

Gospels class 9-The Ministry of John the Baptizer Scott Ashley August 4, 2012

Good morning/afternoon, everyone.

Today will be continuing with our Bible classes and discussing the ministry of John the baptizer, commonly known as John the Baptist. I don't much care for the term John the Baptist because baptist is a religious denomination and John is a man who was performing the rite of baptism, so I prefer the term "John the baptizer" because that's a more accurate description of who he was and what he did.

You could also call him John the immerser, because that's what the Hebrew and Greek words for baptism and baptize mean—to completely immerse someone in water so that they are submerged. So when I use the term John the baptizer, I'm trying to help us understand better how he would've been viewed and identified in the culture of that day.

John is a pretty enigmatic figure in the Bible. Not much is said about him, and what *is* said can be pretty puzzling at times. There are many popular misconceptions about John. Many people have the idea that John was this kind of wild man living out in the desert doing strange things. Is that the case? We'll look at that today.

By way of review, since it was months ago when we covered the angel Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah the priest that he would have a son, let's briefly go back and look at that again as a reminder and to set the stage for what will be covering today. So let's look at **Luke 1:5-17** where we read about the announcement of the coming of John to Zechariah.

5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division,

9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.

When we covered this earlier, we talked about how part of the prayer that was to be offered in the incense offering included a plea to God to send the one who would prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. And I think it was probably at this exact point that we read about what happens next.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

So this elderly priest Zechariah is offering the incense inside the temple in front of the holy of holies, and he knows he supposed to be all alone. And suddenly this angel appears there with him within the holy place. And to be blunt, Zechariah is scared to death when this happens, as we see from his reaction.

12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

14 “And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15 “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.

16 “And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

17 “He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

And as we discussed earlier, this is quoting from **Malachi 3:1** and **Malachi 4:5-6**, which we won’t turn to today in the interests of time. So John the Baptist was the one who, as it says in Luke 1:17, came **“to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,” and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”** John would prepare the way for Jesus the Messiah by telling people that One greater than he was going to come and urging them to repent and be ready. This was John’s mission and purpose.

So with that background, let’s now pick up the story in **Luke 3:1-14** and start covering new ground.

1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,

A quick historical footnote here. Luke is the meticulous historian, and it shows in the detail he gives here. Earlier in Luke’s gospel we saw that Caesar Augustus was the Roman Emperor and Herod the Great was King of the Jews. Now, in probably A.D. 27, both of them are dead and Tiberius has succeeded Augustus as Roman Emperor. Herod the great died and his kingdom was divided up into four parts, with each part ruled by an official with the title “tetrarch” that we see here.

One of Herod’s sons, Archelaus, was such a bad ruler that he was in office only a few years before the Jews pleaded with Rome to have him removed and replaced. And he was replaced by another individual we see here by the name of Pontius Pilate—who, of course, we’ll read about later when he presided over Jesus Christ’s crucifixion. This is how the Romans came to directly rule Judea with a Roman governor. The “Herod” mentioned here is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, as is the Philip mentioned here. We don’t know anything about the Lysanias other than that his name is mentioned in a few inscriptions that have been found.

On the back of your harmony you can see the territories of these rulers mentioned here. The darkest area, which includes Samaria, Judea and Idumea, is the area administered by the Roman governor Pilate. To the right of that, the area labeled Perea, and to the north, stretching up into Galilee, is the area governed by Herod Antipas. To the north of that, the lighter colored area along the Mediterranean coast is what was governed by Lysanius. And to the upper right, including the area of Caesarea Philippi, is the territory of Philip. So Luke is very specific about the rulers mentioned, their specific titles, and the specific areas over which they ruled. And this is all verified historically, showing that Luke knew what he was talking about.

So Luke has given us the political background to what comes next, and now he gives us the religious background. Continuing in verse 2—

2 while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests,

Does anybody notice anything odd here? How many high priests were there supposed to be at one time? *One*. It was a position that, according to the instructions God gave through Moses, was supposed to be hereditary, through the descendants of Aaron, and for life. So why does Luke mention two high priests? What's going on here? Let's take a closer look at these two characters.

There was indeed only supposed to be one high priest at a time, not two. But in the approximately 60 years leading up to this time there were no fewer than 28 different high priests. When the Romans made Herod the Great “King of the Jews” in 37 B.C., about 60 years earlier, the Romans and some of the Jews saw this as a good money-making opportunity. So the Romans started selling the office of high priest to the highest bidder.

So they had a good thing going. Herod and his Roman backers got the money and no doubt a lot of it made its way back to Rome and into the hands of the Emperor. And the Jews who bought the office of high priest had a good thing going, because whoever bought it then controlled the money-changing and the selling of animals for sacrifice, and they could and did charge exorbitant rates for those services. That's why Jesus, when He cleansed the Temple, called it a den of thieves—because it had become an organized and established system built around stealing from the people who came to worship at the temple.

Annas was one of these individuals who had bought the office of high priest, which he held from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15. He made himself very wealthy from it. So wealthy, in fact, that he made it more or less a family franchise. He was followed as high priest by one of his sons, a son-in-law—who is the Caiaphas mentioned here—then four more sons and eventually a grandson, so this was the family business for a long time. Josephus describes Annas as “a great hoarder up of money,” which tells us something about his motivation and character.

So by this time the office of high priest and the Jerusalem religious establishment had become totally corrupted by this system. And the reason Luke mentions both Annas and Caiaphas as high priests is because Caiaphas was the official high priest, but Annas was the real power behind the scenes. And of course, when Jesus comes along and begins to

threaten their power, what do they do? They conspire to eliminate Him so they can hold onto their power and source of income.

So continuing in verse 2—

2 while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests,

the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

As we discussed in an earlier class, Zechariah and Elizabeth were quite elderly when John was conceived and born. Now 30 years have gone by and they have passed from the scene and it's time for John to begin his mission of preparing the way for the coming of the Lord.

3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan [River], preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,

And here is a photo that gives you a pretty good idea of how that might've looked in terms of the general terrain and climate and the way people dressed at that time. The Jordan River Valley was a main travel route, so John would've encountered plenty of people as they traveled back and forth along the roads in that valley.

4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.

5 Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth;

6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

This is a quote from Isaiah 40:3-5, so let's read that:

3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth;

5 The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

So what's this talking about? Both here and where this is quoted in Luke, it's using a physical metaphor to explain a spiritual truth. The physical metaphor is this: When a king took office, one of the first things he often did was to tour his kingdom. So his officials would send out couriers to the villages and cities along his planned route to tell the people to prepare the way—**to prepare the roads, in other words**—for the coming King.

To use a modern analogy, if the president is coming to town, the mayor and the governor are going to have workers go out and patch the potholes along the way. They might even repave the streets in some areas. And that is essentially what's being said here—the King is coming, so go fill in the potholes in the roads, smooth them out and make them level, and straighten out some of the curves so the road isn't so twisty and windy. This is how you prepare the way for the coming of the king.

So that's the physical metaphor. How does that apply spiritually? We see that from John's message. He tells people to *repent* so they can be forgiven of their sins, so their hearts will be right to receive the message of salvation that the King, in this case Jesus the

Messiah, will bring. This is how John would carry out his mission to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord—the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s not talking about straightening out roads, it’s talking about straightening out hearts and human thinking so they will be prepared and receptive for the coming of the King.

So a question for us to ask ourselves is, how prepared are we for God and Jesus Christ in our lives? Do They find in us an easy road that is smooth and open and inviting for them to work with within us? Or do They find a road that is rutted, full of potholes and broken pavement, that is twisty and windy and difficult to negotiate?

One of my favorite activities in summer, which I hardly ever get to do anymore, is to go out on four-wheel drive roads up in the mountains. And I’ve been on some doozies—some with such tight turns that I thought I’d run into myself going around some corners, and some where I’ve scraped bottom and had to get out and look under the vehicle to make sure all the parts were still in the same place. I’ve been on roads where you look off the side and several hundred yards down the mountainside you see the mangled remains of the vehicle from someone who wasn’t so good a driver. Is this the kind of road we give God to work with? A road that’s so rough and tough and is such hard going that eventually He may just decide it’s not worth the effort and give up? Or do we give Him a smooth road that’s easy to work with, one on which he can make real progress? This is all part of the word picture that’s being used here to convey a spiritual lesson to us.

So John’s purpose and mission is to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. John knew that he wasn’t the primary one. He was the forerunner, the courier, the messenger who would come before the primary one, who was the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. He would be secondary; the Messiah would be primary.

I want to point out something here about Mark’s Gospel because this is where Mark begins his story. If you remember back to the background sermons I gave about the four writers and their messages, one thing I mentioned is that Mark’s Gospel is a message of action. Mark is apparently writing for Peter, who was himself a man of action. And notice how Mark begins his book. He doesn’t start off with genealogies like Matthew, or about the preexistence of Christ like John, or with the message of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah like Luke. No, Mark writes about action. He gets right to the point:

Mark 1:1-4

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.”

3 “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.’”

4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

It’s no fluff, just all action—*bam, bam, bam, bam, bam*. That’s a characteristic of Mark’s Gospel that we’ll see again and again. That’s one reason why Mark’s Gospel is the shortest one—it’s all action and no explanation. Again, just *bam, bam, bam, bam, bam*.

All of the Gospel writers have their own style, and Mark's style is very distinctive. God didn't use just one kind of writer or one kind of person to tell the story.

Now let's notice some added details given in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark that Luke doesn't include. In my last sermon I talked about *remez*, a Hebrew word that means "hint," or "clue," or "echo," or another good definition, "look back." It encompasses all of those meanings. I won't repeat all that I said in that sermon, but I wanted to give it when I did because we're getting to a point in the Gospels when we start finding examples of *remez* used quite often. There were actually a number of examples earlier that we skipped over because we needed to get to a certain point where it would begin to make sense.

One example of *remez* I gave in that sermon was of John baptizing where he did and how he dressed. Matthew and Mark tell us:

Matthew 3:4

4 And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist...

Mark 1:6

6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist...

Why does John clothe himself this way? What is unusual is the leather belt, because most people at the time would've just worn a cord or rope around their waist to keep their robes from flapping in the wind. Few could afford the expense of a leather belt. They're common for us today, but not so much back then. Let's go back to **2 Kings 1:7-8** and notice this dialog between King Ahaziah and some messengers:

7 Then he [King Amaziah] said to them [the messengers], "What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words?"

8 So they answered him, "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

So the prophet Elijah wore something distinctive, so distinctive that it stood out to these men. He was wearing a leather belt. And we see that John the baptizer is wearing a leather belt. *What's the point?* What's the message John is sending by wearing a leather belt? The point is that he is the second Elijah who was to come.

Lets' notice something else here as well. The Hebrew language has far fewer words than English. English has about 700 to 800,000 words while Hebrew has about 150,000 words. So Hebrew is a much less precise language because words can have a number of meanings. And we see a good example of that here in this passage. In the original Hebrew **"hairy man" is literally "master or owner or possessor of hair."**

Now in English that makes little sense. It may mean that, as the New King James and most translations put it, that Elijah is simply a hairy man. However, I checked a number of commentaries, and of those that say anything at all about these words, most say it's referring to him having a hairy garment—just as John the Baptizer had a hairy garment many centuries later. Four different commentaries—*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Adam*

Clarke's Commentary, The Bible Knowledge Commentary and The MacArthur Bible Commentary—**indicate that this is talking about a hairy garment.**

And I'd have to agree, because the literal wording again is “master or owner or possessor of hair,” and what would be the point of stating that a person was the owner or possessor of hair unless it was something hairy that he owned, and the only hairy possession that makes sense in that day and age is a garment made of hair. So I think we can conclude that John the Baptizer was wearing both a leather belt and a garment of animal hair because that's exactly what Elijah wore, and he's reinforcing the message that he's the second Elijah to come.

Remember what the angel Gabriel said in **Luke 1:13-17**, which we reviewed a few minutes ago:

13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

...

16 “And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

17 “He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah...”

And in the sermon we also read what Jesus Christ said over in **Matthew 11:11-14—**

11 “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist....

14 “And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

So again, John was to be a kind of second Elijah. So what does he do? He *dresses like Elijah*, wearing a distinctive leather belt and a garment of animal hair. John is doing a double *remez* here with the animal hair robe and the leather belt. He's sending a double message that he's a prophet like Elijah.

People read this account of how John dressed and they get the impression that he's some kind of wild man, a guy dressing like a caveman, a guy who ought to be locked up somewhere because he's a danger to himself and others. But they miss the point. They miss the point that John is sending a clear message by the way he dresses—the message that he's a prophet, and not just any prophet, but *the* prophet who was foretold to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

Another point that Matthew and Mark make is that John is eating locusts and wild honey. This is another thing that makes people think John was some sort of crazy wild man. So what's going on here? What does this mean? Well, locusts or grasshoppers as it could be translated are designated as clean to eat. And they have been eaten in that part of the world for centuries. They're probably solid protein. And there are plenty of them in that area, so they were a reliable food source.

The “honey” that's mentioned here might've been wild honey from bees, which would be a real treat, and again something that's very nourishing. But “honey” is also used in the Bible for a kind of jam made from dates. And there are and were many date palm trees in the Jordan valley, and dates are also a great source of food. And we heard on our last trip to Israel for the Feast that dates are just about the perfect food—and they were just

ripening at Feast time, so we ate a lot of them. And they were delicious. So this may be talking about that kind of date jam that was called “honey.”

But there’s something else going on here as well. Who is John’s father? Zechariah. And what is Zechariah’s occupation, you might say? He’s a priest. What does that make John? A priest also. If he’s a priest, why is he out here in the desert instead of serving as a priest in the temple in Jerusalem? Have you ever wondered that?

Again, as we talked about earlier, the **Jerusalem priesthood had become very corrupted.** Notice I say the Jerusalem priesthood, meaning the high priest and his cronies and supporters like the Sadducees who controlled the temple and made it their own private business and source of income. The priests who lived scattered around Judea, like Zechariah, and who came in only for their two weeks of the year and their service during the pilgrimage feasts, weren’t didn’t rely on the temple for their livelihood and hadn’t been corrupted to that extent—although no doubt some of them were. So I draw a distinction between the two types of priests—the temple establishment and the others.

And in the recent decades leading up to this time a movement had begun in response to this corruption. How many of you have heard of the Essenes? Those were the people who, as near as we can tell, wrote and hid the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran in the Jordan Valley near the Dead Sea. Many of them appear to have been priests who got fed up with the corruption of the temple and of Jerusalem, so to remain pure they moved out into the desert and established a settlement at Qumran where they could study God’s Word and devote their lives to that. The key thinking behind this movement is that *they had rejected the temple and the Jerusalem priesthood.*

What is John doing? John is a priest, the son of a priest. But is he serving with the priests in Jerusalem? No, he’s out in the desert preaching. What is he preaching? As we’ll see in a minute, he’s preaching a message of repentance and the need to turn to God. Is John an Essene, then? Some people think so, but I don’t. They had too many things wrong. But is John disavowing and turning his back on the Jerusalem priesthood? You bet he is. You could even say that even though he’s a priest, he’s set himself up as the opposite of the Jerusalem priests.

They’re very wealthy. Here’s an artist’s reconstruction of a priestly house that was discovered and excavated in Jerusalem back in the 1960 and 70s. Some of us have visited the ruins of this house. It was incredibly lavish for its day. This is how the Jerusalem priests lived. How did John live? He lived out in the desert, maybe without even a tent to take shelter in at night.

The priests wore the finest linens imported from Babylon for their priestly duties, according to Josephus. What did John wear? A robe made of coarse camel hair. The priests ate lavishly on the finest of foods. What did John eat? The grasshoppers and wild honey that he could find for free down in the Jordan River valley.

You might say that John is the “anti-priest.” Whatever the Jerusalem priesthood is doing, he’s doing the opposite. Whether this is just a matter of circumstances or whether it’s deliberate, I don’t know. But considering the temperament of John and the mission he’s given and the message he is to deliver, I think it’s quite possible if not quite likely a deliberate part of John’s message and ministry, that he’s rejecting the temple establishment.

After all, what did Jesus Christ Himself do? He overturned the tables of the moneychangers, drove out the animals being sold for sacrifice, called the priests a bunch of robbers and thieves, and got them to hate Him so much that they eventually murdered Him. So they both clearly rejected the Jerusalem priesthood and what they stood for and how corrupt they’d become. So this is another angle that may help us understand where John is coming from in his actions and lifestyle that seem so unusual when we read this without any understanding of the background of the times.

So getting back to John and his message in Luke 3:7—

7 Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

One commentator I read pointed out that, considering the setting, this is a picture of what happens in the dry desert in that area of the Jordan Valley and Judean wilderness when it occasionally catches fire from a campfire or a lightning strike. The dry grass and brush starts burning, and out of the cracks and crevices of the rocks **come these desert vipers** trying to escape the flames. Here in Colorado a similar thing would happen, the only difference being that it would be rattlesnakes instead of desert vipers that would be fleeing the fire. This appears to be the analogy John is using, that a fire is coming and they’re like a bunch of poisonous snakes trying to scurry away to escape the flames. It’s not a pretty picture, but a graphic one.

Matthew adds a detail that Luke leaves out. In Matthew 3:7, he says that John said this in response to the Pharisees and Sadducees who showed up, and the Pharisees and Sadducees are apparently the ones John calls vipers and snakes. Why them in particular? We’re more familiar with the Pharisees and their self-righteousness, but the Sadducees were a part of the Jerusalem religious establishment that we’ve talked about, the ones who were allied with the high priests and the temple establishment who were making a financial killing off such things as the money-changing and selling animals for the animal sacrifices. The Sadducees may have actually been *even worse* than the worst of the Pharisees. And this is why John has such choice words for them.

8 “Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

Now what does this mean? Basically the people John is preaching to think that God is on their side because they are physical descendants of Abraham, and therefore they’re all right with God and automatically have salvation as their birthright. They’re not like those nasty gentiles or Romans or Samaritans. John says, “Do you think you’re special to God

because you're a descendant of Abraham? Do you think God needs you? Do you see these rocks scattered on the ground all around us? God could turn these rocks into children of Abraham if He wanted to."

In other words, John is saying, "You *can* be replaced if your life doesn't measure up before God. In fact, you can be replaced by one of these rocks. So if you want to be accepted by God, it's not a matter of who you're descended from. It's a matter of whether you are living a life that shows you truly have repented and are living in a way that pleases God rather than yourself."

9 "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Again, his point is that if you're not bearing fruit that shows a repentant and changed life, you're no better than a fruit tree that doesn't bear any fruit. What good is a tree like that? It's good for nothing than to be cut down and used for firewood. Later we'll see that Jesus uses the same analogy in His teaching.

About this time we might ask ourselves, does this remind you of anyone? Again, who is John? He's the one to come in the spirit and power of Elijah. What kind of message is John giving in his preaching? It's a message like Elijah—very blunt, he doesn't mince words, he tells people they'd better repent and change or they'll suffer the consequences. As the Elijah to come, he's patterning his message after that of the prophet Elijah.

Next we see John address three different groups of people—the general crowd first, then the tax collectors, then the soldiers as they're called here.

10 So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"

This is the same question people asked when they heard Peter's sermon on that first Pentecost after Jesus died and was resurrected—"What shall we do?" And the answer is the same: repent, change your life, turn your life around and become converted by transforming your life into the way of loving your neighbor as yourself.

11 He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

This "tunic" that John refers to here is a kind of undergarment, something like a nightgown or nightshirt. They would wear this under their outer robe. The reason someone would have two is for cold weather to provide extra warmth. So John says, "You with two undergarments to keep yourself warm, what about the man who has no undergarment and is cold because of that? Better you both be a little cold than that he should be freezing while you have these three layers of clothing on." And the same goes for food. Better you both be a little hungry than for your fellow man have nothing to eat. So here are areas where John's message is very much like that Jesus Christ would bring later—love your neighbor and share what you have with others who don't have anything.

12 Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"

13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."

Notice that he didn't tell them, "Don't collect taxes for the Romans." No, they could continue their profession, but they were not to do it as was commonly done. And what was commonly done is that the tax collectors essentially bought their offices too, and

anything they could collect above and beyond what they owed the Romans they could and would keep for themselves. That's why they had a well-deserved reputation as thieves and immoral people. John's instruction is simple: **"Collect no more than what is appointed for you."** In other words, stop stealing from the people and take only what's legally due.

14 Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, **"And what shall we do?"** So he said to them, **"Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."**

I should point out here that in all likelihood these are not Roman soldiers. There are two kinds of soldiers talked about in the Gospels. There are the Romans, who are a part of the Roman military structure there as part of the Roman Empire, and there are the local military forces that would've served functions something like a combination of local police, sheriffs, state troopers and the national guard. They weren't under Roman command, but were under the command of the high priest and local rulers and officials.

And because of their positions, like the tax collectors, they had ample opportunity to abuse the local populace as well. They could bully people around, they could make false accusations against people to force them to pay up to stay out of jail or to keep from getting beaten up, or they could use their authority in other ways to extort or get bribery money from the local population. That's why John says to them, **"Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."** John wouldn't say these things unless that's what was commonly being done and what these two groups had earned a bad reputation for.

We're going to stop here and pick it up next time.

Do we have any questions about any of this?