

Luke 1:1-38

Intro:

--Luke gives us his reasons for writing in the first four verses, but there are still some things worth knowing by way of introduction.

--First, Luke is the only known Gentile author in the NT (In **Col. 4:11+14** he is mentioned with the Gentiles, not the Jews).

--He is also directly named in **2 Tim. 4:11 + Philemon 24** and is indirectly referenced in the “we” sections of **Acts 16:10-17; 20:6-16; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16**.

--Second, his nature as a doctor shines through in the way he mentions births, healings, right hand, right ear, etc.

--Third, in terms of a timeline, most scholars agree Luke was the third gospel written. Matthew and Mark came before, and John was the last.

Verses 1-4:

--(1) ***Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us,***

--Luke acknowledges that there were many people who wrote about their experiences with Jesus Christ—they loved Him! ***John 20:30; 21:25; Acts 1:21-22***

--He is not saying everything out there was wrong or false, just that he was now going to follow in their footsteps and give his own similar accounting.

--(2) ***just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us,***

--Luke is recognizing the ministry of the apostles in relation to ***the word***—which, with the use of the definite article, seems to be a title for Christ as ***the Word*** and not simply a reference to His teachings and commands.

--(3-4) ***it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.***

--Luke is writing to Theophilus—which means *loved by God* or *friend of God*. The use of a respectful title like ***most excellent*** indicates this is a real individual and not just a title for any lover of Christ.

--There are many theories about the relationship between Luke and Theophilus, but all of them are just that—theories. What we do know is that Luke wants Theophilus to be assured of what he has learned about Jesus Christ and the faith!

--Why did Luke want to add his own account to the endless stories about Jesus Christ? Because he ***had perfect understanding of all things from the very first*** and wanted ***to write an orderly account***.

--Luke realized he was in the unique position to do something no other NT writer had done. He records from the birth of Jesus' predecessor John the Baptist, through the life, death, and ascension of Jesus Christ, to Pentecost and the acts of Jesus' apostles. No one had done that!

***Acts 1:1-3** makes it clear the two accounts (Luke & Acts) are united in Luke's mind as he writes to Theophilus.*

--Luke's **perfect understanding** and **orderly account** mean he is setting down eyewitness facts (not embellished stories or hearsay) in a purposeful (not necessarily chronological) order.

--Why? Assurance of the truth. Truth is found in what is written. Trust the Word of God.

Verses 5-7:

--There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

--God was about to do a new work to touch the whole world, but it was not disjointed from His past work through the people of Israel. Look at how the story starts with a Jewish priest, in the land of Judea, with a Jewish wife, in the temple, with a prophetic forerunner, etc.

--These were not easy days as they were **the days of Herod**. That would be Herod the Great (also mentioned in **Mt. 2:1-22**), who was a brutal man, a descendant of Esau, and an idolator.

--Yet God was not focused on the "great" kings of the world. It is the humble and obscure servants who come to our attention. What does Luke tell us about them?

--First, that they walked with God faithfully. They were blameless in the sense that there was no outstanding known, unrepentant sin in their lives.

--Second, they didn't walk with God because everything was perfect in their lives.

-They lived in difficult political days under Rome and Herod.

-They lived in difficult religious days in a hypocritical and degraded priesthood.

-They lived in difficult personal days as a barren couple. Culturally, it would be seen as a sign of God's disfavor. Also, nationally, being without a child left them without a connection to the Messiah!

Verses 8-12:

--So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

--At this time in history, there were more priests than were needed. There were 24 divisions (**1 Chron. 24:1-6; 2 Chron. 8:14**), and each would serve one week twice a year. They would cast lots to decide who served in which functions.

--Zacharias' lot falls on putting incense on the coals of the altar of incense, which symbolized the prayers of God's people rising to Him. It was an honored task, which might only happen once or twice in a priest's lifetime.

--The incense was to be offered every morning and evening (**Ex. 30:7-8**), this seeming like a morning occasion. The people would pray while waiting for the priest to return and offer the Aaronic blessing (**Num. 6:22-27**), and then would worship, give offerings, etc., before returning home.

--Zacharias would enter the holy place with two attendants. They would pour hot coals from the outside altar onto the altar of incense and set beside the coals a golden censer filled with incense, and then leave. Zacharias would then take the incense and place it on the coals.

--All of this would be done rather quickly and with a solemn tone, as they didn't want to linger in the holy place and do some accidental sin (**1:21**).

--It is in this moment that Gabriel appears and frightens Zacharias.

Verses 13-17:

--But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 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. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, '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."

--Not only does Zacharias get quite a scare, he also hears that his prayers for a child have been answered in a way he never imagined.

--They will have a boy. They will name him John. He will be a joy.

--He will be great in the sight of the Lord. What else could even matter for our children?!

****Matthew 11:11: 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.****

--He will be a Nazarite (**Num. 6:3**). Set apart to God.

--He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb. *Never underestimate God's ability to work in the heart of a babe through the power of His Holy Spirit!*

--In **16-17**, Zacharias couldn't miss the importance of Gabriel's word. He would be familiar with prophecies like **Isa. 40:3-8**, or **Mal. 4:2**. John the Baptist was not *the* Elijah (**Mt. 11:14; 17:11-13; Jn. 1:21**), but his ministry would have a similar prophetic tone.

--There had been no prophetic word or message from God for 400 years since Malachi. Now Zacharias was getting the news that he was about to be a father, and his child would be a key figure in God's next work! *There is no break from the OT story, only one continued story of God's work in the world.*

Verse 18:

--And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

--First, don't talk about your wife like that!

--Second, he should have believed. Zacharias knew the stories of Isaac, Jacob & Esau, Samuel, Samson, etc.

--He was standing there in the official position as a priest, and his dull response was indicative of the priesthood as a whole. Sadly, we see the sad state of the religious leaders described in all the gospels. *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, and his instinctual reaction is disbelief.*

Verses 19-20:

--And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

--Angel-human relations can be humorous. Zacharias says, *I'm an old man*. Gabriel says, *I'm Gabriel*.

--Certainly, he would know of Gabriel from Daniel (**Dan. 8:16; 9:21**), but receives him without Daniel's faith: ***because you did not believe my words***.

--No doubt his mute state was a rebuke and something of a miraculous reminder.

--Unbelief stifles spiritual joy. This was a joyful message from heaven! Gabriel calls his words ***glad tidings!***

Verses 21-22:

--And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

--We have the people waiting for a blessing and receiving a mute priest. They leave questioning and unblessed. *God has His own methods of publicity! He doesn't need our help.*

--Wonderfully, the story may begin with a mute priest and a people unblessed, but Luke ends with Jesus Christ with raised hands, blessing His followers, and ascending into heaven to be our heavenly, eternal, and faithful High Priest.

Verses 23-25:

--So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

--It seems that Elizabeth is hiding from the reproach of the public (1:36: *her who was called barren*) until God's miraculous work of conception is evident physically.

Verses 26-28:

--Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

--The *sixth month* spoken of here refers back to the fifth month mentioned in 24. Elizabeth was just showing physically and publicly.

--What happens? Gabriel is sent from God to Nazareth! Praise God, there is a direct heavenly line to the least likely places on earth.

--**having come in.** . . is an understated way to describe the shock of an angelic appearance.

--Gabriel calls Mary **highly favored** or *much graced*. *This is where the Catholic's hail Mary *full of grace* comes from, as if she had grace to give others. Nothing is further from the context. Mary is the recipient of grace, not a dispenser of grace.*

--Mary was highly favored and blessed of heaven because she would be the only woman to ever carry, birth, nurse, and mother Jesus Christ. *Other childbearing women can understand something of this blessing in their own experiences of pregnancy and birth.*

--Still, the privilege should be balanced biblically with Mary's responsibility to God and her necessity to still need Jesus as her Savior. *Mk. 3:31-35*

Luke 11:27-28: And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Verse 29:

--But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

--Mary does not doubt Gabriel; in fact, she is troubled by his message. The Greek word for **troubled** (*diatarasso*) is used only here in the NT, and means *to be wholly disturbed*.

--The thought of it all stunned her. Angels, heaven's favor and blessing. . . and her!?

Verses 30-33:

--Then the angel said to her. "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

--Gabriel speaks plainly and literally. None of this is symbolic, and Mary wouldn't have understood his message in any other way than a literal divine birth, a literal throne, and a literal kingdom.

--**Jesus**. . . meaning savior, because He will save His people from their sins (**Mt. 1:21**). Not only at the cross, but ultimately in resurrection and the eternal kingdom!

--God continues His eternal purposes to bring humanity to its ultimate end in Jesus Christ. A new humanity is established through the old humanity. Thus, Jesus is the Firstfruits and the Last Adam. ***1 Cor. 15:22-23+45***

--He will be great. . . (Ps. 110:1-2; 118:22-23; Isa. 6:3; 9:6-7; 61:1-3).

--and will be called. . . means He will be publicly declared and recognized as **the Son of the Highest**.

--David's throne and Jesus' eternal kingdom are literal. (**2 Sam. 7:11-16; Ps. 89:4, 29, 35-37; 132:11; Isa. 9:5-7; 16:5; Jer. 23:5-6; 30:9; Dan. 7:14, 27; Micah 4:7; etc.**)

--The Scriptures make it clear that this literal promised kingdom is still coming.

Matthew 6:10: Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Revelation 5:10: And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.

--the house of Jacob. . . is used only here in the NT. It is a term used frequently in the OT describing all of Israel (**Gen. 46:27; Ex. 19:3; Ps. 114:1; Isa. 2:5-6; etc.**). It is another connection to the OT prophecies and promises.

Verse 34:

--Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

--Her very question implies faith. *Because* she believes, she is asking how it could be possible. The humble, childlike faith of this young lady is purer and more simplistic than that of the aged and blameless priest Zacharias!

1:45: Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Verses 35-37:

--And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible."

--Here is heaven's explanation of the virgin birth! I don't think we can do much better, but we can certainly do much worse with unsanctified theological speculation. When it comes to this mysterious truth, we should never stray far from the source. (See also: **Jn. 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14; 10:5.**)

--***therefore***. . . answers a question. Because the Holy Spirit will come upon her and God's power will overshadow her, ***therefore***, the Child will be born as a ***Holy One***. Human but untainted by sin.

--Gabriel seeks to encourage her faith by referencing the miraculous work done in Elizabeth, and thereby connects the two lives of the children.

--Finally, he reminds her that with God, the Creator, nothing is impossible. She has all she needs for faith.

Verse 38:

--Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

--Amazing, unbelievable things are promised to her, and Mary responds with simple faith. Zacharias with unbelief. Certainly, these are meant to instruct Theophilus (and us!).

--Mary literally surrenders her body, reputation, and life to the Lord for His purposes. The virgin birth was an honor and a burden.

****John 8:41: Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God.****

--But isn't that true of all God's servants? Noah, Moses, John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, etc. All earthly burdens in His purposes end in eternal glory and crowns.