

A Study in Luke

Week One

Luke 1:1-28

Day One

1:1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us,

2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

3 Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,

4 so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

vs. 1&2 – Luke wrote that many had undertaken to “draw up an account” of Jesus’ life. It would seem that there existed a body of teaching about Jesus’ life, but perhaps some did not maintain the accuracy of the stories. Maybe others started well but didn’t finish their work. Diligence is an important factor in serving the Lord. How many projects have you started that remain undone? I hope that the study of Luke’s gospel will provide you an incentive to not only start well, but to finish well, whatever it is that you need to finish.

vs. 3&4 – Luke was a physician and a scientist. Experts say that he used the best Greek in the New Testament. God doesn’t promote potential; God promotes and uses those who can produce results for Him. But notice how nonchalant Luke is about his work. He is writing the inspired word of God and wrote, “It seemed good to me.” Does anything seem good to you to do? Then why aren’t you doing it? If the role of the Holy Spirit in you is to give you the mind of Christ, why are you so surprised that you may have that mind? What are you waiting for? The devil isn’t speaking to you in your prayer times or at church; God is. So isn’t it time that you did something that “seemed good to you,” like starting a business, going to Africa, writing a book, going back to school, or learning another language?

Day Two

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.

6 Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.

7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.

v. 5 – Zechariah and Elizabeth were “bluebloods” (an American term for someone who is born into a prominent family) who could trace their ancestry to Aaron, Moses’ brother. They were “well-connected” in the natural, but they were needy in the sense that they had no children. No matter how privileged we may be in the natural, we are all needy before God. There is a verse in Proverbs that states:

Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all
(Proverbs 22:2).

v. 6 – Not only was this couple born into a significant family, they were also holy and devout. They were blameless in carrying out the Old Testament Law and God endorsed their lives as upright. Yet they were still needy. Have you ever looked at someone and thought, “They don’t have any problems. They have money, or a good job or a great ministry?” Don’t be fooled; they don’t have it all together. We all share this one problem; we are human, and to be human is to share in this frailty called sin and this weakness called humanity.

v. 7 – Not having children was a serious stigma for anyone in the days of Zechariah and Elizabeth as it was throughout the Old Testament. Sarah, Rebekah, Hannah and others agonized over their barrenness. The Bible doesn’t tell us that this couple were crying out to God, but I think it is safe to assume that they were or at least that they mindful of their lack.

Are you waiting for something and has the wait been long? Does it seem like there is no longer any chance that you can receive what you have been waiting for? Then the story of this couple should be of particular interest to you! They were advanced in years in their service to God and God was about to move on their behalf. It is never too late! Renew your faith in God today. Trust Him to do what He promised, no matter how impossible it may seem.

Day Three

8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God,
9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.
10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

v. 8 – Zechariah was doing what he had done all his life and his priestly family had been doing for centuries! And God was about to meet him in a special way. I am glad that Jesus has ushered in a new era, when the presence of God isn’t so rare. Because the Holy Spirit has been sent, all believers have access to God, not just the High Priest or his family. Do you take God’s presence for granted? I hope not. We need to be grateful for the grace of God that enables us to come into His presence whenever we choose.

v. 9 – God is in control. He rules in the affairs of your life. The psalmist wrote:

The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all (Psalm 103:19).

In another place, it is written:

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD (Proverbs 16:33).

Do you have confidence that what has happened or is happening in your life is God-ordained? Remember what Paul wrote in Colossians:

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:2-4).

For something to get *to* you, it must get *through* Him first. That means what is happening to you is under God's watchful and loving control. It may not seem like it is, but it's true. Can you rest in this today? Can you trust that things that seemed random, like casting a lot, aren't really random where you are concerned?

v. 10 – Incense is symbolic of the prayers of God's people ascending to Him. These prayers are a fragrant aroma to God, for they represent the faith of God's people as they lift their voices to Him in need. This also represented a time of corporate prayer. We need both a personal and corporate devotional life. That is why membership in a church is so important.

Day Four

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.

14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

16 Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God.

17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

vs. 11&12 – Angels aren't the chubby little baby dolls as they are often portrayed. They are large creatures that almost always instill fear in those to whom the angels appear.

Here is an old man who has seen a lot of things in his days, but the sight of these angels terrifies him.

v. 13 – A pastor once said, “When God tells you not to fear, it’s generally too late!” And that is so true. Following God can be a scary proposition, because God asks us to walk by faith and not sight. There are more than 300 messages in the Bible that say, in one way or another, “fear not.” That must mean that fear is something that every believer must deal with. What are you afraid of right now? What can you do to overcome your fear?

Zechariah and Elizabeth must have been praying for a child, even in their old age. For what impossible thing are you believing at the present time? Is that thing represented in your prayers on a regular basis?

v. 14 – The angel was specific. They were going to have a son and he would be a joy and delight. I wonder if this couple were still praying for a child, but wondering if they could be parents that late in life? Is there anything that you think you are too old to do or receive? Trust God! It’s not too late and what He provides will be a source of joy to you.

v. 15 – Their son was to be what was called a Nazirite:

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazirite, he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins (Numbers 6:1-4).

A Nazirite was set apart for some special role in God’s service. It seems that this vow could be for a certain period of time, but their son John was to be a Nazirite for life. I have always interpreted this vow to abstain from anything that comes from the grape was to allow God to be the source for everything in the Nazirite’s life. He could not produce joy through drinking wine or energy by eating grape products high in sugar content. The Lord was to be the joy and energy for the Nazirite.

vs. 16&17 – If John was to bring many back to the Lord, that meant there were many who were not walking closely with God at this time. Keep in mind, the last prophetic word from Malachi had come 400 years before John. For four centuries, people had followed the prescribed duties that God has assigned, but God had not given them any fresh revelation.

John’s purpose was to make ready a people for the Lord. And he did that by living in a desolate area, wearing strange clothes and maintaining an unusual, natural diet. When you are functioning in your purpose, God empowers you to succeed, no matter what the

circumstances. In spite of John's location and living conditions, the whole nation came out to see him. That's the power of purpose.

John was going to follow in the footsteps of Elijah, an Old Testament prophet. Do you have a model for your life or ministry? Who is it? Why not read about that person today, whether their story is in the Bible or a historical figure. Allow that person to mentor you, even though they may have died long ago.

Day Five

18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19 The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

v. 18 – This seems like an obvious and natural question, but it seemed to have taken aback the angel. The angel saw this question for what it was: A lack of faith.

vs. 19&20 – The lesson of this encounter seems to be that there is no “wobble room” it comes to faith. The angel of the Lord, and therefore God Himself, expects His word to be accepted immediately. The angel didn't say, “Well, go home and think about it. You'll see that I am right.” He didn't say, “I know this is sudden and unexpected and will take some getting used to.”

Instead the angel revealed his name, his status with God and pronounced a judgment of silence for the next nine months. I wonder if the angel got instructions to do this before he left God's presence or if this was a response and judgment that he initiated and set in motion. But whatever the source, this judgment shows that our ability to speak isn't a function of our brain, but it is a God-given ability. If you are nervous when you speak, perhaps this will help you. Your source of eloquence isn't you, but God.

Are you in a state of unbelief concerning anything that God has spoken to you? If you are, this isn't just a weakness on your part; it is intolerable where God is concerned. You **must** deal with this quickly and completely, for it is an offense to God. Unbelief is a sin, pure and simple. You must deal with it as such and not tolerate it in any form.

Day Six

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.

22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

vs. 21&22 – Can you imagine being a man of God, having an encounter with an angel, hearing that God was about to answer a long-standing prayer, and not being able to tell anyone about it! That was the sentence or consequence of his unbelief that was handed down from the angel.

This indicates that we are to speak about what God is doing in our lives, for to not speak about those things is unnatural. Do you have a testimony today? I'm not referring to something God did years ago, but something He is doing right now. Find someone today to whom you can give a report of what God is doing? Don't let your tongue be bound by unbelief, but rather magnify the Lord by talking about what you are hearing and seeing Him do.

Day Seven

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home.

24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.

25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

v. 24 – King David had established the rotation among the priestly families for duty in the tabernacle and this was carried over to the Temple. Each family had to serve one week when their turn came up. The first thing that impresses me about this was that this rotation had been going on for 1100 years! The second thing is that Zechariah finished out his week after having this experience and having been struck dumb! Now that's commitment to duty!

vs. 25&26 – Elizabeth got pregnant, just as the angel had said. She chose to stay out of sight until she couldn't hide the fact any longer that she was pregnant. This is an interesting response, one I am sure that was conditioned by her culture at the time. But her testimony was powerful and spoke to the pain she had lived in while she was barren.

There are two verses in Psalms with which I would like to close this week's study:

For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning (Psalm 30:5).

He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him (Psalm 126:6).

There may be a long night where the Lord seems distant and when the promise of God carries beyond anything you thought possible. This may lead to tears and pain, but God is mindful of what you are going through. Face your pain, but also maintain your faith in God. When it seems least likely, He will come and rescue you, providing what He promised. Elizabeth found this truth, but we will see that her situation, while a comfort

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to her, was also a comfort to her young cousin who was about to have her own encounter with an angel.