

## Luke 3:2-18

### *John Prepares the Way for Jesus*

#### Study Summary and Learning Objectives

Having described John's birth, Luke now recounts John's teaching ministry, which sets the stage for Jesus' arrival. At the height of messianic fervor, John proclaims that he is a forerunner of a "more powerful" figure (vs. 16)—the Messiah—whose arrival is imminent. With this proclamation comes a call to repentance and changed living.

#### Objectives

- Obedience and repentance are consistent and ongoing commands. We should continue to prepare ourselves mentally and spiritually to allow God to better speak truth into our lives.
- Repentance is refocusing one's eyes and affections on God.
- We don't need to be in constant search of a better position in life; God can use us wherever we are.

#### Steps to Prepare (For Leaders)

- Read all of Luke 3. Read Isaiah 40:3-5.
- Read through all of the sidebars in this study and be prepared to provide a summary of the relevant contextual information to your group as it informs the study as a whole, or prepare to read them out loud during the study.

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#### Section One: John the Road Worker

**Pray for your time together.**

? What's your most memorable road trip?

*Leader's Note: You may wish to read the historical context sidebar at this point as a transition into the passage.*

#### **Read Out Loud: Luke 3:2-6 (NIV)**

<sup>2</sup> During the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the

#### Historical Context:

Throughout history, kings would often send envoys or heralds ahead of them to straighten the road – filling in gaps and shaving down the bumps – in order to make their king's journey a smooth one. Similarly, John the Baptist was sent to pave the way for the Messiah; however, the road that John had to smooth out was the road to Israel's heart.

The Jews of John's day had grown immoral and hard-hearted. They had grown to believe that since they had physically descended from Abraham's line, they were entitled to the Messiah's blessing. This led to widespread hypocrisy, immorality, racism, and selfishness. Gross ritualism had buried God's true law under priestly traditions of the day. All of this made it difficult for first century Jews to recognize God's Messiah when He finally came.

forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.

<sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight,  
the rough ways smooth.

<sup>6</sup> And all people will see God’s salvation.”

**For Further Study**  
Read Isaiah 40:3-5 – the  
verses John quotes in this

? John wasn’t literally doing roadwork, but he did help prepare the Jewish people mentally and spiritually for Jesus’ arrival. In what ways do you think the Jews were unprepared for the Messiah?  
*Possible Answers: The usual response to any demand that the Israelites of that day should repent was that they did not need to repent, since they were sons of Abraham. They had grown prideful and didn’t believe that they deserved to be a part of God’s salvation plan because they were Jews by birth.*

? Are there any truths about the Gospel that you’ve struggled to understand or believe because of your upbringing?

? What kinds of misconceptions about Christ have you overcome in your own life?

*Possible Answer: This could lead to discussion concerning how Christian culture sometimes constructs unbiblical ideas of who and what a follower of Christ actually is.*

? How can you prepare yourself to better allow God to speak truth into your life?

## Section Two: Don’t Quit Your Day Job

### **Read Out Loud: Luke 3:7-18 (NIV)**

<sup>7</sup> John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

<sup>10</sup> “What should we do then?” the crowd asked.

<sup>11</sup> John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”

<sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

<sup>13</sup> “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

<sup>14</sup> Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”

He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

<sup>15</sup> The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” <sup>18</sup> And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

*Leader’s Note: Some people in the group might bring up the following topic. If they do (or if you have time), here’s some deeper context behind what John meant when he was talking about stones.*

**?** Optional: What might John mean when he says, “Out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham”? How could this be a response to Jewish pride?

*Possible Answers: Since the Jewish people believed that they were God’s people, they often believed that they were beyond reproach, and that when the Messiah came, those who closely adhere to the Jewish law would be the first to enter God’s new kingdom. They believed they were God’s children because they were descendants of Abraham. John tries to counter this pride by saying that God is so powerful that He can create new descendants from Abraham out of stone. In a way, God did this when He grafted the Gentiles into God’s family through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.*

#### **The Gospel at Work**

Israel didn’t believe that people like tax collectors and soldiers could please God while employed by the Romans, but John doesn’t tell these kinds of people to quit their jobs. Instead, he tells them to repent and stop exploiting others when they work. These people didn’t need to quit their jobs in order to please God. Instead, they just needed to bring the Gospel’s truths into their daily duties. In this way, they would honor God through the work they were already doing.

**?** Tax collectors and soldiers were notorious for acts such as cheating and extorting. Why is it significant that John addresses their actions rather than their career?

*Possible Answers: The Jews would have expected John to tell tax collectors and soldiers to abandon their careers and convert to Judaism. This command would have only solidified the pride and righteousness that Jews found in their lineage. Instead, John targets each individual’s actions and disrupts the status quo.*

**?** John urges his followers to lead a life of repentance. What is your definition of repentance?

*Possible Answer: Repentance as illustrated in Acts 26:20 is not just turning **from** an action, but also and more importantly turning **to God**. It is submitting to God - not simply behavior management. “Repent” means “to change one’s mind.” The Bible also tells us that true repentance will result in a change of actions (Luke 3:8-14; Acts 3:19).*

**?** John commanded the crowds to multiple actions as he called them to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” How do these commands lead to biblical fruit?

*Leader’s Note: Consider referencing Galatians 5:22-23.*

? What empowers us to live the kind of life John suggests?

*Possible Answer: The Holy Spirit. As Christians we should strive to act in boldness, knowing that God can use us no matter what our position in life. A life full of prayer, Scripture, and good fellowship will help us keep in tune with the Holy Spirit's urgings.*

? Do you ever feel like God can't use you based on the jobs/hobbies/schoolwork you currently have? How might you be a blessing to God and others in your current job/hobbies/schooling?

### For Discussion and Accountability

? These are the areas of my life where I need to seek repentance...

? I can better honor God in my "work" by...

### Additional Reading: Luke 3:19-38

*You may wish to read the remainder of Luke 3 outside of small group time.*

<sup>19</sup> But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, <sup>20</sup> Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

<sup>21</sup> When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

<sup>23</sup> Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, <sup>24</sup> the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, <sup>25</sup> the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, <sup>26</sup> the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josek, the son of Joda, <sup>27</sup> the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, <sup>28</sup> the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er,

<sup>29</sup> the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer,  
the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat,  
the son of Levi, <sup>30</sup> the son of Simeon,  
the son of Judah, the son of Joseph,  
the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim,  
<sup>31</sup> the son of Melea, the son of Menna,  
the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan,  
the son of David, <sup>32</sup> the son of Jesse,  
the son of Obed, the son of Boaz,  
the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon,  
<sup>33</sup> the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram,  
the son of Hezron, the son of Perez,  
the son of Judah, <sup>34</sup> the son of Jacob,  
the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham,  
the son of Terah, the son of Nahor,  
<sup>35</sup> the son of Serug, the son of Reu,  
the son of Peleg, the son of Eber,  
the son of Shelah, <sup>36</sup> the son of Cainan,  
the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem,  
the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,  
<sup>37</sup> the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch,  
the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel,  
the son of Kenan, <sup>38</sup> the son of Enosh,  
the son of Seth, the son of Adam,  
the son of God.