

A Historical Study On The Book Of Luke
Teaching #14: Elizabeth Gives Birth, Zechariah Gives Praise
Luke 1:57-66

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 set free, and he began to speak, praising God. All the neighbors were 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.

Remember, Luke is writing to Theophilus to confirm that what he has heard and believed about Jesus is credible. To confirm the credibility of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Luke interviewed eyewitnesses of Jesus.

More than likely, one of those he interviewed was Mary, which is why we have the amazing detail in Luke 1:57 that Mary stayed at Elizabeth's home **about three months**. The reason Luke knew that Mary stayed for about three months was because Mary personally told him.

After leaving Elizabeth's home, soon it was time for Elizabeth to give birth to her son.

Let's look at the series of scenes surrounding the event of the birth of Zechariah and Elizabeth's son, John.

Five Scenes Surrounding The Event Of John's Birth

Scene #1: The Birth (Luke 1:57)

Luke 1:57

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.

This was the child prophesied in the Jewish Scriptures who would prepare the way for the Messiah/Christ – the world's Savior-King.

Isaiah 40:3-5 (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23)

A voice of one calling: "Prepare the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill made low; the uneven ground will become smooth, and the rugged land a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all humanity together will see it."

Scene #2: The Celebration (Luke 1:58)

Luke 1:58

Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

As an older woman, Elizabeth was beyond the childbearing age and she was also childless. Yet, because of the Lord's mercy, she was miraculously enabled by God to give birth.

The joy was great among her relatives and neighbors because Elizabeth:

- Gave birth **at an older age**

And because Elizabeth...

- Gave birth **to the one of Isaiah 40:3-5** who would prepare the way for the Messiah/Christ.

Scene #3: The Circumcision (Luke 1:59)

Luke 1:59

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child...

In accordance with the requirement of old testament law, Zechariah and Elizabeth circumcised John on the eighth day following his birth (**Luke 1:59; Leviticus 12**).

In the Jewish culture, relatives, friends, and neighbors would gather at the home of the family as witnesses of the circumcision. Those gathering at the home were likely many of same ones who celebrated when Elizabeth gave birth. This is indicated in Luke 1:57-59.

Luke 1:57-59 reads,

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 [relatives, friends, and neighbors] came [to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth] to circumcise the child [or to witness and celebrate the circumcision ceremony; possibly Zechariah or someone from the community would perform the circumcision.].

This is much like a wedding.

Relatives, friends, and neighbors attend the weddings of those they know as witnesses and to celebrate the marriage.

Scene #4: The Name (Luke 1:59)

Luke 1:59

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah

Those gathered for the circumcision attempt to name the child Zechariah (**Luke 1:59**).

To us, this seems strange that those gathered decided to name the child. However, there is indication from the Jewish Scriptures that others had input in the name of the child in addition to the parents. For example:

Ruth 4:16-17

Then Naomi [mother-in-law to Ruth] took the child [of Boaz and Ruth] in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they [the women living there] named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Those attending the circumcision of Zechariah and Elizabeth's son wanted to name him Zechariah.

According to the crowd, Zechariah was the natural name for the child.

But Elizabeth spoke up and said that his name was to be John.

Luke 1:60-61

...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."

It seemed strange to the crowd gathered at Zechariah and Elizabeth's home that they would name the child John because John was not a family name. The crowd then looked to Zechariah to find out what he would like to name the child.

Zechariah validated the name of John.

Luke 1:62-63

Then they [relatives, friends, neighbors] made signs to his father [Zechariah], 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."

Remember, Zechariah was unable to speak since receiving the news from Gabriel that he and Elizabeth would have a child in their old ages. This is why he wrote the name John on a tablet. When he wrote the name John, everyone was shocked (astonished – Why would they name him John?). This reveals that John and Elizabeth had not previously revealed to others that Gabriel told Zechariah to name the child John.

Also, remember the name John in the Hebrew culture meant God is gracious.

In our study in **Luke Teachings #7 and #13**, we learned the names:

- Zechariah means God remembers
- Elizabeth means God's promise

As we learned in **Luke Teachings #6, #7, and #12**, God made a promise of grace to Adam and Eve that a male child would be born who would crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15). Other promises of grace were made to Israel. Through the names of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John, God revealed he had not abandoned his grace promises. The main promise is that he would send a male child into the human race through Israel who would

be a Savior and a King, meaning the Messiah/Christ, who would bless the world. Mary would give birth to the Christ who would be named Jesus.

As soon as Zechariah wrote the name John, he immediately began praising God, which leads us to Scene #5.

So far in our study, we have looked at:

- **Scene #1: The Birth**
- **Scene #2: The Celebration**
- **Scene #3: The Circumcision**
- **Scene #4: The Name**

Scene #5: The Praise

Luke 1:64-66.

Immediately his [Zechariah] mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.

Zechariah begins praising God. We will examine his praise in detail over the next few studies.

Scene #6: The word spreads

Luke 1:65-66

All the neighbors were 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.

The word about John spread because the people were in awe of:

- **THE UNIQUE WAY** the birth of John happened:
 - Zechariah and Elizabeth having a child in their old age.
 - It surely reminded the people of Abraham and Sarah.
- **THE UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES** surrounding John's birth:
 - The child being named John.
 - Zechariah could speak.
 - Zechariah's praise.

Zechariah's praise is recorded by Luke in **Luke 1:68-79**.

Like Mary's praise, the content contained in Zechariah's praise is established on **the promises (covenants) God made with the people of Israel** as recorded in the Jewish Scriptures.

However, Zachariah has additional content contained in his praise that we will begin examining in this study and continue to examine in upcoming studies.

An Overview Of Zechariah's Praise

The content of Zechariah's praise includes the:

- **Davidic** Promise (Luke 1:69; Isaiah 9:6-7) – Jesus will reign as the eternal king, bringing peace to the world.

Luke 1:69

*He has raised up a horn [king] of salvation for us in the house of his servant **David**...*

- **Abrahamic** Promise (Luke 1:72-73; Genesis 12:1-3; Romans 4; Galatians 3) – Jesus will die for our sinfulness, to provide the free gift righteousness that is offered to all people all over the world.

Luke 1:73

*...and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father **Abraham**...*

- **New Covenant** Promise (Luke 1:77; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:20; 2 Corinthians 3:1-6:2) – Jesus will die as Savior, to bring forgiveness to the world.

Luke 1:77

... to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins...

- **Messianic** Promise (Luke 1:78-79; Malachi 4:2; Isaiah 9:12; Isaiah 49:6; Isaiah 60:1; Luke 2:32; John 1; John 8:12; Acts 13:47; Acts 26:15-18)

Luke 1:78-79

...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.

All four promises are fulfilled by **JESUS**.

There is also a **FIFTH PROMISE** in Zechariah's praise:

God promised one would come before the Christ as a forerunner, one who would prepare the way for the Christ.

- **Forerunner** Promise (Luke 1:76; Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1) – the one who will prepare the way for the Messiah/Christ)

Luke 1:76]

And you [John], 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 [for the Messiah/Christ]...

The Announcement Of Jesus To The World

1. **JOHN** would announce Jesus to Israel (see **Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23**)

2. **ISRAEL**, through a small group of believers, would announce Jesus to the world.

- Jesus, before his ascension, sends his **TWELVE APOSTLES** to the nations (Luke 24:45-49).
- Jesus, after his ascension, sends **PAUL** to the nations.

Acts 13:47

For this is what the Lord has commanded us: " 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

Jesus sent Paul to communicate the gospel of grace to the nations (Acts 13:13-49; Acts 26:15-18; Acts 20:24; Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:1-6).

We see this being carried out by Paul in Acts. Notice that the twelve apostles of Jesus drop from the pages of Acts and Paul takes center stage. This is because the ascended Jesus gave Paul the message of the gospel of God's grace (Acts 20:24) to take to the nations of the world.

Part of Paul's message was the judgment to come upon the unrighteous (see Acts 17:30-31; Acts 24:25; Romans 2:1-16; see also, John 5:22-23; Acts 10:42).

Those who have placed their faith in Jesus we will **not** experience the...

- **JUDGEMENT TO COME** upon the unrighteous (see Matthew 13:36-50; Revelation 20:11-15 - The names in the books are those who have rejected Jesus; therefore, they are unrighteous. Those whose names are written in the book are those who placed their faith in Jesus; therefore, they are the righteous ones).

Those who have placed their faith in Jesus will experience the...

- **JOY OF ETERNAL LIFE** for the righteous (Romans 3:21-24; 5:12-21).

Today, we continue to communicate the gospel of grace to the nations, the same gospel of grace the ascended Jesus gave Paul.

3. **We** continue to go into all nations to:

- Declare **JESUS**: his life, death, burial, resurrection, return, and judgment.

- Declare **GRACE**: all that God has done for us through Jesus: forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life
Romans, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.

A summary of Zechariah's Praise

Through his praise, Zechariah connects the promises made by God through the Jewish prophets and recorded in the Jewish Scriptures to:

- the birth of his son, **JOHN**, the forerunner of the Messiah/Christ (Savior/King)
- to soon birth of **JESUS**, Israel's long-awaited Messiah/Christ

After Zechariah's praise, the news spread about John, causing the people to ask, "What then is this child going to be?"

Luke 1:64-66

...he [Zechariah] began to speak, praising God. All the neighbors were 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.

The people knew **SOMETHING SPECIAL** was taking place.

The special something taking place was **the soon arrival of SOMEONE SPECIAL – Jesus, the Messiah/Christ, the Savior-King!**

Thanks for being a part of this Bible study!

All verses are NIV unless otherwise noted.

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