

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – Luke

SB_LK1_Chapter 1
The Dedication to Theophilus and the Birth of John the Baptist

Dedication to Theophilus (1:1-4)

Luke is the only one of the four Gospel writers to state his methods and purpose at the beginning of his book. Luke's statement in verse 1 that many have attempted to prepare a narrative of the things "fulfilled" among his fellow believers is one of the relatively few instances in which Luke refers to fulfillment of prophecy. Luke's relatively infrequent use of "fulfillment" language is one of the supporting arguments for the conclusion that Luke's intended audience was Gentile. Fulfillment of the prophecies of Hebrew prophets would be of less concern to Gentiles than Jews.

Luke was familiar with other accounts of Jesus' life (v 1). However, his purpose was so that 'Theophilus' might know the certainty of the things that he had been taught. Luke was not an eyewitness, but he was a researcher. We don't know who Theophilus was. He may have been an official based upon the adjectives "most excellent" (v 4 cf. Acts 23:26; 24:3; & 26:25 all of which use the Greek word *κατασκευαστής*) and/or he could have been a financier of Luke's research.

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias (1:5-25)

The Births of John and Jesus (1:5 ff) Compared

Topic	John	Jesus
Parents introduced	1:5-7	1:26-27
Angel appears	1:8-23	1:28-30
Sign given	1:18-20	1:24-28
A woman without any children became pregnant	1:24-25	1:42

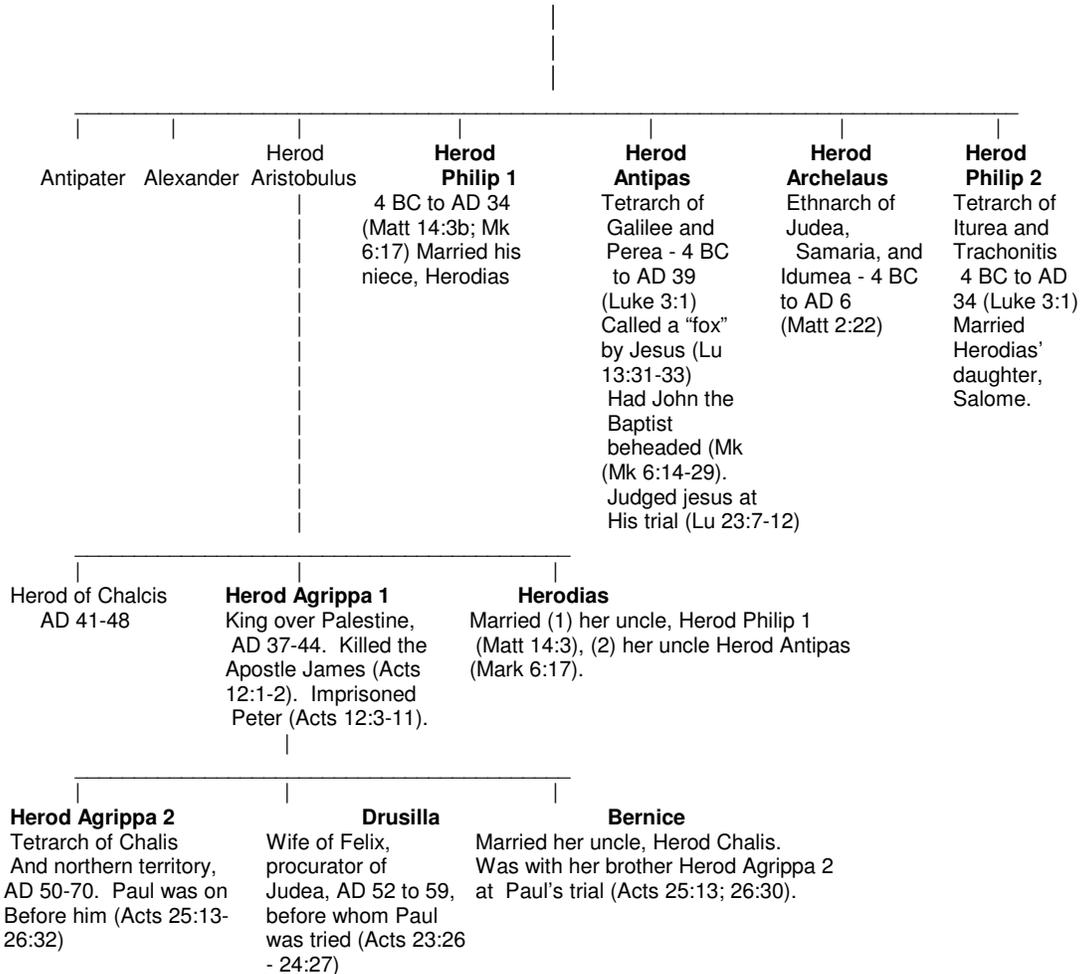
Herod, the King of Judea

This is King Herod who was appointed by the Roman emperor and who reigned from 37 to 4 B.C. over Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and much of Perea and Syria. (See chart below). Herod is the name of a family or a surname that belonged to all the generations of the Herodian house. All the descendants of Herod the Great through the fourth generation, who were identified with the government of Palestine and are mentioned in the New Testament are known in history by the surname Herod.

Herod the Great was an Idumaeen and as such a descendant of Esau (Jacob's brother who sold his birth right for food – Gen 25:29-34). The Idumaeans occupied a southern district of Palestine known as the Negeb, located between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea and southward. Even though the Idumaeans had largely embraced the Jewish religion (e.g. they conformed to the Jewish rite of circumcision), the Jews regarded them with a great deal of suspicion and prejudice. Jews considered them half-Jews. To conciliate the Jews who had been alienated by his cruelties, Herod the Great rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem.

Having been exposed to the Jewish religion, Herod knew that he was not the rightful heir to the throne. He was not a king from the line of David. The Jews hated him and never truly accepted him as king.

Herod the Great¹
King of Palestine – 37 to 4 BC
(Lu 1:5; Matt 2:1-17)
Killed baby boys in Bethlehem



Zecharias and Elizabeth

As a priest, Zacharias would have been a descendant of Aaron and of the Tribe of Levi. Elizabeth was of the same Tribe. Therefore, John was a Levite and was one who would become a priest.

The priesthood of Israel was separated into 24 divisions and the family of Abijah was one of these 24 divisions (see 1 Chr 24:10; Neh 12:17).² Each division of priests would perform their priestly duties for one week twice a year. The order in which each division took their turn and the

¹ This chart was taken from John A. Martin, "Luke," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 203. A similar, but more detailed chart can be found in Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 557.

² Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 6 and 1036.

duties performed was determined by lot.³ Some have estimated that as many as 18,000 priests served during the course of a year.⁴ Offering the incense at the altar was something a priest could only do once in his lifetime. The timing of this incident is no mere coincidence.

Both Elizabeth and Zecharias are said to be righteous before God (1:6). This is a reference to their spiritual practice as believers in the Age of Israel in that they fulfilled the requirements of the Mosaic Law as testimony to their faith in the God of Israel. They are said to have “walked in “all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (1:6). As such, Zecharias was fully aware of the special purpose of his nation and people in a world of Gentiles. He was aware of God’s purpose for giving the Jews and Israel the Law. He was very aware of the promise of a servant (e.g. Ps 22; Isa 53) and king (2 Sam 7:12-13) Messiah Who would deliver Israel. Yet, as we shall see, even experientially righteous believers (regardless of dispensation) find themselves awed to the point of temporary disbelief as they come to grips with the reality of that in which they have placed their faith.

The fact that Elizabeth was barren was most likely a source of pressure and testing in her and Zecharias’ life (see Elizabeth’s statement in 1:25). Barrenness was a significant disappointment in ancient Israel (see 1 Sam 1 in which is recorded the story of Hannah, the mother of Samuel) since the birth of children was seen as blessing from the Lord. The fact that they were both “well advanced in years” (1:7) emphasizes the increasing improbability that they would have children much like Sarah and Abraham.

The Angel’s Message and Zecharias’ Response

The hour of incense occurred twice a day at 9 am and around 3:30 pm.⁵ When Zecharias saw the angel, fear fell upon him. This was a common response to many godly men when confronted with an angel and on most, if not all, the occasions the person was comforted by the angel (see Gen 15:1; Ex 15:16; Dan 8:16; 10:12; Matt 1:20; Acts 5:5, 11; 18:9; 19:17; 27:24; Re 1:17).

In the course of his announcement, the angel indicated that Zacharias’ prayer had been heard. Most likely, the angel was referring to the greater issue of the redemption of Israel that would be accomplished through the Messiah and not just the birth of a long-awaited child. Note the statement in verse 17 by the angel that “he [John] will also go before Him [Messiah] 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.” When an angel appeared to a man or woman in Scripture, there is a greater purpose that God is announcing. On this occasion, there was a match between the desire of man [Zechariah and Elizabeth’s desire for a child] and the desire of God in history [the fulfillment of prophecy – e.g. Ge 3:15; Mal 4:5-6, the redemption of mankind, the restoration of the earth to the dominion of man through the Second Adam, and the resolution of the Angelic Conflict]. Without an objective understanding of the latter, most often the focus is upon the subjective aspect of the former [a child born to a childless couple] in this event.

John would be committed to a vow to refrain from wine and strong drink as a sign of his consecration to the Lord. This vow was imposed by God and it is not clear whether this was the Nazarite vow (Num 6:1-4; Judg 13:5, 7) since nothing is mentioned about not cutting his hair or refraining from contact with a dead body.

³ Ibid., 1036.

⁴ Earl D. Radmacher, General Editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), 1685.

⁵ Ibid.

The angel also makes the statement that John would be “filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb” (1:15). We have studied the word “filled” in this passage on previous occasions. As we have noted, the phrase “filled with” in this passage is the Greek words $\pi\mu\lambda\epsilon\mu\iota$ ($\pi\mu\lambda\epsilon\mu\iota$) + $\pi\upsilon\epsilon\mu\alpha$ ($\pi\upsilon\epsilon\mu\alpha$) in the genitive case and is a reference to being filled with the content of the Holy Spirit. We categorized this as a Type #1 filling. (See lesson SLR_1_FHS in our Spiritual Life of the Believer Series). In addition, the words “even from” are a translation of the Greek preposition $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ which means “from” or “out from.” There are a couple of points that must be noted here:

- The writer of this Gospel narrative, Luke, was one of the most accomplished and educated writers in the New Testament.
- Had Luke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit desired to communicate that John was filled with the Holy Spirit inside his mother’s womb, he would have used the Greek preposition $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ with which he was very familiar. This Greek preposition means “in” or “into.”
- “Filled” out from – $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ (or outside of) has a completely different meaning from “filled” in – $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ (or inside of) the womb.
- There are no other examples in Scripture in which God is said to “fill with the Holy Spirit” a fetus while still in the womb. Yet, there are numerous examples of God filling with the Holy Spirit a human being.

This phrase has been the source of some of the most blatant eisegesis (reading into Scripture one’s desired meaning) on the part of well-meaning, but subjective interpreters of Scripture. For the record and before I go any further, let me say that I believe that abortion under all but certain exceptional circumstances is wrong. However, this phrase has nothing to do with abortion. This phrase has nothing to do with human life in the womb. It has everything to do with God’s sovereign choice to use a miraculous birth once again to intervene in human history with the selection of an individual to accomplish His purposes. John’s volition was still involved and John could have balked and rejected God’s desire for His life. The omniscience of God knew that John wouldn’t balk. Therefore, the angel was commanded exactly what to say.

John was said to go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah (1:17). This is a reference to the Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6 that contained prophecies of Elijah being sent before the Messiah’s coming. We know that John the Baptist would have fulfilled these prophecies had Israel repented en masse and accepted Jesus as the Messiah (see Matt 11:14; 17:12; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17). Since Israel did not accept Jesus as the Messiah either prior to or after His death, burial, and resurrection, then the “times of refreshing” as preached in Acts 3:19 (the Messianic Kingdom on earth) has been delayed for the duration of the Church Age.

As a result, both Elijah and Moses figures will precede the coming of the Messiah at His Second Advent during the last half of Israel’s last days a.k.a. Daniel’s 70th Week or the seven year Tribulation (see Re 17:1-7). These two prophets are seen by Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus as Jesus gave His disciples a glimpse of His Messianic glory (see Matt 16:28 – 17:8).

The angel who appears to Zecharias is identified as Gabriel. Gabriel is one of two angels identified as messengers to men in Scripture. Gabriel appears in Daniel 8:16 and 9:21 and Michael appears in Daniel 10:13, 21; Jude 9, and Revelation 12:7. Zecharias’ response to the angel Gabriel’s announcement evidenced a lack of faith since he asked for a sign – “How shall I know this?” (1:18). Gabriel’s response is almost humorous as if to say “just what greater sign do you really need?” As a result of his disbelief, Zecharias was made unable to speak and apparently unable to hear (1:64-65).

Next lesson, we will cover Christ’s birth announced to Mary and Mary’s and Elizabeth’s meeting.