself to trust God. Identifying with those who anticipated the coming kingdom was right for every good man, and it was incumbent upon Jesus, as a man, to do what other good men did (Broadus, 55). In other words, by being baptized, Jesus identified Himself with the group that John had identified as being morally prepared for the kingdom (Thomas, Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 36, n. "a"). But He also identified with sinful men, not in that He sinned as they had, but in that it was the sinner for whom He had come to save.

Luke 3:21 says that ***Jesus was praying*** when heaven was opened. We will see in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus prayed at all the crucial turning points of His life: His baptism, the selection of the twelve apostles (6:12), at Peter's confession (9:18), at the transfiguration (9:28), in Gethsemane (22:41), and on the cross (23:34). In addition, He repeatedly went into the wilderness to pray (5:16) and spent whole nights in prayer (6:12). As the exemplary man, a man who loved to commune with God, a man who sought the will of God, Jesus was a man who prayed.

Jesus' baptism and the attestation by the Holy Spirit must be looked at together.

While Jesus was being baptized, heaven opened up and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (Lk. 3:21). The opening of heaven indicates that revelation from God will follow. "The Spirit of God descending like a dove" could just be a simile telling the gentle manner in which the Holy Spirit descended, or it could be the appearance the Holy Spirit took in His descent. Luke says, "the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove," so there was an objective reality to what was seen. Although many believe that Jesus was the one who saw the Holy Spirit descending, John 1:32 makes it clear that John the Baptist also saw the Holy Spirit as he was promised (Jn. 1:33). The synoptic gospels focus on the initial alighting of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus, while the Gospel of John states that the Holy Spirit "abided" or "remained" upon Him (Jn. 1:32).

The voice of God testifies that God has broken the silence and is again revealing Himself to man – a clear sign of the dawning Messianic Age (Matt. 17:5; Jn. 12:28) (Carson, 109). The thought reflects Isaiah 42:1 where it says of Messiah, the Suffering Servant of God, "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles." (Also see Isaiah 61:1).

Jesus' baptism did not change His status. That is, He was always the Son of God, but it identifies Him as Messiah and ties Him to the throne of David (Ps. 2).

The baptism of Jesus became a fitting event from which Jesus would begin His public ministry.

3:23 When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli,

...

3:38 the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

It should also be noted that “to bear” or “to be father of” (*gennao* – γεννάω) does not always mean immediate relationship, but often means something like “was the ancestor of” or “was the progenitor of” (Carson, 65). Therefore, one need not assume that the genealogies are trying to list every single ancestor. Matthew starts with Abraham, but divides the list into three groups of fourteen generations with David being named twice due to his prominence (Thomas, Gundry, A Harmony of the Gospels, 319).

Studies of genealogies in the Ancient Near East have shown that they were used in widely diverse functions: economic, tribal, political, domestic and others. While no twentieth century Jew could prove that he was from the tribe of Judah, let alone the house of David, that doesn't appear to be a problem in the first century when lineage was important in gaining access into the temple for worship (Carson, 62-63).

There are basic differences between the genealogies in Matthew and in Luke. Matthew begins with Abraham and moves forward while Luke begins with Jesus and moves backward. Matthew traces Jesus' lineage to Abraham, Luke to Adam and then to “the Son of God.” Luke traces Jesus' line through David's son Nathan, while Matthew does so through Solomon.

A number of attempts have been made to harmonize the two genealogies, but the most convincing is that Matthew is presenting Jesus' legal right to the Davidic throne through Joseph while Luke is giving Mary's genealogy and the human ancestry of Christ (see note 1 [below] for a more detailed treatment of this view).

“Jesus' genealogy performs an important role in Luke's Gospel. The account concludes with the name Adam and then mentions that Jesus is the Son of God. This connection indicates Jesus' relationship to all humankind as their representative. The universal perspective fits very nicely with the Lucan emphasis on salvation for all” (Acts 10:34–43; 17:21–31; Bock, 348).

Or, as Bock says elsewhere,

Jesus' genealogy in 3:23–38 ties all humankind into one unit. Their fate is wrapped up in Jesus. His ministry, as seen from heaven, represents the focal point of history. The introduction of the genealogy right before the commencement of His ministry serves to highlight the scope of Jesus' concern for humans. It points to His universal perspective. Jesus is not some isolated minister to Israel; He does not merely minister to a tiny nation of subjected people seeking political deliverance from a dominating Rome. Rather, He is the culmination of a line of descendants stretching back through the great men of promise like Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. The lineage confirms His position and suggests His ministry's comprehensive character. In Him, the entire hope of the Old Testament is inseparably and eternally bound. In Him, as well, the fate of all divinely created humans is bound together (Bock, 360).

NOTE 1: Harmonizing the Two Linages of Christ

The following material is taken from pages 316-319 of *A Harmony of the Gospels* by Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry. The logic that follows supports the interpretation that the genealogy in Matthew 1 is Joseph's and was given by Matthew to show that Jesus is a rightful heir to the Davidic throne, while the genealogy in Luke is that of Mary and is intended to show the solidarity of Messiah to the human race.

1. Luke 3:23 reads, "Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli,"

It is legitimate to place the entire phrase "as was supposed the son of Joseph" in parenthesis since Joseph's name is the only name in Greek not prefixed with an article. If it is a parenthetical explanation and not part of the genealogy itself, it would mean that Jesus is the son (i.e. grandson or descendant) of Eli, Mary's progenitor. This is consistent with Luke's account of Jesus' conception, which makes it clear that Joseph was not the physical father (Lk. 1:26-38).

2. This view takes the most natural meaning of "was born" in Matthew 1 rather than claiming that descent jumps to collateral lines, as some other views do.
3. Matthew's emphasis on Jesus' relationship to the Messianic kingdom makes it appropriate that he trace Jesus' legal descent through Joseph, giving him the right to the Davidic throne.
4. Since Luke emphasizes Jesus' solidarity with the human race, it is fitting that he trace His ancestry to Mary and then all the way back to Adam, the head of the race.
5. The objection that Mary's name is not in Luke's genealogy is not difficult to explain, for the usual Jewish custom was to leave women out of genealogies. On the other hand, the objection that Jews never gave the genealogy of women is met by the answer that this is a unique case; Luke is talking about a virgin birth. How else could the physical descent of one who had no father be traced? Furthermore, Luke has already shown a departure from the customary way of doing things by reversing the order of the genealogy and starting with Jesus and then ascending up the list.
6. This view also handles the problem with Jeconiah (Matt. 1:11) most efficiently. The problem is as follows.

II Samuel 7:12-17 states that the Davidic kingdom would come through Solomon. This promise was unconditional and was later passed down to Solomon's descendant, Jeconiah. Yet, because of Jeconiah's gross sin, he was to be written down as childless, and God said that no descendant of his would prosper on the Davidic throne (Jer. 22:30; Jeconiah and Coniah are the same person). This poses a dilemma. If Jeconiah had the legal right to the Davidic throne, yet none of his descendants would prosper on it, how can both the unconditional promise to Solomon and the curse upon Jeconiah be fulfilled?

The problem can be solved if we see two different genealogies in Matthew and Luke.

First, notice that Jeremiah's account doesn't say that Jeconiah would have no children. He had seven sons (I Chron. 3:17). Rather, it says that he was to be *written down* as childless. That is, his sons were to be removed from the register and would not succeed him on the throne. Secondly, Jeremiah does not say that the *legal claim* to the throne was removed by sin. The next chapter (Jer. 23:5-6) even speaks of a king (Messiah) that would rule. In other words, *Jeconiah's descendants had the right to rule, but the curse prevented them from exercising that right.*

The legal claim to the Davidic throne remains in Jeconiah's line and is traced by Matthew down to Joseph. Since Joseph was Jesus' legal father, the right to rule on the throne of David passed to Him. Yet Matthew is also clear that Jesus does not come under the curse of Jeconiah for He did not have an actual blood tie to His line (Matt. 1:16). In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus' human nature is traced only to Mary. Therefore, by means of the virgin birth Jesus became the legal heir to the Davidic throne through Joseph, the physical descendant of David through Mary, and at the same time escaped the curse upon Jeconiah's seed in Jeremiah 22:30.