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**A Layman's
Commentary on
Luke**

T.O.D. Johnston

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A Layman's Commentary on the Gospel of Luke

Religious Non-fiction

1st Edition 2006 – Scriptures Included

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A Layman's Commentary
On the Gospel of Luke:
Composed In 40 Lessons

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Dedicated for knowledge, understanding, and inspiration as we seek to follow Our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ.

Preface

After reading many scholarly commentaries on different books of Scripture, it became my mental habit to sift through the minute discussions of individual words and/or phrases, and the quoting of various scholars of the past of many differing opinions, and center on the most logical and inspirational truths that remained. Thus I relied on the studied scholarship of those who had learned the original languages and had read all the previous scholars that had written to get the best possible understanding of Scripture that I, as a non-scholar, could. It seemed that most church members would not attempt to read scholarly works - but would benefit from their knowledge if presented in a plain and straightforward manner, the truths they had perceived. The following commentary is my attempt to do this. May God bless my efforts to the extent that they increase the understanding and faith of the reader.

T.O.D. Johnston
2005

Introduction

The Writer of the Gospel

It is a generally accepted fact that Luke was the author of the 3rd Gospel, as well as the book of Acts. From the evidence in his epistles, Luke was a frequent companion of Paul - especially in Rome.

Very early in the Christian Church (160-180 A.D.), a straight-forward record of evidence recorded Luke is Paul's companion who wrote the Gospel and Acts. A prologue to the Gospel by one of the early church fathers recorded:

"Luke was an Antiochian of Syria, a physician by profession. He was a disciple of the apostles and later accompanied Paul until the latter's martyrdom. He served the Lord without distraction, having neither wife nor children, and at the age of 84 fell asleep in Boeotia, full of the Holy Spirit. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark were already in existence. In his prologue Luke makes this clear but he felt moved to record an account specifically for the Gentile believers so that they would not be deceived by any mixture of Jewish distractions that could cloud the truth. At the beginning Luke relates the nativity of the Baptist - the Lord's forerunner in preparation by the baptism unto repentance. This ministry had been foretold by Malachi. After writing this Gospel, Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles."

About 300 A.D., Eusebius wrote, "Luke who was by race an Antiochian, and a physician by profession, was a long companion of Paul, and had careful conversation with the other Apostles, and in two books left us examples of the medicine for souls which he had gained from them."

Luke's Sources

He was not an eye-witness of Jesus' life on earth, but he had the best opportunity to talk to and record the witnesses of those who had seen and heard Jesus. He was closely connected with Paul, who also in turn had come in contact with many eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension (Peter, James, and others).

While in Jerusalem from 57-59 A.D., Luke had ample opportunity to speak to James (Jesus' brother), the elders, and other members of the Palestinian congregations (especially at Caesarea and Jerusalem). As an educated man, he would carefully record all information valuable in getting a full and clear knowledge of everything he could find out from these eyewitnesses.

According to Acts, Luke stayed with Philip the evangelist, traveled with Silas of the Jerusalem church, and was closely associated with Mark. Mark authored the second Gospel and had most likely been eyewitness to some of the later events in Jesus' life. He was known as the close follower of Peter, whose preaching concerning Jesus is generally recognized as the main source of his Gospel.

Luke had been together with Mark during Paul's captivity in Rome (mentioned in Colossians 4:10,14 and Philemon 24).

Though without doubt many eyewitnesses would have written down their knowledge concerning Jesus, it was not until the eyewitnesses, especially the Apostles, began to die that the necessity of recording all that was known about Christ became essential. It is also likely that the Apostles and other early preachers recorded notes of their messages to aid their memory and delivery.

In his own preface, Luke remarks that he had traced the course of all things from the first. He wrote to make certain that Theophilus had the best record of those things concerning Jesus that he had been taught.

It has become a precarious assumption of some modern critics, that the art of writing was not widely known and practiced in the time of Jesus.

2 Timothy 4:11,13 gives the careful reader the idea that Paul was then helping Luke in the composing of the third Gospel and/or the Book of Acts.

No certain date has been suggested that can be corroborated within the Gospel or the Acts. It is assumed that the Gospel was written first. Both are generally regarded as being written before 70 A.D.

Luke's writing shows a mastery of the Greek language. In his two books he records with a vocabulary of about 800 words which do not occur anywhere else in the New Testament.

Luke As Historian

After doing many years of research and studying regions where events described by Luke took place, Ramsey stated that "Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness." Ramsey was a world-renowned archaeologist.

His Purpose

Luke himself states the reason he wrote his book. It is addressed to Theophilus to make certain that he may know with certainty the facts about the things he was taught. He wanted Gentile Christians to know on what certain historical facts their faith was based. It was written from a historical and scientific point of view. He constantly refers to the relationship between the history of Jesus and the first Christians, and that of the Jewish and Roman world of the time. He often gives indications of time, and mostly follows chronological order.

His Gospel is the most complete and comprehensive of the four Gospels. His was not, however, just a historical work, but with the object of convincing, converting, and spiritually instructing his fellow believers. His work was written out of faith unto faith, to reveal Jesus as Lord and Redeemer.

Special Characteristics of Luke

One thing that Luke does uniquely in his Gospel is depict Jesus as the Great Physician who came to seek and heal all those sick with sin. He is called Savior (what Jesus the name means), the Redeemer, He embodies the salvation which God prepared. Luke also emphasizes the universal quality of that Salvation. He was not just the promised Messiah of the Old Testament come to only save Israel, or just the Jews. His salvation was offered to Samaritans, pagans, publicans, sinners, outcasts, the poor, the respectable, the rich, women, as well as men, even to slaves.

Uniquely, Luke connects the events in Jesus' life with important references to the wider world of people, forces, and events.

Jesus' birth is recorded as during the reign of Roman Emperor Augustus. John the Baptist began preaching in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar, Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod Tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.

In his genealogy of Jesus he goes back beyond Abraham to Adam as created by God. Luke also emphasizes Jesus' compassion for physical as well as spiritual need. He came to bring physical as well as spiritual redemption to all in need, both now and forever more. A great variety of people were saved, and especially noticed is the totally different attitude toward women than that of all the cultures of that time. Generally they were treated as less than any man, as servants, and often with contempt. Jesus treated them as of equal value and stature.

Luke also stressed the perfect humanity of Jesus and His constant communion with the Father. He is the Son of Man, He is the Son of God, He is Christ our Lord, the Redeemer.

Please Note

It is essential to read the appropriate Scriptures as you study the lessons, in order to gain a full understanding of the material.

Lesson I:
Chapters 1 and 2

Chapter 1.

1 Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,
2 even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;
3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent The-oph'ilus,
4 that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.
5 ¶ There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zechari'ah, of the course of Abi'jah: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.
6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.
7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren; and they both were now well stricken in years.
8 ¶ And it came to pass, that, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,
9 according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.
10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.
11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.
12 And when Zechari'ah saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.
13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zechari'ah: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.
14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.
15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.
16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.
17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Eli'jah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.
18 And Zechari'ah said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.
19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings.
20 And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

- 21 And the people waited for Zechari'ah, and marveled that he tarried so long in the temple.
- 22 And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.
- 23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.
- 24 ¶ And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,
- 25 Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.
- 26 ¶ And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,
- 27 to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.
- 28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.
- 29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.
- 30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God.
- 31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.
- 32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:
- 33 and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.
- 34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?
- 35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.
- 36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.
- 37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.
- 38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.
- 39 ¶ And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah;
- 40 and entered into the house of Zechari'ah, and saluted Elisabeth.
- 41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:
- 42 and she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.
- 43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?
- 44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.
- 45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,
47 and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all
generations shall call me blessed.
49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.
50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.
51 He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination
of their hearts.
52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.
53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.
54 He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;
55 as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.
56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.
57 ¶ Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a
son.
58 And her neighbors and her cousins heard how the Lord had showed great mercy upon
her; and they rejoiced with her.
59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they
called him Zechari'ah, after the name of his father.
60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.
61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.
62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.
63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they
marveled all.
64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and
praised God.
65 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised
abroad throughout all the hill country of Judea.
66 And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child
shall this be? And the hand of the Lord was with him.
67 ¶ And his father Zechari'ah was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,
68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,
69 and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;
70 as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:
71 that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;
72 to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;
73 the oath which he sware to our father Abraham,
74 that he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
75 in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.
76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the
face of the Lord to prepare his ways;
77 to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,
78 through the tender mercy of our God;
whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

79 to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.

Chapter 2.

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyre'ni-us was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, (because he was of the house and lineage of David,)

5 to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 ¶ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 ¶ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

21 ¶ And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

22 ¶ And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;

23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

24 and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

28 then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

30 for mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

31 which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

32 a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

33 ¶ And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him.

34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

35 (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also;) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

36 ¶ And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phan'u-el, of the tribe of Asher: she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity;

37 and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

39 ¶ And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.

41 ¶ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

52 ¶ And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Preface 1:1-4 - Luke's Preface.

Only Luke addresses his readers and relates his reason for writing. This is a style of classical Greek historians and medical writers. His purpose is to record the Gospel story.

Up to this time the spoken word of the Apostles and other eyewitnesses was the method of delivering the Gospel message to the Church. As the church reached further distances and as those original witnesses died there became an ever increasing need for the essential and complete Gospel record to be written and circulated. Luke perceived this need. He refers to the fact that others had already set forth such a record. He indicates, however, that he sees a need for a specific record of events that those already written did not fulfill.

It is generally accepted that Mark was one of these writers. Luke emphasized that all the writings were based upon accounts related by eyewitnesses, specifically the Apostles. Thus these records are not fables or ritualistic traditions, but the authoritative information of observed fact. Mark is credited as recording the message that Peter taught and preached. Luke, as a companion of Paul had ample opportunities to interview those that were eyewitnesses of the life and ministry of Jesus, both in Jerusalem and in other locations.

Verse 3. He states that he has gotten the information from the beginning of the life of Jesus, as well as the promise of the Forerunner, John the Baptist. Luke reports that he looked at all available information to be certain that what he recorded here would be as complete and detailed as necessary. We must assume that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the most important and necessary data to record the words and events of the Gospel narrative.

He also set his task to relating these events in chronological order. Of the four Gospels, Luke's is the most comprehensive. It includes many things not mentioned in the others.

Luke addressed himself to Theophilus, otherwise unknown, but a 'most excellent' person, most likely of high official rank, in the Roman Empire. Since 'Theophilus' means 'dear to God', some have suggested that this was a pseudonym given to a convert to Christianity. It was a not uncommon practice of the time to dedicate a writing to a specific person, and plan it for a wider circulation of readers.

Verse 4. Luke stresses the need for Theophilus (and other readers) to have a complete account of what they have already been taught in part to firmly ground their faith.

In the original Greek, these 4 verses are written in one sentence. In the rest of his writing he follows the pattern of Hebraizing style of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, both Aramaic idiom, and colloquial style of the time. His object was clear communication, not classical or ornate skillful language. He did not want to distract the reader from the message.

The uniqueness of Christianity is the recording over many centuries of how God has dealt with man both prophetically, and practically. In the Old Testament, this is shown through the whole sacrificial system, especially the Passover and the Day of Atonement. This was to prepare them for the coming of Jesus. This redemption was completed in and through the Incarnation and finished work of Jesus the Christ. In other words, it tells how God, through His mercy and grace, made a way to save the lost. Luke justly emphasizes the trustworthiness of his Gospel narrative.

Luke 1:5-25 - The Birth of John the Baptist Announced.

The appearance and ministry of Jesus is the central event of time. Everything that went before led up to it. Everything that has come afterwards is connected with it, or in acceptance or rejection of it.

This record has the background of the Baptist, forming the link between the revelation of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The old and new are a continuous movement in the unfolding revelation of God's plan.

The voice of prophecy had been silent for about 400 years. Everything was prepared. Now God was to turn to the whole of humanity. It begins in the temple, with a priest who will father the one to prepare the way.

Luke tells the story of John focusing on the way it points to, and identifies Jesus the Christ. This new work begins with the life of a priest in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, the Holy City. Luke recounts only the aspects of the background of John the Baptist that point to Jesus.

Verse 5. The nativity of the Baptist is closely connected with that of Christ, as His forerunner. As John announces the beginning of the New Dispensation, the reign of Herod (king of Judea from 40 to 4 B.C.) reaches its tragic conclusion. He was called Herod 'the Great'. He was from Dumea, but professed to follow the Jewish faith. His kingship was by favor of the Roman Government.

Outwardly he seemed successful, especially because of the many beautiful buildings he had built, which included the new temple. On the other hand, he had also erected pagan temples, and instituted pagan games. He was relentless in his cruelty toward any who opposed him. He distrusted his own family, several of whom he had put to death.

When he died in 4 B.C., no one mourned, in his own family nor in the whole Jewish nation. The days of Herod were considered dark and dangerous for Israel. Against this background, Luke begins with the coming of the Forerunner, and then the Christ.

Since David's time, the priests were divided into 24 orders, of which Abijah was the eighth. Zacharias belonged to this order. His wife, Elizabeth, was also of priestly descent. A priest married to a priest's daughter was considered a special distinction. Any offspring was considered especially blessed.

Zacharias means 'the Lord remembers' in the sense of His covenant. Elizabeth means 'My God is the Absolutely Faithful One'. This suggests the working of God's providence.

Verse 6. These two were righteous and upright before the people - and also before God. They acted quite differently than the general behavior of the time. These were the parents

chosen by God to bring Christ's forerunner into the world and raise him in such a righteous home until the time for his ministry to begin.

Verse 7. This couple had borne the sorrow to an advanced age of being childless. They had not become bitter or resentful toward God. They persevered in their service to God.

Verse 8,9. In this particular week the priestly course of Abijah was called upon to serve at the Temple. Zacharias was one. Each day the lot was cast for the various duties for that day. On that day Zacharias was chosen by lot to burn incense in the Holy Place in the morning and again about 3 in the afternoon.

Verse 10. In the temple court outside the Sanctuary, public gatherings for prayer typically took place three times a day. The first and last of these gatherings took place at the same time as the burning of incense.

Zacharias was presenting the incense offering on the golden altar in the holy place, a great multitude were praying in the outer temple court. When the signal was given, the incense was offered. The incense represented true consecration to God. As the smoke of the incense ascended, the people fell down with hands spread out in silent prayer. All was quiet throughout the area. This lot normally fell to a priest only once in his lifetime.

Verse 11. It was during these moments that an angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias. He stood all at once on the honored right side of the golden altar on which Zacharias was offering the incense.

Verse 12. Zacharias was overtaken with fear in this most solemn moment when the angel appeared.

Verse 13. The angel assured him that he had no need to fear, but that God had heard his prayer. This prayer was most likely for the salvation of his people through the promised Messiah. The angel assured him that a great privilege was to be visited upon him and his wife.

Elisabeth was to bear him a son who would be the forerunner and proclaim the coming redeemer. God in this way was also fulfilling their years of prayer for a child, even though they were so advanced in age. The child was to be called John, the name meaning 'the Lord is merciful', or 'the gracious gift of God'.

Verse 14. His parents as well as any other will rejoice at the child's coming into the world. After so long a time without a prophet, the coming of John will be a great blessing to the devout followers of God.

Verse 15. This child will be great in the sight of the Lord, so the reaction will be great rejoicing. He will neither drink wine nor any other strong drink. He will be constantly full of the Holy Ghost and receive from Him the necessary strength and inspiration to fulfill his divine calling. The Old Testament prophets were as a rule only temporarily filled with the Spirit, but John will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the beginning of his life.

Verse 16. The true function of a prophet was to call the wayward and sinful people back to God and true righteousness (Jeremiah 3:17; Ezekiel 3:19, Daniel 9: 13). He will be successful.

Verse 17. He will be more than any ordinary prophet. He will go before the Lord and prepare the way for the Messiah. What was prophesied in the last Old Testament Book of Malachi 3:1 "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come saith the Lord of hosts."

In Malachi 4:5, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the great and terrible day of the Lord." Jesus Himself said of John that he was the prophet Elijah who was to come. Christ's coming brought the judgment of God in Israel because the majority of the people had refused to accept Him.

The angel declares that John will appear in the manner of Elijah. The hearts of those in a family will be reunited. John's calling for repentance will cause those who answer that call to give up their sinful ways. This would bring the formerly rebellious into religious harmony with their believing ancestors (forefathers). All this works to prepare a people to be spiritually awakened and expectant of the coming of the Lord.

Verse 18. Zacharias is overwhelmed. How can these things be? Elisabeth is not only barren, but also far advanced in age as he also is. He wants to believe but hesitates in asking for a sign of the truth of this prophecy.

Verse 19. Certainly he knew the story of Abraham and Sarah who had been given Isaac in their advanced age. Sarah had also been barren. His lack of belief in the absolute power and mercy of God is unmerited, so he is chastised.

Zacharias calls himself 'an old man'. In contrast, the angel states: "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak unto thee, and to bring thee these glad tidings". How can Zacharias doubt such a message from such a messenger, sent from the immediate presence of God, especially to him?

Verse 20. The sign asked for is given, but at the same time, it is a chastisement. He will, from that moment, until the birth of the promised son, be dumb. He doubted the message of Gabriel - yet it will come to pass, as God planned.

Verse 21. Meanwhile, the people were waiting for the priest to come out from the Holy Place. The length of time was to be immediately after the incense was offered. Any delay brought increasing anxiety.

Verse 22. Traditionally, the priest would come out and bless the people following that of Numbers 6:24-26. When Zacharias finally came out, the people were waiting. They immediately noticed that something extraordinary had happened. Zacharias not only didn't give the priestly prayer, but was waving his arms in an agitated way. They concluded that something supernatural had taken place.

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