

Luke 1- Part 1

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MEETING LUKE

First, Luke was not one of the 12 Apostles, he was not even of the Jewish nation. Unlike Matthew, Mark and John, he was not an eyewitness of the events of Christ's life. So, what do we know about Luke? Paul says in Colossians 4:14 that he was a nice person and a doctor.

Luke, the beloved doctor, sends his greetings. . .

Paul had listed the Jewish men who were with him in verse 11 and Luke was not on that list. So, he was a Gentile. This accords with a comment by church historian Eusebius

many years later that he was of “Antiochan parentage” from the city of Antioch in Syria.

Luke had become a Christian long before he met Paul in Troas (Acts 16), so when they became acquainted, Luke was ready to close his medical practice and sign on with Paul in taking Christ to the gentile world. (Troas was up in Turkey.)

Luke was skilled in Classic Greek as well as Common Greek. He was familiar with the prophets of the Old Testament, especially Isaiah. This can be seen here in Luke chapter 1 where he includes extensive references to Isaiah as quoted by Zachariah, Elizabeth and Mary. If ever Isaiah had an admirer in the early days of the church, it was the good doctor Luke.

Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke describing the life of Jesus and followed this book with the Book of Acts that describes the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church. The two books combined contain more words than all of the writings of the Apostle Paul. Luke wrote more of the New Testament than any other writer.

LUKE'S PREFACE TO LUKE

(1:1) Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. (2) They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples.

- There had been earlier writers (vs 1), unknown in our time. The subject of Jesus was very popular. These writings were on the local best seller list. Many who were healed or fed by Jesus must have had their stories written for friends and posterity. Such a rich source of information!
- **Fulfilled** (vs 1). He was looking back to prophecies that foretold the coming Savior. For Luke, history was no accident. It was the **fulfillment** of a divine plan. The

coming of Christ had been predicted by the prophets of the Old Testament. Isaiah 53 is the crowning example.

- His information came from **eyewitnesses** (vs. 2). During Luke's later travels in Palestine, he would have had ample opportunity to interview **eyewitnesses**.

LUKE'S INTENTIONS

(3.) Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account for you, most honorable Theophilus, (4) so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.

- Luke is the only writer of the canonical Gospels who did not claim acquaintance with Jesus during His ministry. He writes from the standpoint of a historian who came to the land of Israel and gathered information. He was a researcher (vs. 3) who was compelled to write the story of Jesus.
- The name **Theophilus** means "lover of God." Luke addresses him as **most honorable** (vs 3) suggesting that he was a Roman governor. The Greek word is used just three other times: in Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25. In each case, it is used of a Roman governor. Luke does not put the Roman government in any bad light with the exception of Felix in Acts 24:27.
- **So you can be certain of the truth** (vs. 4). Luke's statement is one either of arrogance ("I can't be wrong") or of inspiration by God. Paul and Luke had been traveling companions. In 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul quotes Luke 10:7 and calls it Scripture. It is the years of association with Paul that gives the Gospel of Luke the ring of apostolicity.
- Inspiration does not necessarily mean revelation. For Luke it meant months of traveling and interviewing

witnesses. Inspiration here is that special gift from God that keeps errors out of a historian's research.

ANNOUNCING THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

WHEN IT WILL HAPPEN

(5.) When Herod was king of Judea,

- **Herod** ruled from BC 37-4. He was an Edomite (descended from Esau, brother of Jacob in the old Testament) who was hated by the Jewish population.
- Since Luke is writing to a Roman officeholder, he dates the event by the reign of **Herod**, the **king**. **J. W. McGarvey** describes **Herod** as "a Jewish proselyte, an . . . Edomite by birth, founder of the Herodian family. . ."

RECIPIENTS

(5b) there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. (6) Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. (7) They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

- The **priests** were divided into 24 courses and each served one week in the temple. All priests were from the tribe of **Aaron** and **Zacharias** had also married a lady from the same tribe (vs. 5).
- While most worship of God had fallen to great depths in the Jewish society, **Zacharias** and **Elizabeth** were blameless (vs. 6). They lived the way God asked people to live. And they were blessed beyond measure for doing so. They were mainline, godly saints.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES

(8.) One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. (9) As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. (10) While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

- Luke quickly brings the plot into the presence of **God**. Zacharias is serving Him. Many believe this is the only moment in his lifetime that Zacharias drew this duty. Such excitement! Such exhilaration!

- The temple in Jerusalem was like the temple of Solomon's time. A miniature has been constructed in Jerusalem and this is a photo of the miniature.



- The story is unfolding in the inner portion of the **Temple** (vs.9) where only the priests could go. The priest appeared **before God** on behalf of the **multitude**. They, in turn, represented all of Israel. **Prayer** was a standard part of the ceremony (vs. 10). It was probably the 9:00 A.M. burning of **incense**, although the same event was repeated at 3:00 P.M. also.

GOD'S ANGEL GABRIEL

(11.) While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the

incense altar. (12) Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. (13) But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. (14) You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,

- There had not been a word from heaven for more than 400 years. Understandably, **Zacharias was shaken**. The more a person fears God, the more awed they are by God's representatives.
- The **prayer** being answered had been prayed long ago and not repeated recently (vs. 13). An answer earlier than now would not have served God's purposes. A son! (vs. 13). The dream of a lifetime, but the family did not have the option of selecting a **name** for him (vs. 13). There is no doubt that **Zacharias** and **Elizabeth rejoiced** (vs. 14) at the **birth** of this child. The text reports that the neighbors later also rejoiced. Luke 1:58.

THE SIGNIFICANCE

(15.) for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. (16) And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. (17.) He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly."

- For evidence of his **greatness** (vs. 15) in the sight of the **Lord**, we only need to consult Matthew 11:11.
- The baby was to be raised as a Nazarite and beverage alcohol was forbidden to them as well as anything from the grapevine. Numbers 6:2-4. This would effectively

force John from normal society. He was to have the **Holy Spirit** from birth, or even before. John showed the **spirit** of **Elijah** the Old Testament prophet in his ascetic dress and life (2 Kings 1:8, Matthew 3:4) and in his message of repentance (1 Kings 18:21-40).

- The life-task of this promised son has already been set in heaven. Indeed, John caused many in Israel to turn - repent. The angel is quoting (vs. 17) from Malachi 4:6, showing the word of God's prophets like Malachi is authoritative in heaven. These words of promise were among the last of the Old Testament documents and among the first of the New Testament record right here. They form a connecting link.
- John's work would create needed social changes in Israel, but what is more important, he would be **preparing** people for the coming of the Lord. In Isaiah 40:3 this is Jehovah - whom we soon learn is Jesus of Nazareth. The name is correctly applied to the Son as well as the Father. Luke reports later that John was successful in turning many in Israel back to obedience to God. Luke documents this in Luke 3:10-18.

ZACHARIAH'S REACTION

(18.) Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years." (19) Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was He who sent me to bring you this good news! (20) But now, since you didn't believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time."

- It is not wise to ask God, or His heavenly representative, for proof of their promises (vs 18). It is plainly lack of faith — trust. **Zechariah** was in disbelief because of the

usual laws of reproduction, forgetting that he was talking to a messenger directly from the Maker of those laws.

- **Gabriel's** name means "Mighty one of God." Only the Lord God of heaven could have sent him to **Zechariah**. The sign **Zechariah** requested was granted. It served to strengthen his faltering faith, also as a punishment for lack of it. He would be unable to speak for the next nine months (vs. 20). While the Book of Acts opened with the gift of tongues, Luke opened with the sign of silence.

THE AFTERMATH

(21.) Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. (22) When he finally did come out, he couldn't speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary. (23) When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. (24) Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. (25) "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children."

- **Zechariah** was taking too long for the normal incense routine. The crowd was talking about it outside (vs. 21).
- Not only was the silence of tongue a sign to **Zechariah**, it quickly became one for the people waiting outside when he emerged. His inability to speak quickly became evidence that he had seen a vision while in the temple (vs. 22).
- Having made one serious error, he was not about to leave Jerusalem before his assigned work time was fulfilled. But did he ever have a story to share with Elizabeth! (vs. 23).

- It is likely that his house was at Hebron, but there is no firm evidence. That must have been a very quiet household for a while.

ANNOUNCING THE BIRTH OF JESUS

THE CIRCUMSTANCES

(26.) In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, (27.) to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.

- The dating is timed by pregnancy of Elizabeth. It was the **sixth month**. It is here we learn that John was six months older than Jesus.
- Gabriel is on the scene again — this time in **Nazareth** (vs. 26). This is God's second or third intervention in the narrative.
- **In Galilee.** Theophilus, who received this letter, was not familiar with the location of all of the towns like a local person would have been.
- **Nazareth** is not mentioned in the Old Testament or Josephus or the Talmud. The word means *Branch*. (See *An Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words* by W. E. Vine, page 39.) Luke was undoubtedly reminded of the Old Testament promises of a coming Branch.
 - **Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot—yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.** Isaiah 11:1. (NLT)
 - **Soon I am going to bring My servant, the Branch.** Zechariah 3:8 (NLT)
 - **Tell him, 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Here is the man called the Branch. He will branch out from where He is and build the Temple of the LORD.** Zechariah 6:12 (NLT)

It is clear that Jesus was the Branch from Branchville.

- Luke the doctor does not waver in describing Mary as a **virgin** (vs. 27). His professional credibility is on the line.
- The betrothal period was not just social, like it is in western countries. The couple was legally bound as in marriage and the only escape was by divorce. Matthew 1:19.
- **Joseph**, the future groom, was a direct descendant of Israel's King **David**. This is amply demonstrated in the first chapter of Matthew, where it serves as a credential to Jewish men that Jesus had a right to be on David's throne.

THE GREETING FROM GABRIEL

(28.) Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you! [Blessed are you among women.]" (29) Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. (30) "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God!

- **Mary** wondered what this salutation meant (vs. 28). It had been more than 400 years since God had communicated through a prophet, let alone to a girl in Israel. (Naturally, she had not heard of Zacharias' experience.) **Mary** had lived in such a way as to find a special favor with God (vs. 30). Though young, she was a lady of faith.

GABRIEL'S PREDICTION

(31.) You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name Him Jesus. (32) He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David. (33) And He

will reign over Israel forever; His Kingdom will never end!"

- Here, as in John's case, God was specifying the name of the child, **Jesus**. It is the Old Testament word Joshua and means "Jehovah is Salvation." The child will be the **Son of God**.
- He will be on **the throne of His ancestor David** (vs. 32). Furthermore, he will rule **forever** and his **kingdom** will be eternal (vs. 33). Since Mary is being told that **Jesus** would not have an earthly father, the angel is saying that Mary, too, was from the line of **King David**. Luke demonstrates this later in Luke 3:32. Jesus directly fulfills the promise made to **David** so long ago.
Your house and your kingdom will continue before Me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever. 2 Samuel 7:16 (NLT)
- **Jacob** is an alternative name for Israel. Genesis 32:28.

THE IMPOSSIBLE EXPLAINED

(34.) Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." (35) The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and He will be called the Son of God.

- **Mary's** question (vs. 34) differs in nature from that of Zacharias. He asked for proof. She believed, but was asking about the physiology of the promise since she had not had sexual relations with a man. The answer is delicately put: **The Holy Spirit will overshadow you**. It will be God's baby - **the Son of God** (vs. 35).

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR MARY

(36.) What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was

barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. (37) For nothing is impossible with God. "

- Gabriel next offered a sign: Your aged relative, Elizabeth is now **six months** along with a **son** (vs. 36). That would certainly confirm Mary's promise. How could they be relatives, yet one was from the line of David and the other from Aaron? Their common ancestor was through their mothers. **God** has power to do what He says he will do (vs. 37).

MARY'S SUBMISSION

(38.) Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

- **Mary** could have said "No." This wise lady knew that her reputation for purity would be trashed by the town talk. She understood that Joseph could divorce her for unfaithfulness. (He considered divorce when he learned about her pregnancy. Matthew 1:19.) Her response: She said she was the **Lord's servant** and would accept His will (verse 38).

Luke has introduced himself to Theophilus and linked with the last book of the Old Testament. Then he has introduced Theophilus to the events leading up to the birth of John, showing the hand of God in that extraordinary birth. After learning about John, Luke then focuses on the miraculous birth of Jesus and His purpose of reigning on the throne of King David forever.