

The Church of the Servant King Survey of the Bible Series – Luke

SB_LK1B_Chapter 1:39-56 Mary Visits Elizabeth & Mary's Magnificat

Mary Visits Elizabeth (1:39-45)

Since Mary accepted Gabriel's word, there is no reason to think Mary's visit was to check the truth of that word. Two women, not only kin but now drawn by a common experience, meet in an unnamed village in the hills of Judea. The author does not say exactly where Elizabeth stayed. The location is given generally as *a town of Judah*. Judah is about a three day trip south of Nazareth.

Some interpret Luke's statement in 1:41 regarding the baby John leaping in Elizabeth's womb as a fulfillment of the angel Gabriel's prophecy in 1:15 that John would be "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb."¹ As we have previously studied, I believe such an interpretation to be more eisegesis than exegesis. I base this on the following facts and observations:

- In Luke 1:15, the preposition translated "from" in many Bibles and "in" in other Bibles is the Greek preposition ἐκ (ek) meaning "from" or "out."
- Luke was perhaps the most educated of all New Testament writers and demonstrated a style of Greek that is unparalleled in the New Testament.
- Luke would have known the difference between the Greek prepositions ἐκ (ek) meaning from or out and εἰς (eis) meaning in or into.
- In Luke 1:41-42, it is most consistent with the use of the phrase "filled with the Holy Spirit" in the rest of Luke's two books (i.e. Luke and Acts) to associate the "filling" with the speaking with the loud voice by Elizabeth when she blesses Mary (1:42) rather than to associate the filling with the babe leaping in her womb (1:41). [For more information on the two types of filling in the New Testament, please see our notes in SLR_8A in the Review of the Spiritual Life of the Believer series].
- Pregnant women often experience motility in the womb during heightened emotional states. Such reflex motility could explain John's leaping in the womb when Mary's greeting was heard by Elizabeth. Such excitement is very understandable given the supernatural nature of the two pregnancies involved as well as the fact that they both had been attended by prophetic announcements by the angel Gabriel.
- The emphasis of the passage is on the excitement over a common experience between Mary and Elizabeth (see 1:43-45) and Elizabeth's prophecy while "filled" with the Holy Spirit.
- There is no Biblical evidence that Elizabeth even knew of Mary's pregnancy prior to prophesying while being "filled" with the Holy Spirit.

Once again, on the basis of these facts and observations, there is no reason for using this passage as some type of proof text for when human life begins. The context and the intent of the passage has nothing to do with when human life begins. Is there life in the womb? Yes, at a minimum, there is biological life with the potential for human life (i.e. soul and physical life). This passage (v. 41-42) has more to do with the faith of Mary and Elizabeth as evidenced by their excitement over their mutual involvement in two of the most momentous births in history than it has to do with the birth of John or Jesus. Elizabeth's statement in 1:43-45 supports this understanding of the emphasis of the passage.

The Song of Mary (1:46-55)

¹ For instance footnote number 134 of the Net Bible (www.netbible.com) states "when the baby leaped John gave his first testimony about Jesus, a fulfillment of 1:15." Also, the footnotes to *The Nelson Study Bible* (NKJV), p. 1687 include similar comments.

Mary's song, in response to Elizabeth and to the events that have transpired, is sometimes called the *Magnificat* from the opening word in the Latin translation. The song itself draws upon the song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10) with other OT allusions and phrases interspersed.² Here are some special points of note regarding Mary's song of praise:

- Mary manifests joy in her soul. Joy (i.e. magnification of the Lord) can only occur in the soul of the believer who has come to grips with spiritual truths. This was just as true of the Age of Israel believer as it is of the Church Age believer.
- Mary calls God "my savior" which evidences the nature of her faith in Yahweh (1:47). This is one piece of evidence to me that the Yahweh God of Israel (as well as the God of the Gentiles prior to the beginning of the Age of Israel) was the Second person of the Trinity, i.e. Jesus Christ, in pre-incarnate status.
- Mary is truly humbled by the honor of being the birth mother of the Messiah of Israel (1:48) and she knew that such an honor was a stark contrast with her worldly position. Yet, she possessed great appreciation.
- Mary praised God for His special favor on Israel (vv. 51-55). Through the Child that she was to bear, God was being **merciful to Abraham and his descendants**. Mary was aware that the birth of her Child was a fulfillment of the covenant promises to Abraham and his people.³
- All of the verses in this passage reflect a soul that was saturated with a knowledge of several truths pertinent to Mary and the Jewish people and the expressions correspond to similar expressions found in the OT. The following observations reveal the humility of a soul grounded in spiritual truth:
 - Mary had a tremendous appreciation for the essence of God and His policies.
 - "He Who is mighty" (v 49) – omnipotence
 - "Holy is His name" (v 49) – justice & righteousness
 - "His mercy is on those who fear Him" (v. 50) – Mercy = God's policy of grace in action
 - "He has shown strength with His arm" (v. 51) and "He has put down the mighty from their thrones" (v. 52) – God's sovereignty and omnipotence
 - "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty" (v. 53) – God's justice, righteousness, and omniscience in action to determine blessing and reward or punishment based upon the spiritual quality of one's life
 - "In remembrance of His mercy" (v. 54) – God's policy of grace in action
 - "As He spoke to our fathers" (v. 55) – God's immutable nature means a promise (i.e. the Abrahamic Covenant – Gen 12) will be kept
 - The following chart contains an analysis of the verses of the *Magnificat* of Mary compared with the OT passages that contain similar phraseology. This comparison reveals Mary's extensive knowledge of the what we call the Old Testament.

Verse of the <i>Magnificat</i> of Mary	Phrase	OT Passage	Phrase
Luke 1:48	He has regarded the lowly state	Psalm 138:6	Though the Lord is on high, Yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar
Luke 1:49	He...has done great things	Psalm 71:19; 126:2, 3	Your righteousness, O God is very high, You who have done great

² Mays, James Luther, Ph.D., Editor, *Harper's Bible Commentary*, (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.,1988).

³ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983, 1985).

			things, O God, who is like You? (Psa 79:19) Then they said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them, the Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad. (Psa 126:2b-3a)
Luke 1:49	Holy is His name	Psalm 111:9	Holy and awesome is His name (Psa 111:9b)
Luke 1:50	His mercy is on those who fear him	Psalm 103:17	But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him (Psa 103:17)
Luke 1:51	He has shown great strength with His arm	Psalm 98:1; 118:15	His right arm and His holy arm have gained Him the victory (Psa 98:1b) The right hand of the Lord does valiantly (Psa 118:16b)
Luke 1:52	He has put down the mighty from their thrones	1 Samuel 2:7-8	The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. (1 Sam 2:7-8)
Luke 1:54	He has helped His servant Israel	Isaiah 2:1-4; 9:1-7	The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways and

			we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.
Luke 1:55	As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever	Gen 17:1-14	And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly. (Gen 17:2)

- Mary understood the nature of the spiritual life that would be present in those who would enter the Messianic kingdom. She made observations in verse 53 that are akin to the statements made by Jesus in Matthew 5:6 (the Beatitudes) regarding the attitudes that would characterize those entering the kingdom He offered, i.e. the Messianic kingdom.
- Mary was familiar with the Jews special purpose and place in history as expressed in the Abrahamic Covenant (v.55 cf. Gen 12)
- Mary knew the ultimate future of the Jews (vv. 54-55 cf. Isa 2:1-4; 9:1-7)

Finally, the fact that Mary returned to “her home” (v. 56) indicates that she was still a virgin and not yet living with her soon-to-be husband, Joseph.