

'Luke' - Extra Teaching Points #1

Luke 1:1-25 (NASB)

Something big is coming!

Luke 1:1-4 "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴ so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught."

Luke tells us what he is writing, and why.

- Others had tried to write down the events as eyewitnesses had handed them down.
- Luke seems to have felt he could do a better job of compiling all the eyewitness testimonies into an orderly account.
- Luke says he has investigated everything carefully, and wants to put the information into a chronological order.

Luke got his information from eyewitnesses and servants (ministers) of the Word.

- In [2Tim 2:2](#) it is not known if these are two groups of people—eyewitnesses, and those whom the eyewitnesses trusted... or if Luke is referring to one group who were eyewitnesses, and so became servants of the Word.
- The point is, **Luke's account is accurate and trustworthy!**
 - In [Acts 17:6, 8](#) Luke mentions government officials called "*politarchs*."
 - For many years skeptics thought Luke made-up this title because it only appeared in Luke's writings, and was otherwise an unknown title.
 - However, in recent years, several inscriptions from Thessalonica circa 1st century have been found that use this term.
 - What was once considered a challenge to Luke's accuracy and reliability, is now considered verification. Other such verifications exist as well.

Q: Who was Luke?

- Luke is a "nobody."
 - Gnostic gospels always claimed to be written by people whose credentials wouldn't be questioned (i.e., Thomas, Peter, Judas, etc.).
 - These claims are false because these people were long dead before they were written.
- We wouldn't know Luke if he hadn't written *Luke* and *Acts*.
 - His obscurity makes him *more* credible... not *less*.

Extra Info on Luke:

Paul said Luke was a doctor ([Col 4:14](#)).

- Paul was often physically abused during his ministry ([2Cor 11:23-27](#)) and also mentions a health condition that tormented him ([2Cor 12:7](#)).
 - It could be that Luke served as Paul's personal physician as well as fellow servant of the Lord.

Luke is thought by most scholars to have been a gentile.

- If Luke was a Gentile, he was the only Gentile that contributed to the writing of the Bible.
 - Luke is second only to Paul in terms of volume of writing.
 - Luke wrote both the Gospels of *Luke* and *Acts*.
- The evidence for Luke's ethnicity is slim and circumstantial.

- In [Col 4:10-11](#) Paul lists those with him who were Jewish (of the circumcision)... and Luke is not listed among them.
- Luke uses the highest most educated Greek writing (only the book of *Hebrews* uses a more eloquent Greek style) which would be less likely of one who was Jewish.
- Luke is described by many as a historian of the first order and uses a chronological style, which was more common among Gentile writers.
 - Greeks tend to tell stories in a linear way, from beginning to end.
 - Jews tended to tell stories in a more topical way... often jumping forward and backward in the time line to connect events to a train of thought.

Luke 1:5-7 *“In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.”*

Zacharias was a priest, **not a high a priest**. Not only was he descended from Aaron and the tribe of Levi, but his wife Elizabeth was too, which would have caused others to consider them a “**power couple**,”—an especially pure priestly family.

- This means John the Baptist came from a strong priestly background.
- John the Baptist, however, never served as a priest; instead, he was called to be a prophet.
 - Priests usually began their years of service at age 30, which is about when John started his prophetic ministry.

We are told Zacharias and Elizabeth were “**both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.**”

- This is not said of many people in the Bible.
 - Calvinists would have difficulty explaining this statement since they believe being righteous and blameless is only possible after regeneration, which didn’t happen until after Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection ([1Peter 1:3](#)).
- Though most of Israel lost touch with really serving God, there was a **faithful remnant** ([Rom 9:27](#)). John’s parents were part of the faithful remnant.

Zacharias was an old man; and his wife, Elizabeth, an old woman... and they had no children.

- They remind us of Abraham and Sarah, **which may be intentional**.

Extra Info on Priests:

- There were 1000’s of priests, but only one high priest.
 - Because of Roman occupation and political reasons there were two High priests at the time of John the Baptist’s birth, (i.e., Annas and Caiaphas), though this was a violation of the Law of Moses.
- All priests were descendants of Aaron.
 - There were so many priests they couldn’t all minister at the same time.
 - David divided the priesthood into 24 groups which served the temple at different times of the year ([1Chron 24:3](#)).
 - Each would serve for two weeks a year... one week at a time.
- One of the greatest privileges for a priest was to go into the holy place (not the holy of holies) and serve there.
 - The holy of holies could only be entered by the high priest once a year, but the holy place could be entered by one of the priests every day.

- In the holy place was the lamp stand, the showbread, and the golden altar of incense.
 - Incense would be burned twice a day in the holy place.
 - Three times a day the Israelites would gather at the temple for prayer.
 - The first and third times of prayer would coincide with the burning of incense – evening and morning – along with the evening and morning sacrifices.
 - Since only one priest could go into the holy place at a time, they cast lots to determine which priest from the group of priests serving that week would get that privilege.
 - Such a great privilege could only be given to a priest once in his lifetime.
 - Zacharias would have been waiting for the privilege of serving in the holy place all his life... as well as waiting for the birth of a child.
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Luke 1:8-10 *“Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, ⁹ according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.”*

Q: Is there anything significant about the connection between burning incense, and prayer?

- Incense smelled sweet, and apparently that is how prayer is to God—a sweet aroma.
 - The imagery of prayer and incense found in [Rev 5:8; 8:3-5](#) may have come from this well-known ritual in the temple.

Q: Why is prayer a sweet aroma to God?

- Probably because prayer humbles us and causes us to realize our need for God. ([Prov 3:34](#); [James 4:6](#); [1Peter 5:5](#))

Luke 1:11-17

*“And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, **“Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. ¹⁴ “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 he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. ¹⁶ “And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ “It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN**, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”***

Q: In verse 12, the first thing Gabriel says is the same thing angels always say first, “Don’t be afraid.” Why do angels always start off with, “don’t be afraid?”

- Apparently the first impulse of anyone who sees an angel is to be afraid.
 - Some Charismatics claim to be able to give orders to angels; others claim to see angels, but don’t have any fear or dread of them.
 - That is inconsistent with Biblical accounts of human encounters with angels.
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Extra Info on Angels:

Angels are ministering spirits ([Heb 1:14](#)).

- The Greek word translated “angles” is “*aggelos*” which means “messenger.”
- Spirits don’t have bodies ([Luke 24:39](#)), though they can apparently assume a human shape ([Gen 19:1-3](#); [Heb 13:2](#)).
 - Angels also appear as dazzling light ([Matt 28:2-4](#)).
 - The description of angels having wings is more likely a description of their ability to move through the air like birds than a physical description.

- Angels never appear as cute, chubby infants!
- Angels don't marry or reproduce like humans ([Matt 22:30](#)).
 - Some believe that angels don't have gender, although angels are always spoken of in the male gender (*he, him, his*).
 - Masculine pronouns may be more of a statement about their authority than their gender.
- Not all angels are good.
 - The Bible classifies some angels as "elect" ([1 Tim 5:21](#)) or "holy" ([Matt 25:31](#); [Mark 8:38](#)).
 - All angels were originally holy, enjoying the presence of God ([Matt 18:10](#)) and the environment of heaven ([Mark 13:32](#)).
 - Other angels oppose God under the leadership of Satan ([Matt 25:41](#); [2 Peter 2:4](#); [Jude 6](#); [Eph 6:12](#)).
- We don't know whether or not every angel carries out the same tasks, or if some of them specialize in certain areas.
 - The Bible does speak about classes of angelic beings like cherubim ([Ezk 1](#)) and seraphim ([Is 6](#)).
 - We also know the names of two notable angels: Michael ([Dan 10:13](#); [Jude 9](#)) and Gabriel ([Dan 9:21](#); [Luke 1:19, 26](#)).
- The unnamed angels who appear most often in scripture carry out a variety of tasks... all designed to serve God...
 - **Worship and praise**—This is the main activity portrayed in heaven ([Is 6:1-3](#); [Rev 4-5](#)).
 - **Messengers**—They serve as messengers to communicate God's will to men. They helped reveal the Law of Moses ([Acts 7:52-53](#)) and served as the carriers of much of the material in Daniel and Revelation.
 - **Guiding**—Angels gave instructions to Joseph about the birth of Jesus ([Matt 1-2](#)); to the women at the tomb; to Philip ([Acts 8:26](#)); and to Cornelius ([Acts 10:1-8](#)).
 - **Providing**—God has used angels to provide physical needs such as food for Hagar ([Gen 21:17-20](#)), Elijah ([1 Kings 19:6](#)), and Christ after His temptation ([Matt 4:11](#)).
 - **Protecting**—Keeping God's people out of physical danger, as in the cases of Daniel and the lions, and his three friends in the fiery furnace ([Dan 3 and 6](#)).
 - **Delivering**—Getting God's people out of danger once they're in it. Angels released the apostles from prison in [Acts 5](#), and repeated the process for Peter in [Acts 12](#).
 - **Strengthening and encouraging**—Angels strengthened Jesus after His temptation ([Matt 4:11](#)), encouraged the apostles to keep preaching after releasing them from prison ([Acts 5:19-20](#)), and told Paul that everyone on his ship would survive the impending shipwreck ([Acts 27:23-25](#)).
 - **Answering prayer**—God often uses angels as His means of answering the prayer of His people ([Dan 9:20-24](#); [10:10-12](#); [Acts 12:1-17](#)).
 - **Caring for believers at the moment of death** - In the story of Lazarus and the rich man, we read that angels carried the spirit of Lazarus to "Abraham's bosom" when he died ([Luke 16:22](#)).
 - **Executioners**—Angels are sometimes used by God to punish sin. An angel of the Lord killed an Assyrian camp ([2 Kings 19:20-34](#)) – "*behold, they were all dead corpses.*" The Assyrian Army was annihilated. A destroying angel was sent, but later withheld, to punish David for his vanity in taking a census of the great number of his people. At the time of Moses and the Exodus, the Egyptian firstborn were killed by an angel of death.

Q: The next thing Gabriel says is "Your prayer has been heard." What prayer was heard?

- We might assume that Zacharias had been praying for a child, but they were very old at this point. Would they still have been praying for a son?

- Could it be they had prayed for a son when they were younger, and it was being granted now when they were older? It is never too late for God!
- **On the other hand, Zacharias was in the temple praying for the redemption of Israel. Gabriel could have been saying that God was ready to answer the prayer for redemption that Zacharias had just prayed.**
 - The announcement that Zacharias and Elizabeth were going to have a son was also the beginning of the story of the redemption of Israel.

Extra Thoughts on Prayers Being Heard:

In [Acts 10:4](#) we read that prayers & gifts to the poor serve as memorials before God... they don't go away!

- It could be that the prayers we prayed years ago, (prayers we no longer pray) have been stored up, like memorials. God remembers them, and will answer them on His timetable.

Q: What is the connection between prayers and gifts to the poor?

- Both should be focused on sending God's resources where they benefit His Kingdom most!
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Q: [Vs 15](#) Gabriel said John would be "great in the sight of the Lord." Why is this significant?

- There are many people who are "great men", but John would be "great in the sight of the Lord."
 - John's parents were both righteous before God ([Luke 1:6](#)).
- The Pharisees were righteous before men; but these people were righteous before God.
- God looks at the heart, while men look at the outward appearance ([1Sam 16:7](#)).
- Jesus said there was no one greater than John ([Matt 11:11](#)).
- **Q: Who do you want to think you are great? God or men?**

Q: Why was it important that Gabriel said John would "drink no wine or liquor?"

- It is probably a reference to John being a Nazarite ([Numbers 6](#)).
- Nazarites had three restrictions which were self-imposed.
 - They wouldn't touch anything produced by the grapevine.
 - They would never cut their hair during the time of their vow, which could be a month or a lifetime.
 - They would have no contact with a dead body.
- The Nazarite vow was a vow of separation from the world, but short of isolation.
 - The restrictions of the vow were to avoid the things normal people would do.
 - **It was a vow to be unusually devoted to God.**

Q: What does it mean that John would be "filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb?"

- Gabriel was most likely meaning that John would be filled with the Spirit from time to time throughout his whole life.
 - John had his low points and even doubted Jesus at one point ([Matt 11:3](#); [Luke 7:19, 20](#)).
- The indwelling of the Spirit is a New Testament phenomenon that has been happening since the day of Pentecost in [Acts 2](#).
 - In [John 7:39](#) we are told that while Jesus was on earth, the Holy Spirit had not yet been given; because Jesus had not yet been glorified.
 - The Apostle John was most likely talking about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every believer.
- The Holy Spirit was active on the earth before Jesus was glorified.
 - He would come upon people and enable them to do things people couldn't normally do.

Q: What was John's mission? (Vs 16-17)

- John's mission was to prepare people for Jesus—to be a forerunner, and to get them **thinking the right way about their sins and about God** ([Luke 1:17](#)).
 - The nation had become apathetic about the things of God, and were therefore compromised.
 - Even the most prominent leaders – the Pharisees and the chief priests – were wicked people internally... in their hearts.
 - The nation was not ready for the Messiah, so they had to be prepped or primed for His message so they could respond properly.
- John was a prophet of the Old Testament sort, sent to prepare “**a people**” for the Lord.
 - He wasn't sent to prepare people in general, but “**a people**”... a certain group of people.

Q: What is so significant about John being sent in the spirit of Elijah “TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN?”

- This is a quote from [Mal 4:5-6](#), the last verse of the Old Testament that predicted God would send a prophet like Elijah before the “great and terrible day of the Lord.”
 - The “great and terrible day of the Lord” was to be the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel by the Romans in A.D. 70.
- God was not going to send that judgment without first giving Israel a chance to repent.

John was the last warning before the Messiah and before the judgment.

- The coming of the Messiah was going to bring 2 things:
 - The offering of redemption to Israel... though it would only be offered to the remnant of Israel—the people who were prepared for the Lord.
 - Judgment for the rest of Israel for rejecting not only Jesus, but also all the prophets ([Matt 23:37-39](#); [Luke 13:34-35](#)).
- Jesus said that John was Elijah “who is to come.” ([Matt 11:14](#))
 - John was the fulfillment of the prediction about Elijah.
 - Some Christians, and many Jews, still think Elijah the Tishbite is going to come back in the flaming chariot and whirlwind he left in.
 - At Passover, many times Jews will set a place at the table for Elijah in case he comes back that night.

Luke 1:18-25

¹⁸ Zacharias said to the angel, “**How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.**” ¹⁹ The angel answered and said to him, “**I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.**” ²⁰ “**And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.**”

²¹ The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. ²³ When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.

²⁴ After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, ²⁵ “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men.”

Q: Zacharias is struck mute for not believing what the angel said, yet Mary wasn't punished when she asked the same angel “How can this be.” ([Luke 1:34](#)) Why was Zacharias punished for his question?

- One explanation might be that Mary was asking “how” (wanting to know the process), not questioning the truth of the prophecy.
 - However, Abraham and Sarah doubted and even laughed when God Himself made them the promise of a child... yet they were not punished.
- It could be that being mute was not a punishment, but rather an answer to Zacharias’ question, “How can I Know?”
 - The inability to speak could be seen as a sign rather than a punishment.
 - Zacharias ended his silence the day John was born... So did God!
 - There had been 400 years of silence since the last prophet had been sent... God was ending that silence by sending John.
 - Priests represented God... perhaps Zacharias was representing God as having been silent for a long time, but now speaking again.
 - When John was named, Zacharias was able to speak again, and immediately prophesied... ending God’s 400 years of silence ([Luke 1:67](#)).

Follow Up Assignment

Q: If Gabriel appeared to you and said, “*Your prayers have been heard,*” what would you expect to happen?

- If your prayers and gifts are memorials before God ([Acts 10:4](#)), do they remind God of your selfishness... or your deep desire for Him to send his resources where they can advance His Kingdom?
- CHALLENGE: Keep a prayer journal for the next week and see what kind of memorials you are leaving in front of God.

Q: God was silent for 400 years before He sent John. During that time, only a few people remained faithful... the rest settled for being religious.

- Have you experienced God’s silence? If so, how did it affect you?

Q: The nation of Israel had become apathetic about the things of God, and were therefore compromised. John’s mission was to prepare “a people” for Jesus—to get them **thinking the right way about their sins and about God.**

- Are you really ready for the King?