

Lifting Up The STANDARD

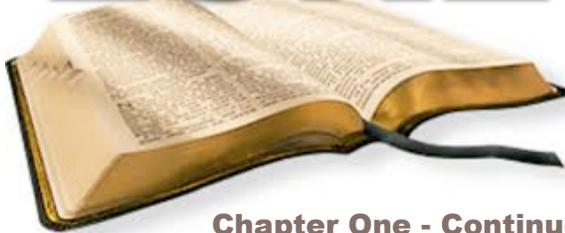
“When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isaiah 59:19).



Challenging And Encouraging God's Remnant To Remain Faithful

Article # 2

Lessons From LUKE



Chapter One - Continued

We are calling this series of articles "Lessons from Luke." A "lesson" is acquiring a better understanding about something, and that's what Luke was writing about. He wrote in Luke 1:4, *"That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed."*

Three People Making Choices

Herod-Zacharias-Elizabeth

In verse five we have three people that God starts this story with: one is Herod, one is Zacharias, and the other is Elisabeth. All of them, like us, simply made choices and like us, they faced the consequences of those choices. Zacharias and Elisabeth were common people, but they were concerned people. They were not concerned about the temporal things of life, but it was the eternal things that really mattered to them. All of us make our choices concerning what matters to us, whether it's the eternal things or whether it's the temporal things.

In verse fourteen of Luke Chapter one, we read the angel said to Zacharias, *"And thou shalt have joy and gladness;*

and many shall rejoice at his birth." (the birth of John the Baptist). Verse 15 says, *"For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord..."*

God's Definition of Greatness

We have man's idea of what greatness is and we have God's truth concerning greatness; and they're very, very different. We look in the sports world and remember the boxer who said, *"I am the greatest,"* and then we have the hockey player who is referred to as *"The Great One."* What do we have to do to be great in the sight of the Lord? The Bible tells us in verse fifteen that he (John), *"shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb."*

When we are talking about being great, we are talking here about being great in the sight of the Lord, not in the sight of man. How did John the Baptist turn out? In the sight of men, he wasn't so great. They killed him. And the same thing was true concerning the Lord. So greatness in God's eyes and greatness in man's eyes are obviously two different things.

One of the things we see here is John the Baptist's choices regarding *eternal* things or *temporary* things. The angel said that he shall not drink wine nor strong drink. Second, we look at *internal* choices or eternal things, and that is *"he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost."*

When we are talking about being filled with the Holy Spirit, we sometimes think that's something more than it really is. When the Holy Spirit came, we read in the early part of the book of Acts that there was a rushing mighty wind, and when you think of a ship, the wind will fill the sails, and it will move the ship in the direction that the wind is pushing it. And that's all it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It doesn't mean to be perfect.

The Bible says that *“he that says he has no sin deceives himself and the truth is not in him.”* To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to have the Holy Spirit moving us in the direction He wants us to go, and we're saying, *“Yes, I'm going in that direction.”*

When it says *“even from his mother's womb,”* this means even from an impossible situation where Elisabeth was too old to have children, and it doesn't mean, as the Calvinists would like us to believe, that he was predetermined to be saved and others are predetermined to go to Hell. That's not what it's talking about here. It means that *even* from his mother's womb, this was one very special situation.

Interpretations And Applications

In verse sixteen it says, *“And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.”* The word *“Israel”* occurs in verse fifty-four, verse sixty-eight, and verse eighty, and we need to understand when studying the Scriptures that every Scripture has a singular interpretation but every Scripture may have very many applications.

In order to obviously understand what was happening with John the Baptist, we have to understand that his ministry had to do with the nation of Israel. That is very important. If you go through our series on the Book of Acts, available on our website you can download a lot of detail about John's ministry.

Verse seventeen says, *“And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias”*—and here is how he spent his life—*“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.”* Now, that's what made John the Baptist great in the sight of the Lord.

Zacharias' Attitude

Zacharias kind of doubted this whole story. He's talking to this angel, *“And Zacharias said unto the angel, “Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.”* There are consequences when you doubt God or someone who brings a message from God, and that is what is happening here.

Luke 1:19,

“And the angel answering said unto him, (1) I am Gabriel, (2) I stand in the presence of God; (3) I am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. (4) And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not

able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.”

Zacharias, The Unbelieving Believer

The Bible talks quite a bit about believers who really don't believe, and the Bible says, *“According to your faith (what you believe) be it unto you.”* There are consequences when we as believers refuse to believe. It's interesting that we can trust God to save us for eternity, but we can't trust God to let Him have direction in our lives in this little span that the Bible calls a vapor.

The Crowd Outside

In verses twenty-one and twenty-two the Bible focuses on the people outside that had no idea whatsoever what was happening. (Much like our present day of apostasy).

We read,

“And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.”

The Remnant And The Religious

As mentioned in our previous article, there was only a remnant of people at that time that understood what was happening. It's been that way ever since the beginning. We can go all the way back to the story of Noah. There was only a remnant, a very small remnant that got on that boat. We can go later to the book of Isaiah, and Isaiah said that *“had it not been for a very small remnant, we would have been as Sodom and we would have been as Gomorrah.”* (Isaiah 1:9).

Then we come to when Christ was born. How many people in Jerusalem were there going through their religious activities? Very few of them understood what was going on. We have a few shepherds who got in on the truth. We have a couple of people who were in the Temple who understood the truth. How many thousands of people were in the Temple who didn't understand what was happening? And then, of course, we had the three wise men who came in from afar, and that was it—just a remnant.

Zacharias - Back To The Hill Country

At this part in the story, Zacharias went back home to his wife Elisabeth. He went back to the hill country. We read in verse twenty-three, "And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house." He went back home.

Big things happen with very small beginnings. Proverbs 15:16 says, "Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith." Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock" (Luke 12:32). There was just a remnant that really understood what was going on, and Zacharias and Elisabeth were two older folks who knew what God was doing.

Zacharias departed to his own house. He didn't have a fancy office in downtown Jerusalem. He just went back home. He's going to cut the grass, he's going to take out the garbage—and he's going to be used of God to change the direction of the world. His son will be the forerunner of the Savior. Big things happen with small beginnings.

The Focus Back On Elizabeth

In verse twenty-four, the focus goes back on Elisabeth, and we read,

"And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men."

Elisabeth was a godly woman. She was a Proverbs 31 kind of a woman. She was a wife, she was a mother, and she was one of those people who Titus 2:5 talks about—*"a keeper at home, good, obedient to her own husband, that the word of God be not blasphemed."*

Gabriel Returns

The second time the angel shows up, but this time he doesn't talk to an old man like Zacharias, who was a leader, but rather a very young lady. She was probably twelve, thirteen, maybe fourteen years old. She also would be seemingly insignificant by most people around her.

Both times it was the angel Gabriel who showed up to talk to these people. There are only two angels mentioned by name in all of the Bible. One is Gabriel; the other one is Michael. There are lots of other angels, but these are the only two that the Bible names. In both cases, the angel came from Heaven with a special message that had to do with a miracle birth.

Luke 1:24,25,

"And after those days his wife Elisabeth (Zacharias' wife) conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men."

When it says "she hid herself," it doesn't mean that she crawled into a closet somewhere. To "hide" here simply means to keep secret concerning what was going on. Remember, she's an older lady, probably in her seventies, maybe even older, and if she's going to tell somebody that she's going to have a child, they're all going to laugh at her anyway, so she kept it hid for five months. But she was excited and said, "**The Lord has taken away my reproach.**" The first time that phrase "my reproach" is found in the Bible is back in the book of Genesis where Rachel said, "**God hath taken away my reproach,**" and Rachel was also about to have a child.

Luke 1:26-27,

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary."

We have a lot of interesting and important information here. "In the sixth month" is referring to the fact that Elisabeth is six months pregnant at this time. The angel Gabriel, the same angel that had spoken to Zacharias, was sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth. That's important. That is an insignificant town, a nothing town way out in the hill country. It's very interesting how the greatest story that's ever been told in this world begins with these insignificant people in an insignificant place.

We read the angel came to "a virgin", and it's important that Jesus was born of a virgin. If He wasn't, none of us are going to Heaven. Jesus was born of a virgin who was espoused (or engaged) to a man whose name was Joseph. Joseph was also very insignificant. The important thing we see here about Joseph in this particular portion of Scripture is that he was of the house of David.

That means he was in the royal line, and because both Mary and Joseph were of the royal line, this gave Jesus the absolute right to walk in and claim the throne of Israel.

Verse 27 says that “*the virgin's name was Mary.*” The word “*virgin*” is mentioned twice because that is so important.

Verse 28 tells us, “*And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.*”

Verse 29, “*And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.*”

Mary Was Troubled

At this point the angel had not told her that she was going to have a child. She is troubled at the very thought that she would be “*highly favored*” with God and she would be blessed among women in any way. She was a very humble young teenage girl. And by the way, it says that she was “*blessed*”. It does not say she would be the *blessor*, and it does not say that we could pray to her and have our prayers answered. Mary never hears our prayers. She was an ordinary, insignificant young lady who was absolutely in love with the Lord and wanted to do what the Lord wanted her to do, and that is why she was chosen for this particular responsibility—and what a responsibility it was!

No Rebuke By Gabriel

Mary was troubled at the angel’s saying “*and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be*”—Why would he say this about me?

Verses 30-33,

“And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

Mary would realize that this angel is quoting from the book of Isaiah, and she would understand that this would be the Christ Child that this angel was talking about. Mary was a young lady, and this was all happening very fast—and, again, this is the first time in 400 years anybody has heard from Heaven.

Verses 34-38,

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing (The Greek word “thing” is translated “one” four times) which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.”

Zacharias was struck deaf and dumb; Mary was not. Mary had some questions about this, but obviously her attitude was not the same as Zacharias' attitude when he refused to believe. Zacharias had been praying that he and Elizabeth would have a child. Mary was not praying for a child. Zacharias wanted a sign. Gabriel gave him one. He said, “*And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words*” (Luke 1:20).

Luke 1:39-42,

“And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda.” (about eighty miles) And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe” (John the Baptist) leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.”

Why would this young lady Mary, when she found out that she was going to have the Christ Child, take an eighty mile trip out into the hill country to visit with Elisabeth? I think one of the reasons was that Elisabeth would have been the only person in the world who Mary would have something in common with at this time. If she had gone to anybody else and said, “*I'm going to have a baby and I've never been with a man,*” they would say, “*You've been dreaming.*” But Elisabeth would believe her.

Elisabeth said right away, verse 43, “*And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*”

Keep in mind, this is an older lady talking to a teenager.

Verse 44,

“For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.”
 What an interesting verse.

Verse 45-50,

“And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.”

Mary feared the Lord, not in the sense that she was afraid of Him, but in the sense that she had great reverence for the Lord and whatever He wanted, and she is willing to totally and completely upset the rest of her life as a result of being the virgin Mary.



For her to have a child, nobody is going to believe her; she's going to be ostracized for the rest of her life, but she said, *“I'm the handmaid of the Lord, whatever He wants to do.”*

We read down in verse 56, *“And Mary abode with her (Elisabeth) about three months, and returned to her own house.”* When she went there, Elisabeth was six months pregnant. She stayed for three months, and it says in verse 57, *“Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.”*

In verse eighty we read, *“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.”* We've mentioned that every verse in the Bible has a singular interpretation but every verse might have many applications, and the purpose for John the Baptist has to do with presenting the Messiah for the Jews of Israel. He is being presented as their King. Of course, we know they turned Him down.

There are so many lessons from this chapter. What is the best lesson we can learn? One thing we can learn

for sure is that when God prophesies something, it will happen. **These ladies both had miracle children.**

What's Next?

First Thessalonians 5:16-17,

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

That's the next thing on God's program, and when God prophesies something, it's going to happen. We're living in uncertain days; however, verse eighteen, ends with this sentence, *“Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”* We would pray even as John did in the book of Revelation, *“Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus”* (Revelation 22:20).

Contentment



“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

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"That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed"
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“Go ye into all the world, and preach...”

(Mark 16:15)