

Lifting Up The STANDARD

“When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isaiah 59:19).



Challenging And Encouraging God's Remnant To Remain Faithful

Article # 1

Lessons From LUKE



Chapter One

“That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed”

(Luke 1:4).

The New Testament begins with what we call the four gospels, that is, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Most of us could write a little bit about what we know about Matthew; we could write a little bit about what we know about John; but when it comes to Mark and Luke, I think that many of us would have a problem coming up with writing a full page of information about either one of those men.

Luke is a very interesting Book. There are fifty percent more details in the book of Luke than any of the other three gospels. Luke mentions thirteen women that are not mentioned in the other gospels, and there are more miracles mentioned in the book of Luke than any of the other three gospels. Concerning the events of Christ and His life, there are twenty-nine things mentioned by Luke that are not in the other three gospels. It is the longest of the four gospels. It has twenty-four chapters.

Paul the apostle and Luke both wrote about one-third of the New Testament, and yet we could write essays on Paul, but little is said about the man called Luke.

Luke never mentions his own name. He was obviously a very humble person, and what he wrote covers a period of sixty years of history. And, of course, history is His story—not Luke's story but the Lord's story. The focus is all on Jesus Christ, and that is what the theme is in the Book of Luke.

The first four verses give us an introduction to the Book.

Luke 1:1-4,

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Luke wants to talk about the things that they believed. 2 Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye witnesses, and ministers of the word;”

Luke is saying, *“We were there. We saw the things that happened.”* In verse three he wrote:

“It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding (complete understanding) of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,”

There's been much discussion about who Theophilus was. You'll find his name mentioned only one other time, and that is as you start the book of Acts; and, of course, Luke wrote the book of Acts. The name Theophilus means *“friend of God,”* so if you're a friend of God, this Book is for you.

Luke 1:4,

“That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.”

It was important to Luke that we would know *“the certainty of those things”* that we have been instructed in.

The purpose of the Book of Luke is found in Luke 1:77:

“To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.”

The Account Begins

Luke 1:5,

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.”

A Maniac In Control In Israel

The first person mentioned in the story is Herod. Herod was sent there by the Romans as governor of Judea. He was an Edomite, and the Old Testament tells us that the Edomites had been cursed by God.

For political reasons, Herod married a Jewish girl so he could be accepted by the Jews, but sometime later, he drowned the high priest, who happened to be his wife's brother. And obviously Herod's wife would be a little bit upset about her brother being killed, so Herod had his wife put to death.

He had his wife's mother put to death, which would be his mother-in-law, and also three of her children were put to death—of course, his sons. Herod was a maniac.

Then the worst of all the things he did was to slaughter all the children from two years of age and under in an attempt to kill the Christ Child. Well, we don't want to spend too much time talking about Herod except to say we always get the kind of government we deserve.

A Hill Country Priest

The next person mentioned is Zacharias. We could spend a long time talking about him. But it says here that he was *“a certain priest.”* That's interesting. The word *“certain,”* according to the dictionary, is *“having a complete conviction about something; confident, absolutely certain about something.”*

Zacharias lived in an insignificant place. He was not living in Jerusalem; he was living out in the hill country. He was not considered a big-shot priest like those serving at the temple in Jerusalem. At that time there were 18,000 priests in Israel, and out of all of the things that were happening and all of the people who were making it happen, there was only a small remnant who really knew what was going on.



In verses five and six we read:

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.”

This was a very important young couple. They were part of the remnant, part of the people who knew about what was going on. Most of the people didn't have any idea what was happening. Well, here we have Zacharias. He has a wife named Elisabeth. She is mentioned in seven verses in the New Testament, and all seven verses are in the Book of Luke in Chapter One.

In verse five she's mentioned as one of the daughters of Aaron, who was a priest, so she was a daughter of a priest. Verse seven says that Elisabeth was barren, and then in verse thirteen Zacharias was told that *“Elisabeth shall bare thee a son,”* and verse twenty-four, *“Elisabeth conceived.”*

We find out in verse thirty-six that Elisabeth is Mary's cousin, Mary the mother of Jesus. And then in verse forty, Mary went to visit Elisabeth, and we read in Luke 1:41 that Elisabeth was *“filled with the Holy Ghost.”*

Two Insignificant People

Now, we have here what would be considered at that time two insignificant people. To be insignificant is to be too small or unimportant to be worthy of consideration. We have a lot of churches like that today. They're insignificant in the eyes of the movement. They're considered to be too small or unimportant to be worthy of consideration. Not many of those seemingly insignificant pastors are going to be invited to speak in any national preacher's meeting.

It's interesting that when this story begins in the Book of Luke, the Lord uses somebody who is considered insignificant; however, they were not insignificant in the eyes of God. They were part of a very small remnant in Israel at that time in the age of apostasy who knew what was going on as far as spiritual things were concerned.

Very few people did. Very few people do today. In verse six it says they were both *“righteous”*; that is, they were doing what was right before God.

We also read they were *“walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.”* A commandment is what we're supposed to do; an ordinance is how we're supposed to do it. Being blameless is not being perfect it was simply that they could not be accused of doing something that is wrong.

We have these two seemingly insignificant people, and verse seven tells us that they had no child because Elisabeth was barren and they were now well stricken in years.

They had no child. For a woman in Israel, that was a stigma. You remember that Rachel said, *“Give me children, or else I die.”* Hannah was also barren. Well, they both prayed, and the answer to their prayer was not no; it was not now. We need to realize that God is never in a hurry, but He is never late.

“It Came To Pass”

Luke 1:8-9,

“And it came to pass, that while he—that is, Zacharias—executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.”

There is a lot of information here. *“And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office...”* We mentioned previously that there were 18,000 priests in Israel at that time, and they would get to serve in Jerusalem two weeks in a year.

Zacharias' turn came around, and he was no doubt quite excited. The Bible says he executed his office in the order of his course, and then it says, *“According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.”* They chose this priest out of 18,000 priests. This was done by lot, and your chances of getting to do this were usually pretty slim out of 18,000. However, nothing happens by chance with God. So it was Zacharias' lot to go into the Holy of Holies and burn incense. He has come in from the hill country. No doubt he's feeling pretty intimidated as he goes through this situation.

In verse ten the focus turns to the multitude. It says:

“And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.”

Going Through The Motions

Here we have the multitudes going through the motions. God had not spoken to His people, Israel, for 400 years;

however, God has always had a remnant who are let in on what God is doing.

The Remnant of Noah's Day

First Peter 3:20,

“God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.”

The Remnant of Isaiah's Day

Isaiah 1:9,

“Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.”

The Remnant During The Ministry of Christ

Matthew 7:14,

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

It is very important to understand that the verse above has absolutely nothing to do with people being saved. He was speaking concerning the very few Christians who would be willing to walk the narrow way.

Matthew 9:37,

“Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.”

Luke 12:32,

“Fear not, little flock.”

Only a very few people knew what was happening when Christ came. The religious people in Israel were going through the motions without a clue as to what was happening. Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, and a few shepherds were the only ones who knew. Shortly after Christ was born. He was presented in the temple. While the crowds were going through the motions in the temple, only Simeon and Ana knew what was happening. When Christ began His ministry, only a small group of disciples realized what was going on.

The Remnant of The Early Church Period

A careful study of the early chapters of the Book of Acts will show that the crowds that began gathering on the Day of Pentecost were Israelites, and only Israelites, who were looking for the Kingdom of Israel to be organized. As soon as they found out that becoming a Christian meant facing persecution, the crowd was reduced to a remnant. Although they were organized with pastors and deacons the remnant was small enough they could assemble in the homes of faithful Christians.

Romans 11:5,

“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” (NOTE: Nowhere in Scripture is election unto salvation but always unto blessing and service).

Philemon 1:2,

“The church in thy house.”

Colossians 4:15,

“The church which is in his house.”

First Corinthians 16:19,

“The church that is in their house.”

Romans 16:5,

“Likewise greet the church that is in their house.”

Acts 8:3,

“As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.”

Revelation 2:8-9,

“The church in Smyrna...I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty.”

Revelation 3:4,

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis.”

An Important Message From God**Luke 1:11,**

“And there appeared unto him, (Zacharias) an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.”

Again, Zacharias would have been somewhat nervous about what he's doing here, but all of a sudden after 400 years of silence, there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord. Interesting. An insignificant priest from the hill country, not one of the big shots in Jerusalem, and after 400 years, an angel appeared unto him on the right side of the altar of incense. I don't know what that would do for you, but I know what it would do for me, and I know what it did for Zacharias. We find him out of his comfort zone.

Luke 1:12-13,

“And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.”

After 400 years, Zacharias gets to talk to this angel, and the angel tells him he's going to have a son. It says in verse twelve that Zacharias was troubled and fear fell upon him.

Then in verse thirteen the angel said unto him, *“Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard...”* To be *“troubled”* and to *“fear”* are unpleasant emotions. It's interesting that the word *“fear”* is used eighteen times in the Book of Luke.

Zacharias had been praying for Elisabeth that she would have a son. Humanly speaking, we have an impossible situation here. They're both old; they are past the time of having children, and it is to this faithful leader from the hill country that the angel appears after 400 years and says, *“...thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.”*

Zacharias had an unpleasant emotion. He was troubled and he experienced fear. I think I would too. Gideon, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and John in the Book of Revelation all stood in fear. In fact, it says in Revelation that John fell on his face as a dead man when he stood before God. And keep in mind that John had been with Jesus for three years during His earthly ministry. And now here is Zacharias. He hasn't heard anything from anybody in Heaven for 400 years, yet there he is faithfully doing what he is supposed to be doing.

Then we change from these unpleasant emotions to pleasant emotions. It says in verse fourteen that the angel said, *“And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.”*

In upcoming articles we are going to take a look at some lessons that we can learn as we go through the Book of Luke.

First Corinthians 10:11,

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

Gabriel Rebukes Zacharias

In our next article we will see why Gabriel was upset with Zacharias, and as a result he struck him *“dumb, and not able to speak.”* We are attempting to learn lessons from Luke. One thing we can learn is...if Gabriel shows up don't get him upset.



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