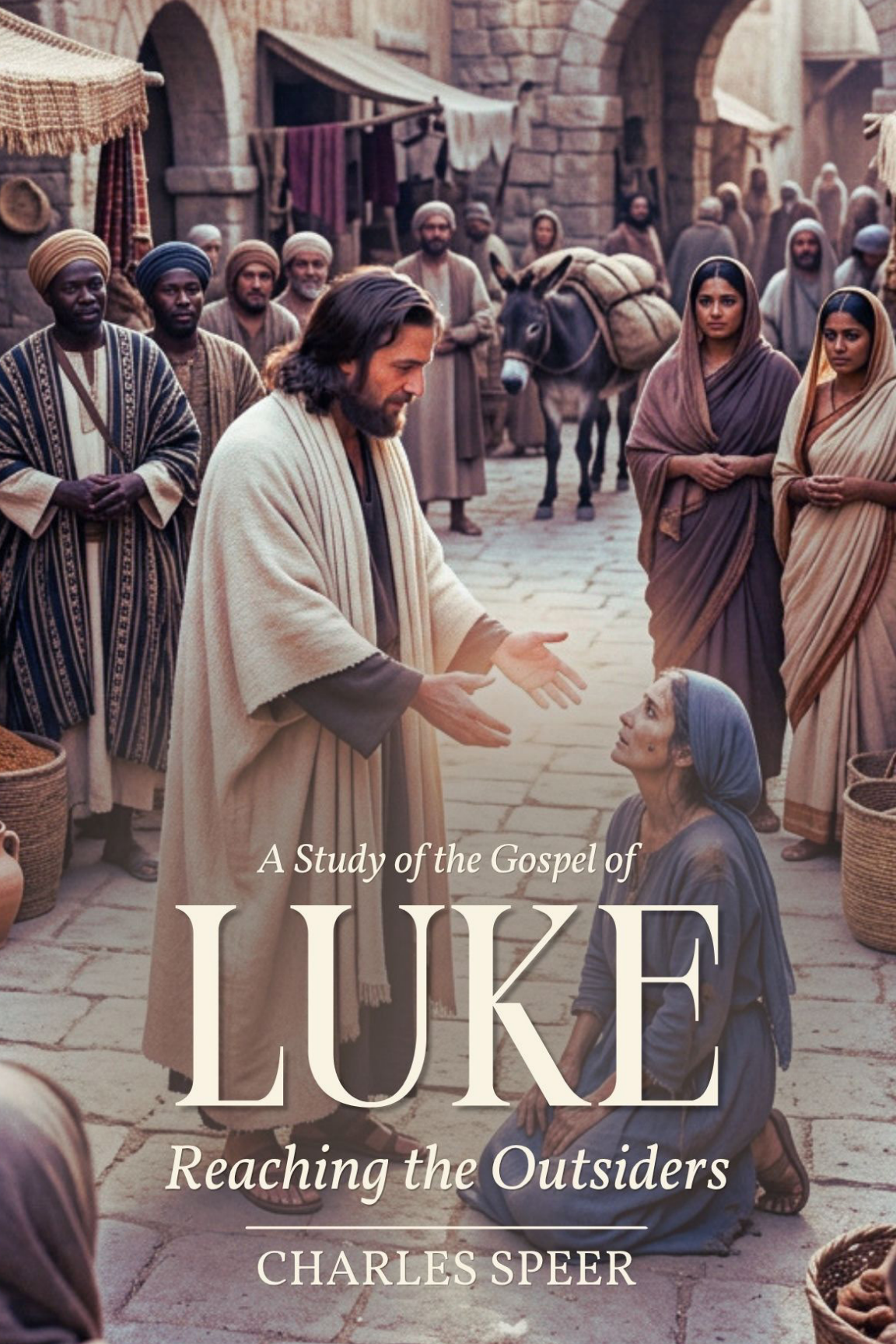




A Study of the Gospel of

LUKE

Reaching the Outsiders

CHARLES SPEER

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Reaching the Outsiders

by Charles Speer

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A Study of the Gospel of Luke

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*This book is dedicated to all the “outcasts”
whom Jesus has embraced and invited into
His kingdom.*

Together we are transformed by seeing the Jesus Luke presented.

*We, like the “outcasts” whom Jesus pursued in His ministry, are
privileged to be sons of the kingdom
with the Son of God.*

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PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF JESUS

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Introduction

This book – *A Study of the Gospel of Luke* – should actually be a two-volume set. In this volume we will cover the life and teachings of Jesus from the Book of Luke. The second volume would be the life and teachings of Jesus from the Book of Acts. Those two New Testament books, Luke and Acts, obviously go together. Acts 1:1 says, “*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.*” It would be nice if these two books were right next to each other in the Bible, but the Book of John is between them. Acts 1:1 ties the Book of Acts to the Book of Luke because the “*former book*” is the Book of Luke. Luke wrote about “*all that Jesus began to do and to teach.*” Notice that Luke is not about **everything** that Jesus taught and did. It is only about what He “*began to do and to teach.*”

Remember that in Acts 2 the church was established. The church is the body of Christ. The body does what the Head tells it to do. The church is the incarnation of Christ continually. Christ has gone to heaven, but His body, the church, remains. The church is to be like

the Lord Jesus, so the church is the continuation of what *“Jesus began to do and to teach.”* When Luke said in the Book of Acts, *“In my former book...I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach,”* that tells the Bible student that the Book of Acts is about what Jesus continued *“to do and to teach.”* Jesus is gone, but His church remains! His church continues to do what Jesus did. His body continues *“to do and to teach”* as long as the church exists until Jesus comes back. Luke wrote a two-volume set about what *“Jesus came to do and to teach.”*

The Eternal Purposes of God

One thing Christians are trying to do is to accomplish the eternal purposes of God. To accomplish those eternal purposes, we need to know what they are:

- **God wants everyone to be saved:** *God “...is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). “...God our Savior...wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3–4).*
- **God wants everyone to become Christ-like:** *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). “And we...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory...” (2 Corinthians 3:18). “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).*
- **God wants to be glorified:** *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ....to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace....In him we were also*

*chosen...in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be **for the praise of his glory**....until the redemption of those who are God's possession — **to the praise of his glory** (Ephesians 1:3–14).*

What do the three eternal purposes of God mean for a Christian?

- **Become like God and Jesus:** *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). “**Be perfect**, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).*
- **“Be Perfect”?** The word “*perfect*” does not mean without sin. That is not what Jesus was saying. He was saying, “Grow up! Be more mature!” The word “*perfect*” has to do with moving toward completeness, moving toward maturity. In essence, that is what He was saying on the Sermon on the Mount — “Become like God.”

Paul told the Ephesians “...to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness....Be imitators of God...” (Ephesians 4:24, 5:1). He told the Philippians, “Your attitude [“mind”] should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). And he told the Corinthians they needed to become like him as he became like Christ: “Therefore I urge you to imitate me (1 Corinthians 4:16, cf. 11:1). Christians are to look at the Christ and become more and more like Him. We should set our minds on that as the bottom line by looking at Jesus in the gospels.

Background Information

Author

Luke appears to be the author of the Book of Luke and the Book of Acts, but that is not specifically stated in either of these two books. Most people think Luke wrote both books because of the following indications:

- There are some “**we**” passages in the Book of Acts. The word “**we**” is sometimes used to refer to Paul and those who traveled with him on his missionary journeys. Luke appeared with Paul a number of times as one of those “**we**” companions. On his second missionary journey, Paul went to a place called Troas. Acts 16:8–11 says: *So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, **we** got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called **us** to preach the gospel to them. From Troas **we** put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis (Acts 16:8–11).* Some have thought because of the “**we**” passages that begin in Acts 16:10 that Troas is where Paul picked up Luke. Sometimes Luke was with them, and sometimes he was not.
- Luke was definitely with Paul in Rome when Paul was about to die. Second Timothy 4:11 says, “*Only Luke is with me.*”
- According to those who know Greek, there are medical terms used in the books of Luke and Acts that might not be used in regular language by most people. Colossians 4:14 calls Luke “*the beloved physician*” (ASV). Doctors sometimes

use language that not everyone understands. Luke probably used some language that was unique to his profession.

- Some church fathers, such as Justin Martyr, Marcion, Tertullian, and Irenaeus, followed the Christian writers past the first century. These men lived around 100–200 A.D., so they lived close to the time of the writing of Luke and Acts. They attest that Luke was the author, as does the Muratorian Canon, which is dated in the late second century.

There is a little bit of internal information that indicate Luke as the author, and then there are the church fathers who said that Luke was the author.

This study is not going to be focused on who the author is; instead, it is more concerned with the book itself. There are a number of books whose authors are unknown, such as the Book of Job and many of the psalms, but Luke is plainly written by Luke.

Date

When was the Book of Luke written? Dates can be difficult to pinpoint. When Acts ended, Paul was in prison in Rome. That happened in about 64 A.D. and was the last incident in Luke's writing. So obviously the date has to be after that. It does not appear that the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in 70 A.D., had taken place. It appears that all of the synoptic gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke — were written between 65 and 70 A.D. John was probably written in the 90s. But again, dates are difficult. Commentaries will vary in their opinions on dates.

Be aware that commentaries may be very liberal, meaning they do not accept the miraculous nature of Scripture. Or they may be very

conservative and think every word is the word of God. So just because somebody writes a commentary that does not mean that they are necessarily trustworthy. There are different kinds of authors and commentaries.

Place of Writing

This is one of those little-known pieces of information about the Gospel of Luke. In other words, we really do not know where Luke was when he wrote this gospel. Some scholars have suggested Antioch, Asia Minor, or even Rome. In my estimation, Antioch is ruled out because I believe that was where Theophilus was located. Asia Minor is interesting because the “we” in Acts are from that area. Was Luke familiar with that area or even from there? Rome is fascinating too, because he was in Rome with Paul at one point. The best answer is that we really do not know

Recipient

*“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**”* (Luke 1:3).

“Theophilus” was the recipient of the Book of Luke. His name means Lover of God. That is a Greek name, so he was probably Greek. He was a beloved brother and friend to Luke, and obviously Luke knew him. Theophilus would have had to know a fair amount of the Old Testament, even though he was not a Jew, because even though the Book of Luke does not have as many quotes from the Old Testament as Matthew, it does have a lot of Jewish flavor.

Why would a Greek understand the Old Testament? Remember that when the church was established in different places, the apostles would lay hands on people and give them miraculous gifts. They might have the gift of prophecy or teaching, but there was not a Bible in the first century when these churches were established. So they had to have somebody who could speak by inspiration. They had prophets and teachers and people with wisdom and knowledge who were inspired. And because of that, they would have studied not only new revelations coming along, but also the Old Testament. Even though the churches had Greeks, or Gentiles, in them, they would not have studied only the New Testament writings. The New Testament relies heavily on the Old Testament for interpretation, so they would have to know the Old Testament to some degree. If Theophilus had been a Christian for very long, he would have studied the Old Testament and would have known some things about it. He might have been a very knowledgeable man.

Looking at the Text

Students studying the Bible need to study all the books, but especially the gospels, on several different levels. This is important.

- The Book of Luke is about Jesus' dealings with people. It is important to know what Jesus was doing with the people mentioned in the book itself. How were those people affected?
- Know what was going on with Theophilus and what was going on where he was. What was happening to Theophilus that necessitated the writing of these books to him? That is called the *Sitz im Leben*. That is a German term that means the "setting in life." What was going on with the recipient?

What was going on around him? That is the occasion for writing.

- What does this book have to do with Christians today? How does this book impact us?

Most people will open the Scripture and start with this third level, but that is not the place to start. We must figure out what was going on originally (exegesis) before looking for how it impacts us (hermeneutics). Some will open the Bible and say, “This is what it means to me.” That is not the place to start. Figure out what it meant to the people it was written to and what was going on around them, then figure out how it impacts us today. Do the exegesis first, then the hermeneutics. Look at the three levels: start on the story, figure out what was going on with the recipients, and then make the application.

Context

There are books that put Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John right next to each other on one page. That kind of book is called a harmony of the Gospels. It is a good book to have. But Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not necessarily tell the same stories in exactly the same way. They do not include all the same details.

Consider this problem: somebody might want to preach on the story of the rich young ruler. It is in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the three synoptic gospels (cf. Matthew 19:16–22; Mark 10:17–22; Luke 18:18–23). John did not include this story. In the harmony of the Gospels, those three stories would appear right next to each other. The person who wanted to preach on the rich young ruler might want to get all the facts from all three stories together. That is not

necessarily a bad thing, but consider this — did Matthew use that story to do the same thing in his gospel that Mark used the story to do in his gospel? Or is it used in a different way in Luke's story? Do not just lift those stories out of the **context** where they were used, because those stories were used in a particular **context**. They might even be used in different places in the story in those three gospels.

Consider why the author would put that story here. Why would Luke put it there? Generally speaking, the synoptic gospels are in chronological order, but not always. Sometimes the gospel writer would take several different stories and put them all together for a reason. Look at Matthew 8–9. Those two chapters have a lot of healings and miracles. Matthew took those miracles and put them into two chapters for a reason. He arranged the material in a certain way to say, "See what the Christ did!" He arranged the material there to make an impact. Look at Matthew 13. Parable after parable after parable after parable. Matthew put them together for a reason. It did not necessarily mean that Jesus told this parable, and then He told this one, and then He told this one. The writers arranged their material to make a particular point in their text. Once again, generally speaking, the gospels are in chronological order, but that does not mean that the author did not take material and put it together in a particular way to make a certain point in his text. Figure out what that is. Lifting a parable out of its **context** and putting it with the same parable in Mark could change the point of how Matthew used that text. Preach on a passage as Matthew used that text. Do not lift it out of context. Know how Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, or any other biblical author used it in the text. **Context!**

Some false doctrines in Christian religions have come about when somebody took a passage out of **context**. It is not just those who

believe false things about religion who make the mistakes about the context. Christians can also make contextual errors.

The Purpose of the Book of Luke

*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that **have been fulfilled** among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. 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, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1–4).*

Luke began by saying that a lot of people had told the story: “...an account of the things that **have been fulfilled** among us...” or some translations may say “*accomplished among us.*” If Matthew and Mark had already been written, Luke might have been referring to them. Any time a Bible student sees the word “**fulfilled**” in the New Testament, immediately his mind ought to know that it is talking about something in the Old Testament that had been prophesied. That is what the word “*fulfilled*” means. Over and over in Matthew’s gospel and sometimes in Luke’s, the text will say something like, “...*is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah...*” (Matthew 13:14) or “...*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*” (Luke 4:21).

All of those Old Testament prophecies are like arrows pointing to Jesus in the New Testament saying, “He is coming” and “He is going to look like this” and “His kingdom is going to be like this.” Luke said, “These things ‘*have been fulfilled,*’ and all the arrows are pointing right to Jesus. Do not look beyond this time, because He is here.” Particularly consider two specific things — the Abrahamic Covenant and the Davidic Covenant — prophecies that were made and then

fulfilled in Jesus. In Genesis 12 there were prophecies made to Abraham about the seed promise. The seed promise was about Jesus' coming: "...*'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'*" (Genesis 12:3). Luke mentioned Abraham twice in the first chapter, telling Theophilus that Jesus was fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Luke 1:55, 73).

Then there was the Davidic Covenant. That covenant was about David the king; David, Solomon, and their sons were the precursors to the Messiah:

"When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom....Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:12, 16).

It would be through David's seed, just like through Abraham's seed, that the Messiah would come.

Luke did not emphasize a lot about these two men, but when he said, *"an account of the things that have been **fulfilled** among us,"* a Christian who knows the New Testament knows the word *"fulfilled"* means he was talking about the Old Testament prophecies. Luke said these things *"have been fulfilled **among us.**"* It had happened, and they had seen it.

Where did Luke get his information? *"Just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word"* (Luke 1:2). This information came from *"eyewitnesses and servants of the word."* Luke probably interviewed people who were there. He may have researched what others had written before him, but this was not third- or fourth-hand information. This information probably came from the apostles and others who were there. There were eyewit-

nesses who could say, “I was there. I saw him raise that child from the dead.”

Luke said, *“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”* (Luke 1:3). Some have concluded that “an orderly account” meant that Luke had put everything in chronological order. In other words, from birth to death to resurrection. That is generally true. But Luke, like Matthew and Mark, would arrange the material to make a point. From time to time, Luke put an incident in a different place in Jesus’ life than where Matthew or Mark put it. He put it there to make a particular point, so when he said, “an orderly account,” it would be chronological, but he would put it in a particular order for a particular emphasis to make a certain point. Luke arranged this “orderly account” for a reason — **This is why Jesus was here; this is who Jesus is.**

Luke was writing *“an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.”* Theophilus had already “been taught” these things. This was not brand new information. It sounds like he was a believer and probably a Christian. Luke wrote this book to reassure Theophilus that what he had heard and what he had been taught were right. Why would Luke think that Theophilus needed to be reassured? Why would Luke write a twenty-four-chapter book and then a twenty-eight-chapter book for Theophilus? Luke 1:4 gives a stated generic purpose, “so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught,” but that is not a complete statement. Maybe there was something going on with Theophilus that demanded that these books be written. And of course, even though it was written primarily to Theophilus, it would benefit many other people.

Sources for Luke's Gospel

There are a number of sources that Luke could have used to write his gospel:

- Three hundred fifty verses of Mark's 661 verses are in Luke. It is possible that Luke had access to Mark's gospel. There is a discussion in the scholarly world as to whether Matthew wrote first or Mark wrote first. For the longest time, Mark was considered to be first, but in the last twenty-five years, some have suggested Matthew was written first. Since half of Mark's book ended up in Luke with some almost word-for-word quotes, that suggests that Luke had access to Mark and used it. There is nothing wrong with that. Or it is possible that the Holy Spirit inspired Luke so that he could say it exactly the same way that Mark did. Luke's gospel has always been considered the third gospel written.
- Luke has 272 verses in common with Matthew. Matthew's gospel is quite a bit longer than Mark's, so Luke used more of Mark than he did of Matthew. These 272 verses are called the *logia* or the *Quelle* (German for "source") documents. It is important to understand that some scholars do not necessarily believe in inspiration. Some think there are lost documents, one of these being the *Quelle* document from which Luke got his material. That is a supposition.
- There are 572 verses that are unique to Luke. They are not in the other gospels, and that is called the L-source. Some commentaries will include this kind of information.
- There is statistical information that might be interesting to some. Scholars count the words that that writer used and

compare them with words that this writer used. It gets really complicated and sometimes blown out of proportion.

Know the Historical Settings and Map Locations

Every Bible student should know about the maps that record biblical history and beyond. Notice that the **Dead Sea** and the **Sea of Galilee** have the **Jordan River** in between. **Syria** is located north of Palestine. All of the following places are mentioned in the Book of Luke.

- Judea, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Mount of Olives
- Israel, Nazareth, Samaria, Arimathea
- Galilee, Capernaum, Bethany, Emmaus

Know the Characters that Luke Mentioned

Luke 1:5 says, *“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.”*

1. **Herod king of Judea** was Herod the Great, who reigned from 37 B.C. – 4 B.C. He was the one who gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under (cf. Matthew 2:1–18).
2. **Caesar Augustus** was also known as Octavian. He was the emperor who reigned from 31 B.C. – 14 A.D. Luke 2:1–3 says: *“In those days Caesar Augustus issued ...”*
3. **Quirinius** was governor of Syria. Quirinius was officially Governor from 6–9 A.D. That is problematic since, as best it

can be determined, Jesus was born about 4 B.C. But Quirinius was also the military leader of Syria beginning in 6 B.C. It is possible that even though Luke referred to him as governor, he was referring to the period when Quirinius was the military leader. He was not the governor when Jesus was born, but he did become governor later. Sometimes people are called by a title they held for a time, even when references are made to times before or after they held that position. It is still the way others think of them.

Luke listed the names of other officials in Luke 3:1–2. Why would Luke mention these men? These details were included for a reason. Theophilus probable knew who these people were; otherwise there was no point in putting them in the book. Those details also give a little bit of information about who Theophilus was.

Look at the Birth Narrative

Luke 1–2 covers the birth narrative. In Luke 1:5–2:52 there are 128 verses. That is two long chapters and a significant part of the Book of Luke. The Book of Mark does not include anything about the birth narrative. And Matthew only has thirty-one verses concerning the birth of Christ. Luke apparently thought the birth narrative was important.

Notice how Luke structured the birth narrative. In Luke 1:5–25 the birth of John was foretold. But in Luke 1:26 the birth of John still had not happened, and the birth of Jesus was foretold. In Luke 1:57 John was born. And then in Luke 2:1 Jesus' birth story really began. Notice the structure: John's birth was foretold, Jesus' birth was foretold, John was born, and then Jesus was born. That was not by accident.

Luke arranged it that way, though he did not explain why. Who was the main character in the Book of Luke? John or Jesus? Jesus, of course, but John received a lot of mention in the beginning of the Book of Luke. Remember this is not really about John, so why did Luke spend so much time on John if the main character was Jesus? What does that say about Christ? Jesus was so important that He deserved somebody to come before Him saying, "He is coming! He is coming!" He was that important!

Jesus' coming was prophesied in the Old Testament, and John proclaimed, "The King is here. The One you have been waiting for is here!" After all those prophecies, He was finally coming! And then, of course, along came Jesus. Every January there is the State of the Union address given by the President. The spokesman comes to the door and says, "The President of the United States," and he walks in. Everybody stands and claps and shows him respect as he walks to the front. He is important enough that everybody stops, then turns to pay attention to him as the President. That is what Luke was saying about Jesus: this baby was not just another baby born in Bethlehem in a stable. Jesus was important!

Jesus was so important that He deserved to have someone important foretell His coming! How important was John's birth? How spectacular was John's birth? How spectacular was John himself? He was impressive! But how much more so was Jesus? John was called a "*prophet of the Most High*" (Luke 1:76), but Jesus is called the "*Son of the Most High*" (Luke 1:32).

The birth narrative has a structure that builds in crescendo toward Jesus. Once again, think about biblical interpretation. Do not just read the story without looking to see how it was crafted by the author with the help of the Holy Spirit. It was crafted to give the

reader a sense of flow and crescendo. Notice where it points, what it is emphasizing, and why these details are there. Nothing is in the text by accident. It is there for a reason; it was arranged for a reason, so look for it. See it. This is another layer. The story of Jesus is there for the reader, but then there is this other layer, like an extra adornment telling more in the story of Jesus. All of the extras added on, like John the Baptist, show how important Jesus is!

Shared Details in the Birth Narratives

Consider the following details that are shared in the birth narratives from **Matthew and Luke**:

1. Jesus' birth was related to the reign of Herod the Great.
2. Mary was a virgin engaged to Joseph, and both gospels make it plain that they had not lived together before the conception.
3. Joseph was of the house of David. (Joseph played a much bigger role in Matthew than he did in Luke. Joseph was hardly mentioned in Luke. Mary received the bigger role in Luke.)
4. An angel from heaven announced the coming birth of Jesus.
5. Jesus was recognized as the "*son of David*."
6. Jesus' conception was of the Holy Spirit.
7. Joseph was not involved in the conception.
8. The name "*Jesus*" was imposed by heaven.
9. The angel identified Jesus as "*Savior*."
10. Jesus was born after Mary and Joseph came to live together.
11. He was born in Bethlehem.
12. He settled with his parents in Nazareth.

Matthew and Luke share a lot of the birth details. The major details are the same: Joseph, Mary, Jesus, Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit, and those kinds of things. But the differences are significant as well. Pay attention to the differences within Luke's gospel and see what is particularly being emphasized.

Chapter 1

The Big Picture: A Universal Savior

Luke 1:5–80

Luke Honored the “Little People”

It is evident even from the beginning of Luke’s gospel that the author had a unique focus. He tended to highlight groups of people who were often less noticed by society. He drew attention to women, commoners, and older people more than Matthew and Mark did. Keep this in mind in the first two chapters. Notice the men and women Luke included and how he portrayed them.

The Prophecy of John’s Birth

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. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well

along in years. Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside (Luke 1:5–10).

Zechariah and Elizabeth were both descendants of Aaron. They were devout Israelites, “...upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly...and they were both well along in years.” While Zechariah was serving in the temple and burning incense:

*Then an **angel of the Lord** appeared to him....When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 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. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 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” (Luke 1:11–15).*

Zechariah was “startled and was gripped with fear.” Surely that would be a natural reaction for anyone who saw an angel. The word “angel” means a “messenger.” An angel is a messenger from God. There are a number of Old Testament references to the “angel of the LORD.” The “angel of the LORD” is not the same as cherubim or seraphim; they are different. Notice that Samson's parents spoke back and forth with the “angel of the LORD” on two occasions (cf. Judges 13:3–23). The “angel of the LORD” even spoke to all the Israelites (cf. Judges 2:1–5). Angels are created creatures, messengers to do God's will. They also have tremendous powers if God gives it to them.

Zechariah “was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: **‘Do not be afraid...your prayer has been heard.’**” When people saw a messenger from God, they were amazed, they were afraid, they “fell with their faces to the ground” (cf. Judges 13:25), or they were “gripped with fear.” Men were fearful because they knew that God is righteous and perfect and mankind is not. In the Old Testament, men who were in God’s presence often thought they were going to die. Zechariah may have thought that he was going to die. People who were opposed to God had reason to be afraid; an “angel of the LORD” killed 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp (cf. Isaiah 37:36). But the angel said to Zechariah, “Do not be afraid.” Notice how many times in the Book of Luke Jesus or an angel said, “Do not be afraid.” Zechariah did not need to be afraid because the angel was on his side. His prayer had been heard. And even Christians today have angel surrounding us. Hebrews 1:14 says, “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”

The “angel of the LORD” said:

“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 [“John” means the Lord has been gracious]. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 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. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. 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.” Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.” 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. 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” (Luke 1:13–20).

Gabriel told Zechariah, *“I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.”* Gabriel said Zechariah’s prayers had been heard. Is it be possible that Zechariah was praying for a son? On the other hand, remember that Zechariah *“...was on duty...serving as priest before God....And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.”* Zechariah represented the people. These people may have been praying for God to bless them, to take care of them, and maybe for Him to send the Messiah.

The answer that Gabriel gave to Zechariah’s prayer was, *“Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.”* It is interesting that the angel did not say, “I am getting ready to send the Messiah.” If they were praying for the Messiah, why did he say they were going to have a son? Their son, John, was part of the answer of getting the Messiah to the earth. John was going to be the precursor, the forerunner to Jesus. Jesus was so important that He needed someone to go before Him. John would *“...make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

Gabriel said John was going to be *“...a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.”* Gabriel’s description of John continued: *“He is never to take wine or other fermented drink....”* This sounds like the Nazarite vow that the LORD spoke to Moses about: *“...‘a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazarite, he must abstain from wine...no razor may be used on his head...he must not go near a dead body....Throughout the period of his separation he is consecrated to the LORD’”(Numbers 6:2–8).*

A person who took the Nazarite vow set himself apart to be consecrated to God and to be a servant of God. John was going to be a very special servant of God. It is not certain whether or not John actually took a Nazarite vow, but the way he lived certainly has the appearance of someone taking a Nazarite vow.

“Filled With the Holy Spirit”

Then Gabriel said, “...and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth” (Luke 1:15). What does that mean? Surely this says something about the Spirit’s involvement in John’s life. Consider what Luke 1:41–42 says: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed....” Then Elizabeth uttered an inspired prophecy about Jesus. She was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Then consider Luke 1:59–67:

*On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John”....[Zechariah] wrote, “His name is John.” Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God....[John’s] father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and **prophesied**.*

John was “filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.” It is not clear what that meant for John. But there is no question about what it meant for Elizabeth and Zechariah — “Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed,” and then after John was born, “Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied.” Both of them spoke by inspiration; they spoke the truth as they prophesied. In the Books of

Luke and Acts it seems that Luke used the phrase "*filled with the Holy Spirit*" to mean that people were speaking by inspiration.

It is interesting that John was "*filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth*." John did not heal the sick, raise the dead, or speak in tongues, but he did speak by inspiration. The Spirit is the power-giver in the Old and New Testaments. He is the one who gives miraculous powers to those whom He chooses. Being "*filled with the Holy Spirit*" simply means that the person was influenced by or empowered by the Spirit. It is then necessary to look at the context of the statement to determine what kind of influence is being discussed.

The importance of context in determining the meaning of the phrase "*filled with the Holy Spirit*" is evident when looking at what Paul said in Ephesians 5:18: "*Do not get drunk on wine...Instead, be filled with the Spirit*" (Ephesians 5:18). Paul was talking to all the Christians in Ephesus, but not all Christians in Ephesus had miraculous gifts. Not everybody in the first century received a miraculous gift through the laying on of an apostle's hands. Paul told **all** the Christians in Ephesus to be "*be filled with the Spirit*." He told them not to be influenced by alcoholic beverages, but "*Instead, be filled with the Spirit*." In this context, since these Christians were "*filled with the Spirit*," Paul told them to "*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs...*" (Ephesians 5:19). In Ephesians 5:18, "*be filled with the Spirit*" does not mean that we are influenced by a miraculous power. It means that every Christian needs to let the Spirit be an influence in his live.

Luke 1:15 says John was "*filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth*," which meant he was a prophet empowered to prophesy. He probably began to prophesy when he began his ministry. But when "*filled with the Holy Spirit*" is found in a different context, it generally means to

be influenced by the Spirit. Sometimes that might mean to speak by inspiration or prophesy.

Who Was John the Baptist?

Luke 1:13–17 is Gabriel’s description of who John was going to be:

“...You are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 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. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. 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.”

John was going to prepare the Jews to be ready for the Lord. Luke 3:3 says, “He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (cf. Matthew 3:2). His message was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent, for the Messiah is coming. Get ready, He is coming.”

John “...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” (Luke 1:17). Elijah was a fiery prophet in the Old Testament who spoke truth to the Israelites. He tried to get them to repent, tried to turn them away from their errors, and tried to get them to return to God. John’s ministry was going to be like Elijah’s. In the Old Testament, there are certain characters who foreshadow who Jesus was. Elijah was one of them. In this case, Elijah was foreshadowing

John the Baptist, who was going to prepare the way for the Messiah.

The LORD Almighty spoke to Israel through Malachi with His parting message from the Old Testament:

*“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send you the **prophet Elijah** before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse”* (Malachi 4:4–6).

This was the last message in the Old Testament. There would not be any more revelations until John the Baptist came. Malachi told Israel to keep the Law of Moses and to wait for Elijah. *“He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.”* This was why God was going to send *“the prophet Elijah,”* who was John. The Jews knew this scripture in Malachi, so they were waiting for Elijah.

Remember when Jesus asked His apostles, *“...‘Who do the crowds say I am?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life’”* (Luke 9:18–19). Why did these people think Jesus was Elijah? The Jews had read Malachi, and they were expecting the Messiah to be Elijah raised from the dead. Then Jesus said, *“‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘The Christ of God’”* (Luke 9:20). The apostles knew that Jesus was *“The Christ of God.”* They knew He was the Son of God. They knew He was the Messiah. They knew He was different, but they did not totally understand who Jesus was. If Elijah was supposed to show up during the time of the Messiah, who was he? In Matthew 11:14 Jesus said, *“And if*

you are willing to accept it, he [John the Baptist] is the Elijah who was to come.”

John was going to “...turn...the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous.”

Zechariah’s Response to the “Good News”

When the angel appeared to Zechariah, *“he was startled and was gripped with fear.”* Zechariah did not believe what the angel was saying even though the angel told him all about who John was going to be. Zechariah and Elizabeth were not going to have a typical child.

*Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.” 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**. 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” (Luke 1:18–20).*

Gabriel had been sent to deliver “good news,” but Zechariah did not react as if it were “good news.” He “*did not believe*” the words from the angel Gabriel. It seems God expected a different response from Zechariah. Compare Zechariah’s response to Mary’s response to Gabriel:

...God sent the angel Gabriel to... Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus....” “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a

virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you...." "I am the Lord's servant.... May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:26–38).

Mary's question sounds a lot like Zechariah's question. She said, "I am a virgin. I have never been with a man. So how can I have a child?" Zechariah said, "We are too old to have a child." It seems like they both lacked faith. God interpreted Zechariah's response as a lack of faith. God did not see Mary's response as a lack of faith. She was asking a logical question — "Wow! How is that going to happen?" Maybe God expected more from Zechariah because he was an older man, who was a devout priest, godly, who had been serving God for a long time. He did not show the faith that God wanted.

It certainly seems that Mary had a stronger faith than Zechariah. Notice that throughout Luke there are some women who have an incredibly powerful faith. Luke meant to do that; he did not highlight the men as much as he did the women. Why would Zechariah pray for a son if he did not believe that God could do it? If Zechariah had been praying for a son, why would he question what Gabriel had said: "...*your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son...*" (Luke 1:13)? Zechariah and Mary both had questions for Gabriel: "*How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years*" (Luke 1:18) and "*How will this be, Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'*" (Luke 1:34).

Christians today react the same way. We pray and ask God for things because we believe that He can do it. When He does not answer the way we want him to, we might ask Him questions. We might even question ourselves, asking, "Where is my faith?" If God makes a promise and He follows through or if we ask Him for something, sometimes we are still surprised and ask, "How did that happen?" Where is our faith?

Notice “...all the assembled worshipers were praying outside” (Luke 1:10). These were the people gathered around Zechariah in the temple and Elizabeth. And again notice to whom Luke attributed an incredible faith:

*And when the time for the burning of incense came [for Zechariah], all the assembled worshipers were praying outside....Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 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....After this his wife **Elizabeth** became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. “**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” (Luke 1:10, 21–22, 24–25).*

Even though the worshipers were praying, they wondered why Zechariah was taking so long inside the temple. They may have been wondering if God was unhappy with Zechariah or with them.

Imagine the conversation Zechariah and Elizabeth must have had when he told her that they were going to have a son. They had been intimate for years and Elizabeth was still barren (cf. Luke 1:7). But then “...Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion” (Luke 1:24). Luke recorded Elizabeth’s faithful thanksgiving: “**The Lord has done this for me....In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people**” (Luke 1:25).

The ultimate goal of a Jewish young lady was to get married and to give children to her husband. It was important for them to continue his family name. The Israelites were a very male- dominated society. When a couple did not produce a child, it reflected badly on the husband and wife. Elizabeth knew that this child was a gift from God

because God had shown her His favor. They believed that the miracle of conception and the birth of a child was a gift from God.

Think about women in the Old Testament who were barren and how God gave them children who played important parts in the story of redemption, the process of bringing Jesus to the earth:

1. *The name of Abram's wife was Sarai.... Now **Sarai was barren**; she had no children....Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah [she was 90 years old] became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age [he was 100 years old], at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him (Genesis 11:29; Genesis 21:1–3).*
2. ***Rebekah**... was very beautiful, a virgin.... Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because **she was barren**. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant...“Two nations are in your womb...and the older will serve the younger [Jacob and Esau]” (Genesis 24:15–16; 25:21–23).*
3. ***Rachel was barren**.... God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, “God has taken away my disgrace.” She named him Joseph (Genesis 29:32; 30:22–24).*
4. *Elkanah ...[his wife was] called **Hannah**... Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh....Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD...she made a vow, saying, “O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life.... Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him*

Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him" (1 Samuel 1:1–20).

What was God doing by choosing these barren women? These women knew that their children were **gifts from God**. Rachel said, *"God has taken away my disgrace."* Hannah named her son Samuel, *"Because I asked the LORD for him."* What should be understood from their stories all the way forward to Elizabeth and Zechariah? What was God saying? These children were from God.

In a sense, **Mary**, the mother of Jesus, **was barren** because she had no children; she had never had any relations with a man. Her child would certainly be of God. Gabriel said, *"You will be with child and give birth to a son....The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the **Son of God**"* (Luke 1:31–35).

Every time one of these children was born, the women, including Elizabeth and Mary, knew they were no longer barren because of **God's** help. They had been barren, and then suddenly they had a child. That had to be because of God. They believed in God; they had incredible **faith**.

The Prophecy of Jesus' Birth

*In the sixth month [Elizabeth was six months pregnant], God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "**Greetings**, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "**Do not be afraid**, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child*

*and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the **Son of God**. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God. “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her” (Luke 1:26–38).*

Gabriel Was Sent by God

Gabriel’s name means “*man of God*.” He told Zechariah, “*I stand in the presence of God*” (Luke 1:19). Luke 1:26–27 says, “*...God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named **Joseph**, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was **Mary**.*” God sent Gabriel as His messenger with a significant announcement for Mary and Joseph.

Mary Was “Highly Favored”

Gabriel told Mary how special she was:

- “**Greetings**” (Luke 1:28) — The greeting that Gabriel gave Mary is remarkable. Her age is not mentioned, but she was probably only a teenager. In Greek this word is connected to “rejoice” or “joy.” When the Jews or the Greeks offered this greeting to someone, it was as if they were saying, “May you be filled with joy.”

- *“You who are **highly favored!**”*
- *“The Lord is with you.”*
- *“You have found favor with God” (Luke 1:28, 30).* What a powerful message. Mary may have wondered if God even knew who she was. After all, she was just a young Jewish girl, and yet she was chosen to be the mother of the “Son of God.” Indeed, the Lord knew who she was. The word “favor” is also connected to the word “Greetings.” Genesis says that Noah was 500 years old when God came to him, and “...Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8). Mary was a very young girl when God chose her to be the mother of the “Son of God.” What a remarkable honor God gave to Mary.
- *“Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be” (Luke 1:29).*
- *“But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary’”(Luke 1:30).*

Gabriel Told Mary about Jesus

- *“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name **Jesus**” (Luke 1:31).* Christians use the name “Jesus” all the time, but many who use it do not even know what it means. “Jesus” means “Jehovah saves.” Every time we say the word “Jesus,” we are making a confession that we believe that Jehovah saves. John was going to be “called a prophet of the Most High” (Luke 1:76). John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for the “Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32).
- *“The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”* God had already set up a plan to bring Jesus as our

Savior through the lineage of David. The prophet Nathan said to David, “...*The LORD declares to you...I will raise up your offspring to succeed you...I will establish his kingdom....Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever*” (2 Samuel 7:11–16). The Jews knew about this prophecy; they just did not understand that it was referring to more than a Jewish kingdom. Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises God made to King David.

Jesus’ earthly father was from the lineage of David: “...God sent the angel Gabriel to...a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David” (Luke 1:26–27). Also, Matthew listed Jacob in the lineage of Jesus: “...*Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob...Jesse the father of King David...*” (Matthew 1:2, 6).

With reference to a spiritual kingdom, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that only Daniel was able to tell the meaning of. In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a stone strike and destroy a statue. Daniel said the dream was about a spiritual kingdom that would crush all those physical kingdoms. Daniel said, “*In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.... It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever*” (Daniel 2:44). The spiritual kingdom will endure forever.

This is reminiscent of other Messianic prophecies:

Isaiah 9:7 — “*Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne...*”

Obadiah 1:17, 21 — “*But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance....Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion...And the kingdom will be the LORD’S.*”

Amos 9:11–15 — *“In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent....I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them....I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,” says the LORD your God.*

- The angel answered, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”* (Luke 1:35). God was actually saying the same thing twice. *“The Holy Spirit”* and *“the power of the Most High”* are poetic equals. This is called synonymous parallelism. This kind of parallelism is seen in the Book of Psalms and throughout the Old Testament. It is also present in the New Testament. God says something and then repeats that concept in slightly different words. The *“Holy Spirit”* was going to **“come”** upon Mary and *“the power of the Most High”* was going to **overshadow her**. Those are the same thing. This would be like what happened in Acts 1:8 when Jesus told His apostles that *“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you”* as they were waiting in Jerusalem. The *“Most High”* was going to *“overshadow”* Mary. He was going to *“cover”* her just as *“the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting”* (Exodus 40:34).
- *“So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God”* (Luke 1:35) because He had been conceived by the *“Holy Spirit.”*
- *“Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month”* (Luke 1:36).
- ...**“For nothing is impossible with God”** (Luke 1:37). This is the answer to Mary’s question — *“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”* (Luke 1:34). God is all powerful to do what He wills. This is actually an allusion to Genesis 18:13–14: *“Then the LORD said to Abraham....‘Is anything too*

hard for the LORD?...” Sarah laughed when she heard that she was going to have a son because she was 90 years old and Abraham was 100 years old. They named their son Isaac, which means “he laughs.” When Gabriel said this to Mary, perhaps she recalled what God had said to Abraham. She probably knew his story and may have thought “I am connected to Sarah’s story. I am connected to the Abrahamic promise.”

Even today God has plans for those who are faithful to Him. God has plans for us as Christians. He has a spot in the kingdom for us. He have a job for us. We have giftedness from Him. He may consider us “*highly favored*” and give us special tasks. Our attitude needs to be like Mary’s: **“Lord, let it be done to me as You will.”**

Elizabeth’s “Baby...Leaped for Joy”

*At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby **leaped in her womb**, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb **leaped for joy**. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty*

deeds with his arm....He...has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.” Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home (Luke 1:39–56).

The baby who leaped in Elizabeth’s womb was John the Baptist. Remember when Rebecca was pregnant with Jacob and Esau: “*The babies **jostled** each other within her....When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb* (Genesis 25:22–24). The Greek word for “***leaped***” in Luke 1:41 is the same word used in the Septuagint in Genesis 25:22 concerning Jacob and Esau when “*The babies **jostled** each other within her.*”

The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, but in the third and second centuries B.C. the Old Testament was translated into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt. It was called the Septuagint because tradition says it was done by seventy or seventy-two scholars. Sometimes people will use the Roman numeral for seventy, **LXX**, as an abbreviation for Septuagint.

Did God mean for the Jews to see a connection between the Old Testament, “*The babies **jostled** each other within her,*” and the New Testament, “*the baby **leaped** in her womb*”? This was another story in the lineage of Jesus. Both of these stories were part of God’s plan to bring Jesus to the earth.

When Elizabeth’s child “*leaped in her womb*” she knew by inspiration that her baby was connected to Mary’s baby and to His story. Elizabeth knew John was going to prepare the way for Jesus.

“Blessed”

*...Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “**Blessed** are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?... **Blessed** is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” (Luke 1:41–45).*

The words “**blessed**” in this text are two different words. These two words are used numerous times in the New Testament. The word “blessed” in the phrase “**Blessed** are you among women” is the Greek word from which we get “eulogy.” Simply put, *eulogeo* means to say good things about somebody. When we sing, “Blessed be the name of the Lord” we are saying good things about God.

The word translated “blessed” in the phrase “**Blessed** is she who has believed...” is *makarios*. It is the word that Jesus used in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are they that mourn...” (Matthew 5:3–4). That word means that the one being referred to was going to receive blessings from the Lord. Elizabeth was telling Mary that she was an amazing woman and that she was going to be greatly blessed.

Mary’s Song — Magnificat

After Mary heard what Elizabeth said, Mary sang a song of praise. It is often referred to as the **Magnificat**. This was her response to the message that she was going to have a child. Mary was thankful that God had chosen a young, humble, barren person like her. No wonder Mary began by saying, “*My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his*

servant.” Mary did not sing about the high and mighty. She emphasized the lowly and humble. Mary sang about herself, a young girl, and praised God for using common people like her.

*And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to **Abraham and his descendants forever**, even as he said to our fathers” (Luke 1:46–55).*

In her song Mary referenced a number of Old Testament psalms and Hannah’s prayer when she took Samuel to dedicate him to the LORD. Hannah prayed, “...‘*My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high....He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed*’” (1 Samuel 2:1, 10). Mary borrowed statements from the Psalms and from Hannah to say, “Thank you for using the little people.” The little people are important in the Book of Luke. And Mary was one of them.

Matthew’s emphasis was on Jesus as the King of the Jews. The Magi came to see Him and brought Him gifts fit for a king. Herod tried to kill Jesus because He was to be king of the Jews. special. The Book of Matthew begins with the lineage of David: “*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father*

of Isaac....and Jesse the father of King David....Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ” (Matthew 1:1–16).

The Book of Luke was about the humble people, the little people. Mary knew that she was one of the humble folks, and she understood who she was: *“And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior....He has helped his servant **Israel**, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers”* (Luke 1:46–47, 54–55). Mary tied the birth of Jesus to Israel and Abraham.

God gave Abraham three promises in Genesis 12:1–3:

1. *“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country...go to the **land** [Canaan] I will show you.’”*
2. *“I will make you into a great **nation** [Israel]...”*
3. *“...and **all peoples** on earth will be **blessed through you** ”* Genesis 22:18 (KJV) uses the word, **“seed”** — Mary would have known that this was the Abrahamic promise, the **“seed”** promise. She would have known that this promise was about to be fulfilled in her child, Jesus. **Jesus** is the fulfillment of the **“seed”** promise.

In Galatians 3 Paul wrote about the **“seed”** promise:

Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham....The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ....You are all sons of God through faith in

Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ...for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:6–7,16, 26–29).

What an incredible history for Christians today concerning the “**seed**” **promise**! Mary knew that she was part of God’s plan just like Abraham and Sarah. Every time a Christian shares the good news, every time someone hears the gospel and becomes a Christian, we are a part of the promise. Christians are a part of God’s plans. We are part of the **eternal purposes** of God:

- God wants everyone to be saved.
- God wants everyone to become Christ-like.
- God wants to be glorified.

The Birth of John the Baptist

*Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.” They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.” Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s **astonishment** he wrote, “His name is John.” Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. The neighbors were all filled with **awe**, and*

throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him” (Luke 1:56–66).

Now Zechariah and Elizabeth had a son. They named him John, which means “The LORD is gracious.” The neighbors and the Judean people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered and asked, “...‘What then is this child going to be?’ For the Lord’s hand was with him.”

Zechariah’s Song — Benedictus

John’s father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and he prophesied. The people probably thought he would speak about John, but first he started to prophesy about **Jesus** in Luke 1:68–75:

*“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because **he has come and has redeemed** his people. He has raised up a **horn of salvation** for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), **salvation** from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his **holy covenant**, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to **rescue us** from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

Zechariah mentioned salvation. This was probably an Old Testament concept — the king, David and others who sat on David’s throne, were supposed to be the protectors of Israel and save them from their enemies; they were to be the “savior.” The mention of “savior” in the Old Testament, particularly in the psalms, was about physical salvation. Most of the time it was not about salvation from sin.

When Jesus came, He would bring a shift in understanding because He did come to offer salvation from sin. Jesus is the Savior. He is the Redeemer. Notice that Zechariah also used the word, “horn.” Zechariah said, “*He has raised up a **horn of salvation** for us...**salvation** from our enemies...**rescue us** from the hand of our enemies*” (Luke 1:69). The word “horn” in the Old Testament is used in reference to authority and sometimes to represent a king. This imagery is found in Revelation 17:12, where the horns of the beast represented kings. Keeping this imagery in mind, Zechariah was talking about a king. Jesus was going to govern. He would be a king of the “house of David.”

Zechariah then addressed John:

“And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace. And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel” (Luke 1:76–80).

Even when Zechariah was holding his son and was excited about his baby, he wanted everyone to know that he understood who his son was going to be. John would be a “*prophet of the Most High.*” He was going to prepare the way for the “*Son of God,*” Jesus, the “*Son of the Most High.*”

Luke wrote about John the Baptist: “*And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.*” This is similar to what was said about Jesus in Luke 2:40, 52 and about Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:26. More will be said about this in a

future chapter, but keep in mind that when Luke used familiar language from the Old Testament, Jews would recognize those references and would be able to see Luke's information in the larger context of the Israelite story.