

JOHN'S ANSWERS

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The prophets foretold of one whom God would send to the people of Israel to prepare them for the work and the teachings of His Son Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was the that one whom Jesus later said was “much more than a prophet” (Luke 7:26). Indeed, John’s primary job was to prepare the hearts of the people for Christ by his preaching. Isaiah 40:3 prophesied of John, “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” Through Malachi, the Lord said, “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me” (Mal 3:1). Numerous New Testament passages declare that John fulfilled these prophecies in preparing the way for Christ (Matt 3:3; 11:7-11; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 1:17,76; 3:4-6; 7:24-28). Luke 3:10-14 records John’s response to the specific questions of three different groups of people. Each of John’s answers to the people, publicans, and soldiers served the purpose of preparing their hearts for the teachings of Christ.

The people

Luke 3:10-11 says, “*And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answers and says unto them, He that has two coats, let him impart to him that has none; and he that has meat, let him do likewise.*” John’s answer to the people prepared the people for the teachings of Christ. The New Testament teaches men to have compassion on the poor and to serve those who are in need. For example, Jesus told a rich young man to “give to the poor” to lay up treasure in heaven (Mtt 19:21-24). He instructed one who had invited him to eat with him to “call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:13-14). Jesus himself “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,” and taught his disciples to “*be servant of all*” in order to be great in the kingdom of God (Mark 10:42-45). The brethren in Macedonia and Achaia made a “contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem” (Rom 15:26). Galatians 2:10 says that “*we should remember the poor.*” Galatians 6:10 says, “*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*” James 1:27 says, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

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(continued)

The publicans

Luke 3:12-13 says, *“Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.”* The publicans collected taxes and often extorted money from the people and grew rich. The New Testament teaches men not to love material things. Jesus said, *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon”* (Matt 6:24; see also Luke 12:13-34; 16:13-15). If we love the world and the things of the world, then the love of the Father is not in us (1 John 2:15-17). A covetous heart will defile a man before God (Mark 7:21-23; Rom 13:9-10). Covetousness is actually a form of idolatry (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5). Hebrews 13:5 commands: *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have.”* We must look on the eternal things, rather than temporal things (2 Cor 4:16-18), and flee from a love of money and the desire to be rich (1 Tim 6:6-11).

The soldiers

Luke 3:14 says, *“And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.”* The soldiers had great power and would be naturally tempted to use violence, false accusations, and to extort bribes. All of these things are contrary to the New Testament and John prepared the soldiers for the teachings of Christ. Christ taught men to not resist evil but to return good for evil (Matt 5:38-48). When the Roman soldiers were converted to Christ, they beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks and did not learn war any more (Isa 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3). This is what ultimately caused the church of Christ to destroy the Roman Empire (Dan 2:34-35,44-45). It was by conversion of the hearts of the people, including the soldiers, to the teachings of Christ, the same teachings introduced by John the Baptist. The New Testament also condemns all forms of lying and false accusations as well as covetousness, extortion, stealing, cheating and all forms of dishonesty. Thus, false accusations and bribery are sinful practices as is violence. As we hear the answers from our God about how we should live our lives in this world, as the people had opportunity to hear through John, we need to listen to His instruction, and follow it with all of our hearts.