

CONCERNING THE WAY

December 6, 2011

LESSON 122: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



Introduction: Authorship

There are many things in the book of Luke that are also related in the other gospels of Matthew and Mark, and in fact, Luke probably drew some of his gospel from their accounts. But there seems to be more details in this gospel than the others. Like the other gospels, Jesus is presented here as the promised Son of Man, the Messiah, who was described in Daniel 7:13-14. This passage describes One who would someday come to earth and rule over the nation of Israel and bring blessings to the whole world. Luke relates how Jesus came as this Messiah and the promised Kingdom was offered to Israel, but He was rejected and killed by His own people. This delay in the coming of the Kingdom was foreseen by God, of course, and the many prophecies of the Kingdom will be fulfilled in the future when Christ returns to the earth and Israel finally recognizes Jesus as their Messiah, but until then God is “taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name (Acts 15:14) meaning the Church. Luke closes his account with the resurrection of Jesus and His return to His Father, and the book of Acts picks up the story there with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Church.

The theme of the book is that the salvation of Jews and Gentiles predicted in the Old Testament is in the process of being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Christ came to save all of humanity. Since the conclusion of Acts shows Paul in Rome, and since the gospel of Luke was written before Acts (Acts 1:1), Luke’s gospel was probably written about 60 A.D., possibly in Caesarea during Paul’s two-year imprisonment there (Acts 24:27).

About Dr. Luke:

- The early church fathers and church tradition agree that Luke, Paul’s “beloved physician,” was the author of both this gospel and the “sequel”, the book of Acts (see Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24).
- Luke was a physician, a missionary, and is considered among all Bible scholars to be a great historian. He was a Greek whose name was Loukas which is Lucanus in Latin. He was obviously educated and was able to interview first hand witnesses of the events of Jesus’ life. He was able to research and write down these observations and had a commanding knowledge of Greek literature and language.
- Some believe he had been a slave, because most physicians were slaves in those days in the Roman Empire, but we don’t know for sure.
- One unproven tradition is that he had neither wife nor children and died in Bithynia at the age of seventy-four. Another tradition says that he was martyred under Emperor Domitian.
- Others had written about Christ and His teachings before Luke did (Luke 1:1), including Matthew and Mark, both of whom had known Christ personally, which Luke probably did not. However, Luke’s long association with the Apostle Paul and others who had known the Lord (Luke 1:2), together with his obvious ability in investigation and research, enabled him to write down an accurate account of his own.

Luke 1:1-4 Since many people have attempted to write an orderly account of the events that have transpired among us, (2) just as they were passed down to us by those who had been eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning, (3) I, too, have

carefully investigated everything from the beginning and have decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, (4) so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

- These verses show how Luke went about his research. He was meticulous, which you would expect a physician to be, and wanted to be sure of his evidence and confirm the facts about the life of Jesus.
- Notice Luke wasn't just reporting hearsay from what was being said around the world about Jesus, but interviewed actual eyewitnesses, people who were there, like the apostles themselves who walked with Jesus. This would mean he interviewed many witnesses and carefully compared their stories. If there were inaccuracies in his writing, there were many people living at the time who would have objected.
- Luke apparently did this work for a man named Theophilus. Who was he? We don't know exactly, but he may have been a Roman official, because of the way Luke addressed him.
- **Who are some of the people Luke could have interviewed who were there "from the beginning"?**

Luke 1:5-7 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. (6) Both of them were righteous before God, having lived blamelessly according to all of the commandments and regulations of the Lord. (7) They had no children because Elizabeth was barren and because both of them were getting old.

- Luke is the only gospel writer to give us the details of the very beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist. He did this because he considered John's role of the herald of the Messiah so important.
- This Herod was "Herod the Great", a cruel ruler who was loyal to Rome but hated and feared by the Jews. Herod was originally nominated to succeed his father Antipater as king of Judea by Julius Caesar – he ruled for 33 years. He was called "the great" because of his extensive building programs, the ruins of which can still be seen today, including the seaport of Caesarea, his palace, and improvements to the Temple in Jerusalem. But he was evil and cruel in his desire for power and prestige, murdering three of his sons and many others, including his wife Mariamne, because he felt threatened by them.
- **Who are Zechariah and Elizabeth and why are they important?** The name Zacharias means "God remembers", and Elizabeth means "His oath". What was the oath that God took? Read Psalm 89:34-37.
- Both Zechariah and Elizabeth came from priestly families.
- Luke says they were righteous before God, having lived blamelessly. This doesn't mean they never sinned, but they believed God and obeyed the commandments and regulations, which included making sacrifices for when they did sin.
- Elizabeth had no children, which was a very serious disgrace for a woman in those days.

Luke 1:8-10 When Zechariah was serving with his division of priests in God's presence, (9) he was chosen by lot to go into the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense, according to the custom of the priests. (10) And the entire congregation of people was praying outside at the time when the incense was burned.

- Service at the temple in Jerusalem was divided up between 24 divisions of priests, which was drawn up in David's time (1 Chron. 24:7-18). The priests in each division were on duty twice a year for a week at a time. This was one of Zechariah's weeks to serve, and being chosen to be the priest to offer incense in the sanctuary was a very big deal, as it could only happen once in the lifetime of a priest.
- The incense Zechariah offered represented the prayers of the entire nation, that's why everyone was gathered outside praying when it was offered.

Luke 1:11-17 An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the incense altar. (12) When Zechariah saw him, he was startled, and fear overwhelmed him. (13) But the angel said to him, "Stop being afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to name him John. (14) You will have great joy, and many people will rejoice at his birth, (15) because he will be great before the Lord. He will never drink wine or any strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. (16) He will bring many of Israel's descendants back to the Lord their God. (17) He is the one who will go before the Lord with the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, and to prepare the people to be ready for the Lord."

- God speaks again in Israel after 400 years of silence. He sends an angel to announce the birth of a son to this faithful elderly couple. As we see in other parts of the Bible, the appearance of an angel caused great fear, and the angel had to tell Zechariah to "stop being afraid". **Why would the appearance of an angel of God cause fear?**
- Zechariah must have been praying for a son, because the angel said "your prayer has been heard".
- Amazingly, the angel told Zechariah the boy's name would be, and six aspects of his character.
- Some scholars believe that John took the vows of a "Nazarite". One of the vows you took to be a Nazarite was to not drink wine or strong drink. He was to find his joy in the Holy Spirit and in God, not the things of the world.
- "be filled with Holy Spirit before he is born" – this is never said about any other person in the Bible. **How does this compare with how believers are filled with the Holy Spirit in the church age?**
- Verse 17 is a paraphrase of Malachi 4:6, the last verse of the last book of the Old Testament. The main prophecy of John the Baptist is in Isaiah 40:3.
- "turn the hearts of parents to their children" – **Discuss this phrase.**
- John was not Elijah returned, but Luke compares him to that great prophet, who also was famous for "bringing Israel back to the Lord". John seems to partially fulfill the prophecies of Elijah coming again, as Luke refers to the Malachi passage and Jesus mentions in Matthew 11:14. But this does not negate the ultimate fulfillment of Elijah returning to the earth in the future (Elijah never died, but was whisked away in a Rapture-like event in 2 Kings 2), as Malachi 4:5 and Jesus Himself (Matt. 17:11) says Elijah will come again, and he may be one of the two witnesses mentioned in Rev. 11:3-6.

Luke 1:18-20 Then Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this, since I am an old man, and my wife is getting older?" (19) The angel answered him, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. I have been sent to speak to you and to announce this good news to you. (20) But because you did not believe my announcement, which will be fulfilled at its proper time, you will become silent and unable to speak until the day this happens."

- Is there something in this passage that reminds us of ourselves when we pray? Zechariah had prayed and prayed for a son, but when he is told that his prayer is answered, he doesn't believe it. This is one of the reasons we don't get answers to our prayers – we have no faith!
- This is one of the rare times in the Bible that we see an angel identify himself. This is one of the highest angels in God's hierarchy, an archangel, he stands "in the very presence of God", and he says this to Zechariah to convince him of the authority he has. Gabriel also appeared to Daniel (Daniel 8:16, 9:21).

Luke 1:21-25 Meanwhile, the people kept waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed in the sanctuary so long. (22) But when he did come out, he was unable to speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them but remained unable to speak. (23) When the days of his service were over, he went home. (24) After this, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and remained in seclusion for five months. She said, (25) "This is what the Lord did for me when he looked favorably on me and took away my public disgrace."

- We're not sure why Elizabeth remained in seclusion for five months. **Why do you think she did this?**
- You can't help but see the humor in this situation. Elizabeth is in seclusion for five months with no one to talk to but her husband, so she probably talked his ear off and he couldn't talk back! But then he did have a good excuse why he wasn't talking!

Luke 1:26-33 Now in the sixth month of her pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, (27) to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. (28) The angel came to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you!" (29) Startled by his statement, she tried to figure out what his greeting meant. (30) Then the angel told her, "Stop being afraid, Mary, because you have found favor with God. (31) Listen! You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus. (32) He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. (33) He will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."

- Mary had not yet had sexual contact with a man, because Luke called her a virgin (also see verse 34 and Isaiah 7:14) and said that she was pledged to be married to Joseph (also 2:5). In Jewish culture then a man and woman were betrothed to each other for a period of time before the consummation of their marriage. This betrothal was much stronger than an engagement period today, for the two were considered husband and wife except that they did not live together until after the wedding.
- Gabriel is again the angel that appears to Mary, and again his appearance causes fear at first. **Why does he say Mary is "highly favored"?**
- The word "favor" is the word normally translated "grace", and it's actually the first mention of grace in the New Testament. Ephesians 1:6 says that all believers have found favor with God. The first mention of grace in the Old Testament is Genesis 6:8, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." In both cases, a human believer was selected by God's grace to bring a new beginning into the world. **What do we learn about grace from these two uses?**
- Gabriel predicted five things about Mary's son, **can you identify all five?** From all these things Mary would have understood that the angel was telling her that she would give birth to the Messiah.
- "Son of the Most High" - Mary could not have missed what that phrase meant. It speaks of His equality with Yahweh. In Semitic thought a son was a "carbon copy" of his father, and the phrase "son of" was often used to refer to one who possessed his "father's" qualities.
- "give him the throne of His father David" - Jesus, as David's descendant through His adopted father Joseph, will sit on David's throne when He reigns in the Millennium (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:3-4, 28-29).

"(Mary) was blessed among women, not above women. She lifted up womanhood. It is so easy to say that a woman brought sin into the world, but remember, it was a woman, and not a man, who brought the Saviour into the world." J. Vernon McGee

Luke 1:34-38 Mary asked the angel, "How can this happen, since I have not had relations with a man?" (35) The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come over you, and the power of the Most High will surround you. Therefore, the child will be holy and will be called the Son of God. (36) And listen! Elizabeth, your relative, has herself conceived a son in her old age, this woman who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. (37) Nothing is impossible with respect to any of God's promises." (38) Then Mary said, "Truly I am the Lord's servant. Let everything you have said happen to me." Then the angel left her.

- Mary confirms that she was a virgin here, and she questions the angel. But it seems different than Zechariah. It's not that she doesn't believe the angel, but that she wonders how it's going to come about.
- The answer was that the Holy Spirit would creatively bring about the physical conception of Jesus (v. 35). This miraculous conception and Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ was necessary because of His deity and preexistence (see Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Galatians 4:4). The Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, took on Himself a genuine, though sinless, human nature and was born as a man, without surrendering in any way His deity.
- We are told in the book of Leviticus in the Mosaic Law that the birth of a child caused a woman to be unclean because she brought a sinner into the world. If He had been born of a seed from a man and an egg from a woman, Jesus would have inherited both physical defects and the sin nature of Adam and Eve. Mary is told her baby will be different – it will be holy.
- Mary and Elizabeth were not necessarily first cousins. The word just means "kinsman".
- Notice Mary's complete acceptance and submission. **How is this an example to us?**

Luke 1:39-45 Later on, Mary set out for a Judean city in the hill country. (40) She went into Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. (41) When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby jumped in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (42) and she loudly exclaimed, "How blessed are you among women, and how blessed is the infant in your womb! (43) Why should this happen to me, to have the mother of my Lord visit me? (44) As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. (45) How blessed is this woman for believing that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled!"

- Remember that John, in Elizabeth's womb, at least 6 months along, was already filled with the Holy Spirit. That would explain why the baby "jumped in her womb" when she heard Mary, who was now pregnant with the Messiah who John would prepare the way for. This proves beyond question that a baby in a woman's womb is already a true human being, capable of emotional expression—joy in this case. **How does this affect your feelings about abortion?**
- Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit at this moment. This is how the Holy Spirit acted upon believers in the Old Testament, coming upon believers for specific times and purposes. In this case it was to reveal to Elizabeth that Mary was carrying the Messiah in her womb. Beginning at Pentecost, the Spirit indwells a believer permanently at the point of salvation as a guarantee of eternal life.

Luke 1:46-56 Then Mary said, "My soul praises the greatness of the Lord! (47) My spirit exults in God, my Savior, (48) because he has looked favorably on his humble servant. From now on, all generations will call me blessed, (49) because the Almighty has done great things for me. His name is holy. (50) His mercy lasts from generation to

generation for those who fear him. (51) He displayed his mighty power with his arm. He scattered people who were proud in mind and heart. (52) He pulled powerful rulers from their thrones and lifted up humble people. (53) He filled hungry people with good things and sent rich people away with nothing. (54) He helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful, (55) according to the promise he made to our ancestors — to Abraham and his descendants forever." (56) Now Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home.

- This passage is traditionally called the “Magnificat”, meaning that Mary magnified the works of God. She may have actually sung it; sections of scripture of praise like this (Psalms) are considered “songs”.
- Verses 54 and 55 tell us that Mary knew this was a fulfillment of promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Just as He has fulfilled these promises literally in time, He will fulfill all the other promises He made literally in the future.
- There are 15 quotations from the Old Testament in these verses, telling us that Mary knew her scriptures very well, and we can be sure that she taught them to Jesus as she raised Him.

Luke 1:57-66 When the time came for Elizabeth to have her child, she gave birth to a son. (58) Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. (59) On the eighth day they went to circumcise the child. They were going to name him Zechariah after his father, (60) but his mother said, "Absolutely not! He must be named John." (61) Their friends said to her, "None of your relatives has that name." (62) So they motioned to the baby's father to see what he wanted to name him. (63) He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And everyone was amazed. (64) Suddenly, Zechariah could open his mouth, his tongue was set free, and he began to speak and to praise God. (65) Fear came over all their neighbors, and throughout the hill country of Judea all these things were being discussed. (66) Everyone who heard about it kept thinking what had happened and asked, "What will this child become?" because it was obvious that the hand of the Lord was with him.

- According to Jewish custom and the Law, John was circumcised on the 8th day, which we now know that medically is the best time to circumcise a baby.
- Normally a family name was given to a baby, but Zechariah had already been given the name by the God through the angel Gabriel, and that's the name they gave him. Zechariah's confirmation of this ended the muteness that had come upon him for his unbelief.
- Notice that the unusual circumstances of John's birth became famous all over the area, and I'm sure many people remembered this when John began preaching years later.
- **Why do you think fear came upon all their neighbors?**

Luke 1:67-80 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: (68) "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel! He has taken care of his people and has set them free. (69) He has raised up a mighty Savior for us from the family of his servant David, (70) just as he promised long ago through the mouth of his holy prophets (71) that he would save us from our enemies and from the grip of all who hate us. (72) He has shown mercy to our ancestors and remembered his holy covenant, (73) the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham. He granted us (74) deliverance from our enemies' grip so that we could serve him without fear (75) and be holy and righteous

before him all of our days. (76) And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, because you will go ahead of the Lord to prepare his way (77) and to give his people knowledge of salvation through forgiveness of their sins. (78) Because of the tender mercy of our God, his light from on high has visited us, (79) to shine on those who sit in darkness and in death's shadow, and to guide our feet into the way of peace." (80) Now the child continued to grow and to become spiritually strong. He lived in the wilderness until the day he appeared in Israel.

- Now the Holy Spirit comes upon Zechariah and he sings his own song of praise to the Lord. It's not only a song of praise, but of prophetic statements about his son and the Messiah. It is traditionally called the "Benedictus", and is filled with Old Testament quotations and allusions.
- The "oath", in verse 73 is the promises gave to Abraham in Genesis 22:16-18.
- Some of these verses have not really been fulfilled yet. **Why is that?** They will be ultimately fulfilled when Christ returns and establishes His promised earthly reign.