

## AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: LUKE 1:1-25

Scripture of Lesson: Luke's Gospel 1: 1-25

Douglas Cho  
5/21/2017

### 1. Introduction to Luke's Gospel

#### A. Who was Luke?

Luke was one of the evangelists of the first century who was a physician by training. He was trained academically to a high degree as today's doctors are trained. Because of his extensive training he had excellent understanding of Hebrew, Syrian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman cultures, which were in milieu at the time. Although he was a physician, he chose to spend much of his life as a companion of apostle Paul, from whom Luke received strong spiritual inspiration and understanding of the gospel of Jesus.

#### B. Why are there four gospels? And how are they different?

There are four gospels--that is, accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Matthew and John were disciples of Jesus, so their accounts are regarded as first-hand records of what they saw and heard. Mark was a nephew of Barnabas and a spiritual son of Peter (1 Peter 5:13). Both Matthew and Luke's accounts share similarities in events and sayings of Jesus with Mark's. Therefore, these three gospels are called 'Synoptic Gospels,' meaning gospels with the same view.

Just as there are different testimonies of multiple witnesses of a crime scene where the witnesses all saw the same crime being committed at the same time but from different locations and in different situations, the four gospels record different accounts as experienced or relayed by other direct witnesses. However, they are not in conflict but complement one another to give a whole, integrated story of the Lord Jesus, His words and ministry.

#### C. Characteristics of Luke's account

Although Luke's gospel shares some 41% of common content with Mark and some 23% with Matthew, it has 35% of its own unique content. Luke's gospel has a specific audience, titled most excellent Theophilus [v. 3], likely a Gentile high official of Roman Empire who may have become a Christian. Luke was aware of a number of 'eyewitnesses.' With a commission from Theophilus and his personal commitment to 'set forth in order a declaration of those things which were surely believed among us.' Luke recorded the events of Jesus' ministry 'in order,' meaning sequentially over time, more so than in other gospels. He wrote, "those things which were surely believed among us." The disciples believed the life, ministry, words, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ 'surely,' meaning without doubts but with conviction. And this strong belief in the Lord's life and God's message through it compelled Luke to 'set forth in order a declaration,' that is, his own account of the gospel of Christ.

Luke felt he should begin his 'declaration' starting with the births of John the Baptist and Jesus so as to put the will of God in a historical light. That is why Luke often records the historical background of each major event recorded such as in 2:1-2, 3:1-2 and the genealogy of Jesus along the maternal line. Since his gospel shares contents with Mark and Matthew, he must have spent some time with

each recorder to hear of their accounts as well as accounts of other witnesses so as to include them in his own unique ways.

We are thankful today that Luke, although he was not one of the twelve disciples of the Lord but was a physician, was moved to spend much of his life as a minister of the word of God the era, preaching the message of the gospel to the Gentiles and putting in orderly record the account of the Lord so that we have a well-written gospel we can read for our own benefit and use to preach the gospel message to the unbelieving world.

## 2. Angel's appearance to Zechariah

### A. Who was Zechariah?

From verse 5 to verse 25 of the first chapter, we read the account of an angel's visit to Zechariah, who was one of the priests of God according to the OT religious structure as specified through the Law of Moses. He was in the lineage of Abijah, a descendant of Aaron, and his wife Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron, the first high priest established by Moses [Exodus 28]. There were several thousands of priests at this time who were divided into 24 clans as detailed in 1 Chronicles 24. Each clan of priests were to serve at the temple twice a year [v. 8], one week each time, in the sequence determined by casting lots.<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, when a clan's priests report for their priestly duties, they chose who would perform the priest's office before the Holy space within the temple building itself [v. 9], whereas the rest of them would perform various duties associated with the animal sacrifice rites. In the present situation, Zechariah was chosen to serve inside the temple, representing the entire people of Israel. Just as they determined the sequence of clans' service at the temple by casting lots, the functions of priests within each clan when they came to their time of service were determined by casting lots from the tradition established in 1 Chronicles 24 during the time of King David.

So, we read the account of an angel appearing to Zechariah. Why did God decide to send an angel to him? The first reason was that God needed a faithful couple to become parents of John the Baptist, who was to be borne before the Messiah as a herald. The second reason was that Zechariah and Elizabeth were found to be a suitable couple for such a purpose. Verse 6 says, *"They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."* So, the lesson for us is that when God needs a man, a woman, a child, or a couple to use for His purpose, He looks for righteous, blameless people who love God. Not that we desire to be used for a grand plan of God, the role of Zechariah and Elizabeth was to be parents of a boy to be named John, who would come with a God given mission. As parents, have you ever thought that being parents comes with a special mission? Every child comes with a special mission of God. Therefore, being parents requires special preparation in life.

### B. Who was Gabriel?

In verse 11 we read that an angel appeared within the Holy sanctuary of the temple in a visible way so that Zechariah was afraid. The angel stood at the right side of the altar of incense where

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/zechariah-father-of-john-the-baptist-701075>  
www.douglaschomistry.net Luke's Gospel

Zechariah was offering the incense and no one else was there, especially in the sanctuary of God's temple. That means the angel was within a few feet from Zechariah, very close. Zechariah was "troubled and fear fell upon him." Because Zechariah knew instantly this person within the sanctuary must be of God, fear came upon him because of his fear of God. Apparently, although Zechariah was a praying priest of God, he never had a visit from an angel of God. And that is why he became afraid on the occasion of the angel's visit. And here's a lesson for all of us. As it was the first time experience to Zechariah, you and I can be visited by an angel of God in a very real way--perhaps in a visible way, carrying God's message to you in person. How do we get ready for such an occasion of theophany? By getting to know God and His angels through deeper fellowship of prayer and meditation. When we become so familiar with God and His heavenly host, we would not be afraid of a visit from one of God's messengers.

So who was Gabriel? According to the First Book of Enoch, which is a non-canonical Hebrew book, widely read by the Hebrew biblical scholars of old, Gabriel is one of seven chief angels, often referred as archangels, that stand before God. Their names are Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Remiel (he is described in the Book of Enoch as having fallen from grace, possibly replaced by Phanuel) and Sariel. In the Bible Gabriel's appearance to humans occurred four times: twice to Daniel, once to Zechariah and lastly to Mary.

Since Gabriel was one of the archangels, his visit carried a very special mission. The births of John the Baptist and Jesus were of utmost importance to God and to the world because the Son of God was to come into this world as a human and John was to be a herald of the coming of the Messiah to prepare the way. That is why God sent Gabriel, one of His favored archangels, to carry His message to Zechariah. What a special privilege to be visited by an archangel of God!

### C. God's message to Zechariah

#### 1) "Your prayer has been heard." -- What prayer?

The essence of Gabriel's message to Zechariah was that a son was to be born into his family. The angel said to Zechariah, "*Do not fear, Zechariah. Your prayer has been heard. And your wife, Elizabeth, shall bear you a son and you shall call his name, John [v.13].*" The angel knew his name and his wife's name. Furthermore, his prayer has been heard by God. What a wonderful thing to know that God knows us by name and He hears our prayers. 1 Peter 3:21 says, "*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*" The ears of the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth are open to the prayers of the righteous. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous people, looking for the coming of the Messiah, praying on behalf of their people, Israel. And their prayers have been heard.

Do you think they might have prayed for the gift of posterity? Yes, I believe they probably prayed God to give them children to carry the name of the family, to succeed him with the holy vocation of serving God as a priest of the Almighty God. Yet, months and years went by and no children came to them. And the time came they no longer prayed for posterity. And they started to pray for fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah would come to deliver the people of Israel, as prophesied by Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, Hosea, Zechariah, Joel and other prophets. Numerous godly people in this very difficult time to Israel were looking earnestly for the day of the Lord's coming. This couple,

Zechariah and Elizabeth, in particular, must have prayed earnestly for such a day. And their prayers were heard by God. And God answered them in His unique way, in a quite surprising way in fact, and He sent His angel, Gabriel, to announce the good news of His plan to Zechariah.

What is the lesson for us here? Let us never cease to pray for the coming of the Lord. Let us earnestly pray for furtherance of God's kingdom here on the earth--not to idols made by hands of men but to the living God of Heaven, whose eyes look into the hearts of men and women and whose ears are tuned to the prayers of the righteous Christians everywhere on the earth.

2) "A child will be born in your family" -- What kind of a child?

The message of the angel Gabriel announced the coming birth of a son to this righteous family in verse 13, "Your wife Elizabeth shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name, John." What kind of a son would this be? What was so special about this child that Archangel Gabriel had to come with the news of his birth? "*And you shall have joy in the sight of the Lord, and many shall rejoice at his birth [v.14].*" Of course there will be joy in the family and joy in the neighborhood because of a son gained in their old age! The fact that they were no longer in the biologically productive stage of life was frankly admitted by Zechariah in verse 18, "*How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.*" This response of unbelief by Zechariah was quite natural when he was faced with the news of God's plan pertaining to their life that was beyond reason by human thinking. He expressed disbelief just as Sarah, Abraham's wife, laughed when another angel brought the news of the coming birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 17:19, *Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him."* But sometimes God has a special plan He wants to fulfill in our life that goes beyond human reason and rational thinking.

Many major events in the history of mankind were God's acts that defy reasonable understanding and acceptance by many scientists and educated elites. And they include the creation itself, the great flood of Noah, Moses' leading Israel across the Red Sea, and the birth and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah as we will study through the gospel of Luke. Scientists and educated elite people may not believe God's plans and acts. Regardless of whether they believe or not, God has been carrying out His plan for the humanity, for the earth and for the universe according to His grand plans. And no one, not one, has been able to stop Him from working, not will any interfere with His works in the future. When He shows you a plan to fulfill in your life, you should count it a grand privilege and cooperate with Him through obedience because He is the Creator and Lord of the universe.

Gabriel then told Zechariah what kind of man this John would be in verse 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.*" What kind of a person is 'great in the sight of the Lord?' Disciples of Jesus asked Him this question in Matt 18:1, *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"* And Jesus replied in verses 2 to 4, *Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* Note the disciples asked their master who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. The answer to this question was

quite unexpected. His answer specified the qualification for entering the kingdom of heaven instead of criteria for judging greatness in it. Then, He stated that humility like that of a little child makes a person great in the kingdom of heaven. Apparently, there is a great gulf between the human understanding of who is great and who is great in God's sight. And we come to find the definition of 'being great' in God's kingdom through the life of John the Baptist and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The life of John the Baptist was short-lived. He was beheaded by Herod within a couple of years into his ministry, which started some time before the commencement of Jesus' ministry. Because Jesus began His ministry when He was 30 years old and John was about six months older than Jesus, John would have been either 31 or 32 at most when he was killed in a savage way. Yet, our Lord Jesus esteemed him very great in Matt 11:11 when He said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."*

There was another child whose birth was foretold to his parents by an angel and the will of God for his life was foretold before his birth. You guessed it right --it was Samson, one of the judges of Israel. An angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah and told him that a special son would be born to the family, in Judges 13:5, *"For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."* Samson's case was a sad story where God's expectation was not met through wantonness and disregard of God's ordinance of holiness.

However, in the case of John the Baptist, His life won the Lord's praise in spite of the seeming failure from the human point of view. What is your measure of success? Is it promotion to a lofty position or amassing a great fortune? Is it a great popularity in the entertainment industry or in professional sports? Or is it in a grand size of a mega church you have built up? Let us remember God has a different criterion of being great and being successful. Having a successful life in your profession is not wrong nor to be discouraged. Having the humility to give God the rightful honor that is due to the Creator, and to give the Lord full control of your life, will make you great in His eyes, though it may bring disdain or ignorance in the sight of men.

### 3) John's mission

- a. To bring many of the children of Israel back to God

Much like the case of Samson, angel Gabriel told Zechariah the grand mission of his son, John. Throughout the OT God kept sending His servants to the people of Israel to persuade them to be faithful and loyal to Him, to trust His grace and power and not to serve the pagan gods. Time and again they did not heed the voice of God to repentance. And now, John was to be the last prophet of the OT era who would bear the same message and carry out the same mission of bringing many people of Israel back to God. Why was it that this chosen nation of Israel was not loyal to God who delivered them out of Egypt and vowed to love them, keep them safe and give them victory in battles? Why did the people kill God's prophets time and again when they came with messages of repentance and pleas of God's love call? Why is this great country America, which was founded on the puritan Christian principles, become so decayed and strayed far from God? Why is it that those messengers of God who speak the message of repentance disdained and disregarded? As John the Baptist received the mission

of calling the people back to God, today God's true servants come with the same mission of calling America back to God.

b. To go before the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elias/ Elijah

In verse 17 Gabriel says, *"he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias, that is Elijah."* Here, 'before Him' means 'before the Messiah.' Prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of John the Baptist in Isaiah 40:3, *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God."* John was to be the torch bearer, the trumpet blower like those who marched before the ark of the covenant when they circled around Jericho in Joshua 6:8, *So it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the Lord advanced and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord followed them.*

Whereas seven priests blew trumpets outside of Jericho walking before the ark of God, John the Baptist alone blew the trumpet before the Lord to announce the Messiah's coming to Israel, very much like the lone ministry of Elijah. God gave divine power and mighty spirit of courage to Elijah so that he overcame the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel and brought about a great slaughter of Baal's priests as recorded in 1 Kings 18. He proved God was the only living and mighty God. Elijah's spirit of courage and total trust in God's power enabled him to achieve a great victory for God and the select few who were faithful to the Lord. Now, it was the destiny of John, Zechariah and Elizabeth's son, to go forth in the same spirit of courage, commitment to the call of God, and total trust in God's power and help, to prepare the hearts of people, to bring them back to the Lord as a preparation for the coming of the Messiah, the Son of God. Such was to be the mission of the Lord's herald.

c. To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children

Next, John was to *"turn the hearts of the fathers to the children."* For centuries before the coming of John and Jesus, generations of Israelites failed to leave good examples to their children. The Lord commanded the people of Israel to keep the Passover feast year after year so that their children could be taught how God saved Israel from the bondage of Egypt through great miracles [Exodus 12]. They were to teach the precepts of the Lord to their posterity. But, the people of Israel failed to teach their children and failed to leave good examples for their children to emulate. Their hearts were not with the children's spiritual welfare, their relationship with God of Heaven. And it was a job of John to cause them to consider their children, their plight, their sad and hopeless state under the oppression of the Roman Empire and the spiritual confusion and darkness brought upon them by their religious leaders.

Today we live in such an era. People do not care what happens to their children. Mothers take drugs during their pregnancy so that babies are born with many types of deformities and genetic defects. And they blame God for such consequences. Both men and women drink every night and beat their children and expect their children to behave before them. Husbands and wives do not love each other and expect their children to have normal marriages. They go to the court for easy divorce settlement and expect their children to find true love and live happily thereafter. They do not respect God and lament why there is so much trouble in their streets and neighborhoods. The mass media disdain God and hate Christians when they show forth their devotion to God, yet they wonder why America has gone south in morality and social order. It is time to consider our children --what they might learn from our generation, what example we are leaving them to follow, what respect we show

to God for all His wonderful blessings to our great country and why we enjoy what we enjoy as the richest and most powerful nation in the world. We need to consider what kind of legacy we will be leaving to our posterity. And the greatest legacy we can leave for them is the legacy and tradition of serving and honoring God as the Lord of our families, schools and the nation.

d. To turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just

Next, John was to “turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.” We keep hearing this word, ‘turn.’ It means to ‘change direction.’ In other words, to turn one’s direction in life means to repent from one’s prior direction and make a change in life. Turning from a life of disobedience to God and heading to the wisdom of the just is a call to repentance. In fact, John would call out without fear, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand [Matt 3:2].”* Many people heeded his call to repentance and were baptized by him. Today, is there a call of repentance voiced to the people of America? Most people wonder what is there to repent about. They do not have any guilt because they are law-abiding citizens. Their lives are fine and dandy without God. Even many Christians who regularly go to church do not see any need of repentance in their lives. Many pastors no longer preach a message of repentance because they would soon find themselves unpopular to their congregations.

Yet we see so much disobedience to the principles of God’s justice, mercy and faith. Where is God’s justice today when the rich take 99% of the nation’s wealth and keep getting richer when the poor keep sinking into debt and hopeless despair? Where is God’s mercy when the poor and weak people are gunned down mercilessly in the streets by the police in the name of social order? Where is true faith when so-called Christians love money and pleasures and pastors trust money and congregation size more than God’s care and provision?

e. To make ready a people prepared for the Lord

Next, John was to *“make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”* I sometimes watch my wife prepare meat for cooking. She tenderizes the meat first by dicing it with sharp knife so that the meat is broken and made thin. Sometimes she cuts it into many smaller pieces so that the marinating sauce penetrates deep into the flesh of the meat. How did John prepare a people for the Lord? He had some sharp words that cut deep into the hearts of people to cause their hearts to become soft and tender towards God. He caused them to remember how God had blessed their forefathers so richly and their present state was the result of generations of disobedience and disloyalty to God. Their hearts became prepared for the message of the gospel when the Lord Jesus came with His divine grace and truth.

The time of the Lord’s coming is drawing near. We need to examine where we are in our relationship with God. Are we ready to face the dreadful day of the Lord’s wrath? God has been patient and long-suffering to the humanity for the past six thousand years. Wouldn’t you think that is a long enough time for His patience? The time of reckoning is drawing near. And the time of preparation is getting shorter. It is like a high school student preparing for the SAT test. He/she knows the test date and prepares for it. We do not know the exact date of the Lord’s coming. However, we observe the signs and come to know it is approaching close. As John prepared the Jewish people for the first coming of the Messiah, servants of God today need to prepare the hearts of His people for the second coming of the Lord. And it is a very urgent task that requires the highest priority.

#### 4) Zechariah's disbelief and the Lord's mercy

Zechariah did not believe the message of Gabriel and expressed his disbelief. Yet the Lord showed mercy to him and proceeded with His plan. The good thing was Zechariah and Elizabeth accepted God's plan and faithfully carried out their role as parents of the child to be born. When God reveals His plan for your life and you express doubt and disbelief, God will not take away His plan unless you object to it. Let us hope that we do not let our disbelief be carried into disobedience and objection to God's plan.

Now it is time to wrap up this study into how we can apply the lessons to our present day life.

### 3. Application to our life

#### A. God comes to you with a glad news of the birth of His son in your life

The gospel comes to you today bringing a message of the birth of the Son of God in your heart and life, just as Gabriel brought the message of a coming birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah. How do you respond to this news? Is it a good news to you? Do you accept that by receiving the message of the gospel there will be a spiritual birth of the life of the divine Jesus in you? He will be living in you to feed you with spiritual riches, satiate your thirst for truth, nourish your intellect, mind and soul with the knowledge of God with all His wisdom, power and eternal life. Your life will never be the same. You will move from the dark past of sin into a new life with Christ, born again as a child of God. Your desires, values, goals and tastes will change from those of the flesh, the world and of Satan to heavenly goals, desires and values. This transformation will take place quite quickly as you submit yourself to the Spirit's control in total obedience and diligence.

#### B. God gives you a mission for your life

Then, God will give you a mission for your life. The details of your mission may vary from those of other Christians, but the essence is the same --to live wholly as a child of God, no longer fettered to sin and darkness, but living as a child of light, living with a lively hope for eternity with God in heaven. You may be called upon to help others find God, to assist servants of God, to spread the good news through diverse channels, to share God's blessing with the less privileged, or to simply enjoy His goodness and show forth joy and happiness of serving Him in your senior age.

#### C. Believe the message and live out the mission

When God reveals His plan for your life, I encourage you to accept the mission for your life when it is revealed to you, either through the Scripture, through the words of a pastor, from a Christian book or publication, or through prayer or meditation in the Spirit of Christ. God will help you fulfill the mission through many people and the Holy Spirit. Just say 'yes' and obey willingly. May God richly bless you in your endeavors for the Lord! And may your walk with Jesus Christ bring joy and gladness to God's heart!

Prayer: Almighty God, our Father!

We thank you that we heard your message today through this story, when you sent your angel Gabriel to Zechariah some 2,000 years ago. As we hear the message of the gospel today, we hear you standing at the door



of our hearts and knocking. As we hear the sound of your knock, we open the door and invite you into our hearts and lives. We were sinners in the past, not knowing you but misunderstanding you and living contrary to your will and plan.

Now we recognize and proclaim that you are the mighty God who created all things, that Jesus Christ came wearing a human body, lived, died a cruel death on the cross but rose again that our sins could be purged. We believe the story of Jesus, believe in His blood and know that you forgive our sins and we have been made whole and clean as your children, although nothing in us makes us worthy of such love and grace from your throne but by the blood of Jesus.

May your Spirit fill us, overshadow us and our families, so that we may go forth honoring, worshipping you with all our heart, mind, body and strength. And may your blessings be with our godly endeavors and all the children of yours all over the world. May the Lord's kingdom come soon in righteousness, justice and truth.

In Jesus' precious name, we ask. Amen!