

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

† THE BOOK OF LUKE

WHAT WE MOST ASSUREDLY BELIEVE

WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRIES, ASSOCIATED

An overview of the Gospel of Luke, by Given O. Blakely

Lesson #2

LUKE 1:1-2

"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, which from the beginning were eye witnesses, and ministers of the word"

"Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name Jesus."

Luke 1:31

COMMENTARY ON: 1:5-23

AN ANGEL APPEARS TO ZACHARIAS

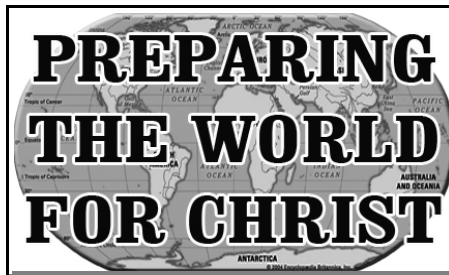
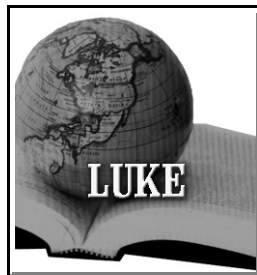
Luke commences his record immediately. I am persuaded he approached it in the same manner as Mark, who began his Gospel, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Mark also commences with the ministry of John the Baptist. Our attention is turned to an aged couple in Israel. Both of them were in a significant lineage: Zacharias was a priest of the order of Abia, who was Abijah from the tribe of Levi (1 Chron 24:10), and Elizabeth was from the "daughters of Aaron," also of the tribe of Levi, and brother of Moses (Ex 6:20). Gabriel appears to Zacharias while he is executing the priests office, and announces that his prayers had been heard, and that he and Elizabeth would have a son, who was to be named "John." A series of instructive events followed this revelation, which was the announcement of a prophecy given centuries before of a forerunner who would appear, preparing the way of the Lord, and readying people to receive the coming Savior of the world.

LUKE 1:3-4

"It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed."

"And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven."

Luke 24:51

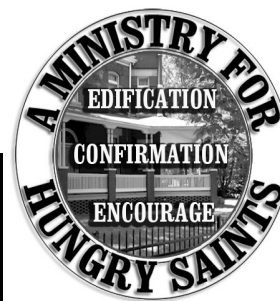


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Luke 09/19/2014

Lesson Number 2



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ABP=Apostolic Bible Polygot m(1992); ALT=Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED =Amplified Bible (1965), ABP=Apostolic Bible Polygot with Greek Interlinear (2003); ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), BRENT=Brenton's English Septuagint; CEB=Common English Bible (2011); CEV=Contemporary English Version (1995); DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), EMTV =English Majority Text (2002); ERV =English Revised Version (1885), ETRV = Easy to Read (1999), ESV=English Stand Version (2001), GENEVA=Geneva Bible (1599), GNB=Good News (1966), GSNT =Goodspeed (1923), GWN =God's Word (1995), IE= International English (1973), ISV=International Standard Version (1967), JPS=Jewish Publication Society (1917), JUB=Jubilee Bible (2003); KJV=King James Version (1611), LITV= Literal Translation of the Bible (1976), LIVING=Living Bible (1971), MESSAGE=The Message (1993), MKJV= Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY=Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD=Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB=New American Bible (2002), NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV=New King James Version (1979), NLT=New Living Translation (1996), NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS=J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT=Bishop's New Testament (1595), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakj (1985), WEB=Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH=Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS=William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE=Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE=Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862)

GREEK LEXICON LEGEND

LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = Barclay-Newman, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT

PERSUADED OF THE NECESSITY OF KNOWING THE CERTAINTY OF THE THINGS WE BELIEVE, LUKE MAKES US MORE FIRM BY BUTTRESSING OUR FAITH, AND CONFIRMING WE HAVE NOT EMBRACED FABLES.

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

AN ANGEL APPEARS TO ZACHARIAS

LUKE 1:5 "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. ⁷ And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. ⁸ And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, ⁹ According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. ¹¹ And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. ¹⁴ And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, 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. ¹⁸ And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. ¹⁹ And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he tarried so long in the temple. ²² 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. ²³ And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house." Luke 1:5-23

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Luke commences his Gospel record by affirming his objective is to establish the certainty of the things most surely believed by those who are in Christ Jesus (Lk 1:1-4). I am

persuaded he approached it in the same manner as Mark, who began his Gospel, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Mark also commences with the ministry of John the Baptist (Mk 1:1-4).

Matthew begins his Gospel with the genealogy leading up to Jesus (Matt 1:1-17). John begins his Gospel by pointing out how Jesus was "the Word" before the world began (John 1:1-3) then focusing on the Ministry of John

CONTENTS

- ▶ INTRODUCTION
- ▶ ZACHARIAS AND ELIZABETH (1:5-7)
- ▶ WHILE HE EXECUTED THE PRIEST'S OFFICE (1:8-10)
- ▶ THERE APPEARED UNTO HIM THE ANGEL OF THE LORD (1:11-12)
- ▶ THY PRAYER IS HEARD (1:13)
- ▶ THE PERSON AND MINISTRY OF THE PROMISED SON (1:14-17)
- ▶ WHEREBY SHALL I KNOW THIS? (1:18-19)
- ▶ THE RESULT OF UNBELIEF (1:20)
- ▶ THE PEOPLE WAITED, MARVELED, AND PERCEIVED (1:21-22)
- ▶ HE DEPARTED TO HIS OWN HOUSE (1:23)
- ▶ CONCLUSION

the Baptist (John 1:6-8).

These various introductions confirm the absence of intellectual and spiritual simplicity in God's "so great salvation" (Heb 2:3). Redemption is like a multifaceted jewel that displays many Divine attributes, as well as the state and need of humanity.

HOLY CONSIDERATIONS

To have a proper appreciation of, and response to, the Gospel of Christ, there are many considerations. In all of them, men must seek to be liberated from the stultifying effects of simplicity.

- ⇒ The Savior's role in creation.
- ⇒ The determination of the how sin would be addressed prior to the creation.
- ⇒ The hopelessness of the natural human condition.
- ⇒ The need for a salvation that was just, or righteous.
- ⇒ A salvation that resulted in true righteousness in the ones being saved.
- ⇒ A demonstration of man's natural inability to cope with Satan.

- ⇒ An appropriate introduction to the fact that men cannot be changed by Law.
- ⇒ A presentment of the powerlessness of mere religious routine.
- ⇒ A confirmation that beholding, and even participating in, visible miracles, had no power to change men.
- ⇒ The proper preparation for a Savior's entrance into the world.
- ⇒ The taking away of sin.
- ⇒ The de-powering of sin.
- ⇒ The effective conferment of righteousness.
- ⇒ Provision for an empathetic Intercessor.
- ⇒ A means of sustaining from heaven men involved in the good fight of faith on earth.
- ⇒ A means of enabling chosen men to transmit the truth of the Gospel to men without flaw or mitigation.
- ⇒ A means of ongoing and progressive change in those being saved.
- ⇒ A means of preparing men for the inevitability of death and the day of judgment.
- ⇒ A Savior that was thorough, and in whom men could be made complete.

THE KIND OF SAVIOR REQUIRED

The Gospels particularly reveal the kind of Savior that was required for the appointed salvation to be made

effective. They make known how the Divine nature appears in flesh and blood, how Satan is resisted, and how Divine wisdom is vastly superior to that of men. **The sinfulness of men is confirmed by the manner in which Jesus was ultimately received when He walked among men.**

The Savior will be presented as growing up into adulthood, being not only knowledgeable of the things of God as a youth, but possessing a prevailing and sustained interest in them.

His ministry will confirm that while He did honor His parents, they were not His preeminent concern. He would defer to His Father, and choose to be with those who listened to His Word, above His own family.

During His ministry, the Lord Jesus expressed a disdain for hypocrisy, an intolerance with unbelief, a high regard for faith wherever He found it, and the absolute refusal to comply with a lifeless form of religion.

THE POVERTY OF A MERELY OUTWARD RELIGION

This Gospel makes known the poverty of a mere religion of form. Meticulous in their appearance, the Pharisees will be shown to be corrupt within. While their fasting and public prayers suggested they were serious, their response to the Incarnate Word confirmed they were full of dead men's bones.

If our eyes are opened to the content of the Gospel – in this case, the Gospel according to Luke – we will see **why** believers are to be devout, godly, self-sacrificing, and consistently

If our eyes are opened to the content of the Gospel – in this case, the Gospel according to Luke – we will see why believers are to be devout, godly, self-sacrificing, and consistently conscious of God.

conscious of God. The Gospel, when believed, transforms the hearers to be like He who is the Subject of the Gospel, thereby confirming that the Gospel is *"the power of God unto salvation"* (Rom 1:16). If unholy people were not tolerated under the Old and inferior Covenant, you may be sure

such will not be endured under the New, and transcendently better covenant that is establish upon better promises.

THE KIND OF PEOPLE GOD USED

The Spirit will also show us the caliber of people used by God. It will be

seen in Zacharias and Elizabeth (Lk 1:5-6), Mary (Lk 1:27), Joseph (Lk 1:27), Simeon (Lk 2:25), Anna (:Lk 2:26-28), the "seventy" disciples Jesus sent out (Lk 10:1-17), Joseph of Arimathaea (Lk 23:50), and, with the solitary exception of Judas, the apostles disciples whom He chose (Lk 6:13-16).

ZACHARIAS AND ELIZABETH

LUKE 1:5 *"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. ⁷ And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years."*

THE TIME IS PIN-POINTED

"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea . . ."

HEROD THE GREAT

"It was a strange, sad state of things. The land of promise was ruled over by an Idumaeen adventurer, a creature of the great Italian Republic; the holy and beautiful house on Mount Zion was in the custody of an Edomite usurper; the high priest of the Mighty One of Jacob was raised up or deposed as the officials of Rome thought good. Truly the scepter had departed from Judah." PULPIT COMMENTARY

In his parting blessing, Jacob had said of Judah, *"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be"* (Gen 49:10). Now, the One to whom the gathering of the people would be, was just a few months from being born, *"made of a woman, made under the Law"* (Gal 4:4). And, as providence would have it, the scepter had, indeed, *"departed"* from Judah. Now, a descendant of Esau is ruling in the land of promise. This was a time of

great spiritual decline in Israel. Dominant in the religious structure of the land were scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and corrupt high priests.

This is the environment as the time of the entrance of the promised "Seed" drew near. This was a condition that would require extensive, yet rapid, preparation. **An acute consciousness of the need for the promised Savior must be awakened, and a call to repentance issued.**

This Herod was the king referred to as "Herod the Great" by the historians, and this was toward the end of his reign. He was an Idumaeen by birth, and not a Hebrew. He was a vassal of Rome, which dominated the world at that time. Later, after the birth of Jesus, this Herod would initiate the slaughter of babes under two years of age, in order to get rid of, what he considered to be a potential king (Matt 2:16).

A SPECIFIC PRIEST AND HIS WIFE

" . . . a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. . ."

Our attention is turned to a specific aged couple in Israel. Both of them were in a significant lineage: Zacharias was a priest of the order of Abia, who was Abijah from the tribe of Levi (1 Chron 24:10), and Elizabeth was from the *"daughters of Aaron,"* also of the tribe of Levi, and brother of Moses (Ex 6:20).

Throughout Scripture, the more

closely an individual or group of individuals is involved in what God is doing, whether favorably or unfavorably, the more specific is their identification. Specific enemies are named (Cain, Pharaoh, Abimelech, Herod), cities (Jericho, Sodom, Gomorrah, etc), and even nations (Egypt, Canaanites, Ammonites, Philistines, etc.). There is also more specificity generally given about those who are seeking the help of the Lord, favorably inclined to Him, or granting favor to His people.

All of this is because the Scriptures are really about the Lord, His purpose, and the progress and success of that purpose.

THE MORAL STATURE OF THIS COUPLE

" . . . And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. . ."

Other versions read, *"walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord,"* ^{NKJV}, *"Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord,"* ^{NRSV} *"They were upright in the eyes of God, keeping all the rules and orders of God, and doing no wrong,"* ^{BBE} *"blameless in their observance of all the Lord's commandments and regulations,"* ^{CEB} *"Both were just before God, and walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, without reproof,"* ^{GENEVA} *"had God's approval. They followed all the Lord's commands and regulations*

perfectly," ^{GWN} "Both were upright in the sight of God and impeccably carried out all the commandments and observances of the Lord," ^{NJB} "righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations," ^{NLT} and "were godly folk, careful to obey all of God's laws in spirit as well as in letter." ^{LIVING}

It is well to remember that this is a statement inspired by the Holy Spirit. It ought to be obvious that no attempts should be used to brush it aside, as though it was not there. It also should be clear that it does not contradict other statements made in Scripture.

These two ordered their lives punctiliously, keeping all of the appointed days, honoring all of the clean and unclean restrictions, not breaking the Sabbath day rules, not engaging in hateful initiatives, etc.

There were outward fulfillments of the Law that could be kept flawlessly – "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Law blameless." The term "walking" refers to the outward manner of their lives – a manner that had been maintained up into old age.

⇒ Noah is described as "a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." (Gen 6:9).

⇒ Job is described as, "a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1,8). God Himself described Job as "a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 2:3).

⇒ It is said of David, "David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that He commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kgs 15:5).

⇒ This kind of obedience was also seen in Peter, who, when he was a mature man, could honestly say (concerning one aspect of the ordinances), "for I have never eaten

any thing that is common or unclean" (Acts 10:14). He made no claim of being sinless, for he later confessed to the Lord, "I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). But he was not a commandment breaker, living while ignoring what the Lord said.

⇒ Paul also had lived this kind of life, describing his prior manner of life in this way: "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil 3:6).

Our theology must make room for this kind of expression.

This does not negate the saying, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom 3:10). It does, however, negate some views of that expression. The meaning of "none righteous," is that there is no one that has developed their own righteousness, or earned the right to be justified. They may have punctiliously fulfilled all of the requirements of the Law, but in so doing Jesus said they were obliged to say, "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). **Doing all of what you are commanded to do is not enough to justify you.**

In our day, sin is so rampant in the professing church that they have not declared the necessity of doing what God has said. The attitude is, "Everyone has sinned, so sinning is not that serious."

Whatever God had required of Zacharias and Elizabeth in the Law, they had done. One of their peers could not drag them to the Law and show them something they had ignored or disobeyed.

In our day, sin is so rampant in the

professing church that they have not declared the necessity of doing what God has said. The attitude is, "EVERYONE HAS SINNED, SO SINNING IS NOT THAT SERIOUS." What all of this has done is diminished the greatness and need of the Lord Jesus Christ. People who have been dredged up from the bottom of the moral pit are set forth as REALLY being saved – exceptional trophies of grace. **They are trophies, to be sure, but how do they compare to trophies like Noah, Moses, John the Baptist, Paul, and the twelve apostles?**

The greatness of the salvation anyone has experienced is not found in the pit from whence they were dug, but in the work to which they have been called! There is a serious need for this whole matter of living– both before and after the individual has been born again. Living an outwardly godly life is not as difficult as some have said. Mind you, it is not possible to be justified by what you do or do not do. **But a blameless life is not only possible, for those in Christ, it is a requirement** (1 Cor 1:8; Phil 2:15; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Pet 3:14).

When we speak of not keeping the Law, we are not necessarily speaking about not breaking it by outward infractions – adultery, murder, theft, bowing down to images, etc. That is involved, to be sure, but not necessarily so. Saul of Tarsus did none of those things. However, he did have unlawful

longings, of which the Law convicted him (Rom 7:7). Rather, we are speaking of the inward manner of keeping it. This also means an uninterrupted and consistent keeping in the heart, and perfectly obeying it without a single infraction. That is the righteousness of the Law (Ex 19:5; Deut 4:5-6; 5:29;

There is an unfortunate absence of such thinking in our time. This is largely owing to the absence of the declaration of “the wonderful works of God.” This has caused a great deficiency in the people

6:2). If the Law convicted you of anything, seen or unseen, regardless of its frequency, you were unworthy.

But this is not the sense in which Zacharias and Elizabeth were blameless. **Rather, it was primarily in the manner of their outward conduct and manner of life.** They were not disobedient, wayward, and living only for self. This is not unusual language.

- ⇒ Abel is said to have been “righteous” (Heb 11:4).
- ⇒ God said to Noah, “*Thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation*” (Gen 7:1).
- ⇒ Abraham asked the Lord if He would “*destroy the righteous with the wicked,*” then asked if the Lord would spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if a certain number of “righteous” people were in it – from fifty down to ten (Gen 18:23-32).
- ⇒ David wrote of “*the congregation of the righteous*” (Psa 1:5).
- ⇒ “*The righteous*” are mentioned 148 times in Scripture.
- ⇒ “*A righteous man*” is mentioned 13 times in Scripture.
- ⇒ We read of “*the words of the*

righteous” (Ex 23:8; Deut).

THEY WERE CHILDLESS, AND INCAPABLE OF HAVING A CHILD

“ . . . *And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.*”

Other versions read, “*well advanced in age,*” NKJV “*well along in years,*” NIV and “*far advanced in years.*” AMPLIFIED

Elizabeth never could have children, and now both her and her husband were very old – far beyond the age when children could be begotten and conceived. **For those who rely upon circumstance, this was an impossible situation.** There was no door of natural opportunity available to this aged couple. If God really does work only with what men have by nature, He will not be able to work in this circumstance.

However, throughout the ages, God had taught Israel about Himself doing the impossible. Those so taught had been cultured in this area with purpose and deliberation.

- ⇒ The record of creation (Gen 1:1-2).
- ⇒ The flood (Gen 6-8).

- ⇒ The dispersion at Shinar (Gen 11:1-11).
- ⇒ The birth of Isaac (Gen 17:3; Heb 11:11-12).
- ⇒ The destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain (Gen 19).
- ⇒ The birth of Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:21-26).
- ⇒ Israel’s deliverance from Egypt (Ex 12-14).
- ⇒ The exaltation of Joseph (Psa 105:16-22; Gen 41).
- ⇒ The defeat of Jericho (Josh 6).
- ⇒ The birth of Samson (Judges 13:2-7,24-25).
- ⇒ The raising of the dead (1 Kgs 17:17-23; 2 Kgs 4:32-37; 2 Kgs 13:21).

The exposure of the people to the record of God’s great and mighty works moved them to think differently than the masses. **They had been cultured to think of God as above circumstance, and fully able to cause nature to serve His purpose, even though no natural aptitude could be found.**

There is an unfortunate absence of such thinking in our time. This is largely owing to the absence of the declaration of “*the wonderful works of God.*” This has caused a great deficiency in the people so that they are rarely, if ever, heard to say, “*Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto Thee!*” (Psa 71:19). O, may there be a restoration of such exclamations.

WHILE HE EXECUTED THE PRIEST’S OFFICE

“⁸ And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest’s office before God in the order of his course, ⁹ According to the custom of the priest’s

office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of

incense.”

IT CAME TO PASS
“And it came to pass . . .”

This phrase is mentioned three hundred times in the historical books from Genesis through Nehemiah. It is mentioned thirty-six times in the prophets (Isaiah through Malachi). It is not mentioned in Psalms through Song of Solomon. The phrase is mentioned in the Gospels fifty times, and fourteen times in Acts. It is mentioned once in Romans through Revelation (1 Thess 3:4). In the prophetic sense "it shall come to pass" is mentioned one hundred and twenty-nine times in Scripture.

This indicates that the language is, for the most part, a depiction of the progress of a Divine initiative. It teaches us that there are things God accomplishes, working them out in established seasons and at predetermined times. In this case, the "it" that came to pass was the predetermined will of the Omniscient and Omnipotent God. Emphatically, this is not the mere report of an historical event.

WHILE HE EXECUTED THE PRIEST'S OFFICE

" . . . that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course . . . "

There was an event approaching that had to do with a determination made before the world was created. The determinations leading up to that event would not take place within the environment of decisions made by the governments of the world, or within the framework of worldly wisdom. **Rather, these occurrences will take place within the framework of Divinely established types and shadows – things relating to Divine directives – in this case, the execution of "the priest's office."**

Other versions read, "while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division,"^{NKJV} "while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division,"^{NASB} when "he was on duty and he was serving as priest before God,"^{NIV} "he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty,"^{NRSV} "in his turn he was acting as priest before God,"^{BBE} "it was the turn

of his section to serve, and he was exercising his priestly office before God,"^{NJB} "was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week,"^{NLT} "was going about his work in the Temple--for his division was on duty that week."^{LIVING}

ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOM OF THE PRIESTS OFFICE

" . . . According to the custom of the priest's office . . . " Other versions read, "according to the custom of the priesthood,"^{NKJV} "as was the way of the priests"^{BBE} "Following the customs of priestly service,"^{CEB} "he was chosen by lot (according to the custom among the cohanim),"^{CJB} and "it fell to him by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood."^{DARBY}

There was a certain order established and maintained in the Tabernacle and Temple service. Activities in the Holy Place were outlined in Exodus: "And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations" (Ex 30:7-8).

This was also carried out in succeeding generations, as David instructed the people: "But Aaron and his sons offered upon the altar of the burnt offering, and on the altar of incense, and were appointed for all the work of the place most holy, and to make an atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded" (1 Chron 6:32,49).

Now, centuries later, the order was still being maintained. Our attention is particularly drawn to the burning of incense, a daily practice that maintained a pleasant odor throughout the interior of the Tabernacle.

HIS LOT WAS TO BURN INCENSE

" . . . his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. . . " Other versions read, "his lot fell to burn incense,"^{NKJV} "he was chosen by lot."^{NASB}

"THE TALMUD SAYS THE PRIEST WHO OBTAINED THE RIGHT TO PERFORM THIS HIGH DUTY WAS NOT PERMITTED TO DRAW THE LOT A SECOND TIME IN THE SAME WEEK, AND AS THE WHOLE NUMBER OF PRIESTS AT THIS TIME WAS VERY LARGE — SOME SAY EVEN AS MANY AS TWENTY THOUSAND — FARRAR CONJECTURES THAT IT WOULD NEVER HAPPEN TO THE SAME PRIEST TWICE IN HIS LIFETIME TO ENTER THAT SACRED SPOT."^{PULPIT COMMENTARY}

The Law did not specify the casting of lots to determine who burned the incense daily. This was largely because, at the beginning, Aaron performed that function (Ex 30:7-8). According to the Jewish Talmud – containing many traditions – As time progressed, the number of priests grew to as high as twenty-thousand.

Because reliable information is very sparse on this subject, and hardly worthy of extended comment, I will simply draw attention to the orderliness that characterized the entire Tabernacle and Temple service. There was nothing slipshod or casual about it.

As you may well recall, the creation was also accomplished in an orderly manner, for order replaced chaos. In addition, there is to be a certain order in the gathering of the saints, so that things are accomplished "decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:40). Other versions read, "properly and in an orderly manner,"^{NASB} "fitting and orderly way,"^{NIV} "in the right and ordered way,"^{BBE} "with dignity and in proper order,"^{CEB} "comelily and with order,"^{DARBY} "honestly, and by order,"^{GENEVA} and "with regard to decency and propriety

In addition, there is to be a certain order in the gathering of the saints, so that things are accomplished "decently and in order"

and in an orderly fashion.” AMPLIFIED

While there is no genuine value to heartless and anthropoidal routine, there is value to orderliness and God-glorifying sequence. **This kind of order allows for profitable thought and cogitation.** Raw emotion is pushed into the background and perception and understanding is fostered.

The entire Tabernacle and Temple activities were characterized by orderliness. In fact, it seems to me that accomplishing a task, realizing a true benefit or result, postulates an orderly approach. God made man to function in this way, because that is the way God has revealed that He Himself works.

THE WHOLE MULTITUDE OF THE PEOPLE WERE PRAYING

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

While Zacharias was in the Temple Holy Place, preparing and burning incense, *“all the throng of people were praying outside [in the court] at the hour of incense [burning].”* AMPLIFIED

According to the Law, the incense

29:38-42). This seems most reasonable to me.

Thus we have the following things taking place – probably in the Sabbath day, as the multitude of praying people suggests.

- ⇒ **The Sabbath day is being honored.**
- ⇒ **The priest is ministering, whose lot it was to do so.**
- ⇒ **Incense is being offered to God.**
- ⇒ **Either the morning or evening sacrifice is taking place.**
- ⇒ **The people have congregated in the Temple court.**
- ⇒ **The people are praying.**

Certainly, this is an circumstance in which something from God can be expected to take place – and, indeed, it does. In fact, at this time God will commence a focused work to alert the people to the coming of His Son into the world.

A LESSON TO BE LEARNED
It is my persuasion that few

among the people, so that they are incapable of hearing a still small voice, sensing the presence of the Lord, or experiencing the joy of the Lord. This, if it is true, is a most serious situation, and contradicts everything God has said about His great salvation. Here are some prophecies that reveal some of the traits of the day of salvation.

- ⇒ Jeremiah said, *“And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, saith the LORD”* (Jer 31:14).
- ⇒ *“And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.”* (Isa 25:6)
- ⇒ *“And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”* (Isa 35:10)
- ⇒ *“Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”* (Isa 51:11)

- ⇒ *“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”* (Isa 55:1-2)

Any religious environment that does not foster these things cannot possibly be from God, or be blessed by God. The lack of these things indicates a grossly deficient environment, and kills expectancy. Diligence should be exerted to avoid a spiritually dead environment,

Any religious environment that does not foster these things cannot possibly be from God, or be blessed by God. The lack of these things indicates a grossly deficient environment, and kills expectancy.

was to be burned every morning and every evening: *“And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations”* (Ex 30:7-8). It is assumed by many that this was coordinated with the morning and evening sacrifices that were to be offered every day (Ex

professing “Christians” actually expect anything to take place, when they gather, that will arrest their attention, bless their souls, or cause some great truth to be seen and comprehended. **The mechanics of dead religion have been firmly set in place by the religious professionals.** Few people identified with the modern church have any idea about an environment that is conducive to experiencing something from heaven. A kind of fleshly casualness rules

THERE APPEARED TO HIM THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

“¹¹ And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.”

Zacharias was doing what was always done during the execution of the priestly office of burning incense. Considering the purported number of priests we do not know if he had ever performed this function before. However, what happened this time it was being performed had never before been experienced – by any priest.

Being a righteous man before the Lord, perhaps he had a level of expectation above that of the ordinary Jew. But, he was not prepared for what was about to happen.

THERE APPEARED UNTO HIM AN ANGEL OF THE LORD

“And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord . . .”

It is important to note the precise language of the text. As Zecharias was executing the office, the angel of the Lord appeared UNTO HIM. He saw the angel. His duties were not being done in such a mechanical mode that he was oblivious to what was happening around him. I know of people who are so immersed in the mundane, they would probably not be aware of anything out of the ordinary happening right there before them. Others can be involved in, what is called a “*worship service*,” yet be completely ignorant of anything out of the ordinary taking place. **However, for Zacharias, it appears his heart was in his work, and he was spiritually sensitive and alert.** Further, the time during which he was executing the priest’s office was apparently considered an appropriate time for this appearance. What better time to hear from heaven than when you are doing something that has been ordained by God – or, have you ever thought of such a thing?

STANDING ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF

THE ALTAR OF INCENSE
“ . . . standing on the right side of the altar of incense. . . .”



The angel positioned himself before the veil, which was between the Most Holy Place, and the Holy Place. He did not stand before the entrance into the Tabernacle (Ex 40:35). He was not standing in front of the Candlestick, or the Table of showbread. He was on the right side of the altar of incense, that was continually emitting a sweet fragrance throughout the interior of the Temple, and before the veil covering the Most Holy Place. It appears to me that this was a most appropriate location for the angel to deliver a message from God. **Also, for it to be delivered, the recipient had to be in the Holy Place, and involved in the service of the Lord.**

It might be well to say here that some people hear very little from Him who is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25) because they are not in the right place, nor are they doing the proper things.

ZACHARIAS SAW HIM, WAS TROUBLED, AND FEAR FELL UPON HIM

“ . . . And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.” Other versions read, “*was troubled when he saw him, fear gripped him,*” ^{NASB} “*he was startled and was gripped with fear,*” ^{NIV} “*was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him,*” ^{NRSV} “*was shaken and overwhelmed with fear,*” ^{NLT} “*was abashed and fear came on him,*” ^{TNT} “*was startled and terrified,*” ^{LIVING} “*disturbed and overcome with fear,*” ^{IE} “*was upset and very afraid,*” ^{ERV} “*was alarmed and felt afraid,*” ^{GNB} “*was paralyzed in fear.*” ^{MESSAGE}

As used here, the word “*troubled*” involves the taking away of calmness of mind, disturb ones equanimity or composure, and for one to be stricken with dread and perplexity, to disquiet and make restless. ^{THAYER} “*Fear*” carries the idea of terror and dread.

This is a common response when a personality from heaven is knowingly encountered (Judges 13:22; Dan 10:8, 16-17; Rev 19:10; 22:8). This response is the result of a variance between God and men that was caused by the entrance of sin. That variance began immediately after Adam and Eve sinned (Gen 3:8-10).

Even though Zacharias was engaged in the work of the Lord, yet, he was troubled and fearful when confronting this angel.

I do not doubt that this kind of response would still take place, were the presence of God to be unquestionably sensed among the people in assembly. There would be a sense of sobriety and alertness that was unparalleled. This is confirmed by the response of the early church when Ananias and Sapphira were judged by God, and the matter was made known. *“And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. . . .”* *“And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things”* (Acts 5:5,11).

But there is something unique about this type of fear. Ordinarily fear causes the people to become disoriented. But this is not what happened to Zacharias. He became cutely alert, and able to take in everything the angel said to him. His mind was alert, and his reasoning capacities were at their normal state.

It ought to be noted that involvement in the will of God is accompanied by the kind of alertness that can yield great benefits.

THY PRAYER IS HEARD

“¹³ But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.”

Angels are messengers, carrying out the will of the Lord. It is said of them, *“Bless the LORD, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word”* (Psa 103:20). *“Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure”* (Psa 103:21).

God has sent forth this angel, commanding him to bring a message to Zacharias, and he is faithfully declaring it.

FEAR NOT ZACHARIAS

“But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias . . .”

Angels have often spoken in this manner to particular people. *“Fear not, Daniel”* (Dan 10:12); *“Joseph, thou son of David, fear not”* (Matt 1:20); *“Fear not, Mary”* (Lk 1:30), and *“Fear not, Paul”* (Acts 27:24).

The words *“fear not”* occur sixty-three times Scripture. They are verification of the gulf that sin has caused between God and man. **When even a person who is born again and reconciled to God confronts a heavenly messenger, they must be told not to fear.** I gather that these words are accompanied with some degree of spiritual composure – like hearing the words, *“Take up your bed and walk!”*

THY PRAYER IS HEARD

“. . . for thy prayer is heard . . .” Other versions read, *“your petition has been heard,”* ^{NASB} *“thy supplication is heard,”* ^{ASV} *“your prayers have been heard,”* ^{CEB} and *“God has heard your prayer.”* ^{GWN}

The text confirms that these prayers had to do with Elizabeth having a child. Keep in mind, that at this time both Zacharias and Elizabeth were *“well*

stricken with years” (Lk 1:7). The physical status required for child-begetting and conceiving were no longer there. Yet, in a grand display of faith, Zacharias, and, no doubt, Elizabeth as well, had continued to pray for a child. **They knew from the history of their people that barren woman had been Divinely enabled to have children** (Gen 11:30; 25:21; 29:31; Judges 13:2). They knew that Sarah, the mother of their nation and many others was not only barren, but past the age of conceiving when Isaac was begotten and born (Heb 11:11). **So Zacharias continued to pray!** He knew that God was transcendent to circumstance, and that nothing is too hard for God (Gen 18:14; Jer 32:17,27).

All of this shows the practical value of being acquainted with the working of the Lord in the past. **Doctrinal statements are deliberately mingled with gracious demonstrations of their reality in human experience.** It is one thing, for example, to accept the statement, *“with God all things are*

There is something else to be seen here. In the Abrahamic lineage, people became familiar with prayer, which is a form of reliance upon the Lord. Abraham prayed for any righteous that might be in Sodom (Gen 18).

- ⇨ Abraham prayed concerning having a son (Gen 15:2-4).
- ⇨ Abraham prayed concerning knowing he would inherit the land of Canaan (Gen 15:8).
- ⇨ Abraham prayed for Ishmael (Gen 17:20)
- ⇨ Abraham prayed for Abimelech (Gen 20:17).
- ⇨ Isaac prayed for Rebekah, who was barren (Gen 25:21).
- ⇨ Rebekah prayed concerning the twins she was bearing (Gen 25:22-23).
- ⇨ Jacob prayed for deliverance from

Perhaps you have noticed that, among professing Christians, resorting to prayer is rather uncommon – except for occasional emergencies. Somehow, the professing church has managed to raise a generation that is less cognizant of God than earlier ones.

possible” (Matt 19:26). However, that is not to be treated as a theoretical or hypothetical statement. It is clearly conformed in such things as Abraham and Sarah having a son, Israel being delivered from Egypt in a single night, David slaying Goliath, Daniel surviving a night in a den of hungry lions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego surviving a fiery furnace, and a whole lot more. **That is why it is imperative for professing Christians to have a working knowledge of Scripture.**

Something Else to Be Seen

Esau (Gen 32:9,11).

Throughout their history prayer, intercession, and the confession of sin was common. This nation was, in a sense, bathed in the prayers of godly people. It is not surprising that when godly people like Zacharias and Elizabeth encountered impossible circumstances, they prayed.

Perhaps you have noticed that, among professing Christians, resorting to prayer is rather uncommon – except for occasional emergencies. **Somehow,**

the professing church has managed to raise a generation that is less cognizant of God than earlier ones. A circumstance that goes along with that situation is less participation in the whole church being gathered together at one time, and in one place (1 Cor 11:17,18,20; 14:23,26; 1 Thess 5:11; Heb 10:25).

THY WIFE SHALL BEAR THEE A SON
". . . and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son . . ."

Although Elizabeth was barren, and had been all along, she would bear a son. **God was intervening in the affairs of men, doing something that could not possibly have taken place unless God did it.** This particular intervention was directly related to the coming of the promised Seed who would deal a mortal bruise to the devil (Gen 3:15), and through whom all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3).

The promise of a coming Savior had been kept alive by Israel – which is itself a marvelous testimony to the

working of God among men. **We have learned by bitter experience that men are prone to forget what God has promised.** However, The Almighty will not allow the human race to forget the things He has promised. There will always be a remnant of people on the earth who are anticipating what God has promised. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in Our eyes.

THOU SHALT CALL HIS NAME JOHN
". . . and thou shalt call his name John."

Here is another name that is dictated from heaven. Names that were ordered from heaven include Ishmael (Gen16:11), Isaac (Gen 17:19, Jezreel (Hos 1:4), Loammi (Hos 1:9), and Jesus (Luke 1:31). These people marked certain periods of time and events, so that when the very name is heard, there were intended associations that came to mind.

The name "*John*" means, "TO WHOM JEHOVAH IS GRACIOUS," THAYER "JEHOVAH IS A GRACIOUS GIVER," STRONG'S "THE GRACE OR MERCY OF THE LORD," HITCHCOCK "JAH'S GIFT." SMITH'S

With the birth of John a new day came. He would be known as "*John the Baptist*" – an expression used fourteen times in Scripture–i.e. (Matt 3:1; 11:11,12; 14:2; Mk 6:14; 8:28).

With the birth of John, and particularly his ministry, the focused preparation for the Messiah commenced. He was like a line of demarcation in human history. Both Matthew and John made a point of this in their quotation of Jesus' words: "*For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John*" (Matt 11:13). And again, "*The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseseth into it*" (Luke 16:16).

The thrust of preaching, or declaration, would be different. The call to repentance would be more pronounced. The sensitivity of the people Godward would be raised to new levels. For a season of a little more than six months, the acceptance of God's messenger would be more pronounced as the people were prepared for the Messiah.

THE PERSON AND MINISTRY OF THE PROMISED SON

"¹⁴ *And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.* ¹⁵ *For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.* ¹⁶ *And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.* ¹⁷ *And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, 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."

The coming of John the Baptist was foretold by the prophets, but not with the specificity revealed to Zacharias.

ISAIAH "*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall*

be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Isa 40:3-4)

MALACHI. "*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*" (Mal 4:5-6).

The prophecy of Malachi was not limited to John the Baptist. First, the Elijah of reference would be sent "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." That is not how the entrance of Christ into the world through Mary was viewed.

The prophecy of Malachi was not limited to John the Baptist. First, the Elijah of reference would be sent "*before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.*" That is not how the entrance of Christ into the world through Mary was viewed. Secondly, when John was asked if he

was Elijah, being full of the Holy Spirit he replied, *"I am not"* (John 1:21). Thirdly, he did not turn the hearts of children to the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). In fact, Jesus said of the people's ultimate response to John, *"they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished"* ^{NKJV} (Matt 17:12).

The angel told Zacharias that John would turn *"many"* of the children of the Lord *"to the Lord their God,"* and would come *"in the spirit and power of Elijah."* Jesus said that even though John came to prepare the way for Him, the people as a whole would actually reject the Lord, for whom John prepared them: *"Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them"* (Matt 17:12).

THOU SHALT HAVE JOY AND GLADNESS

"And thou shalt have joy and gladness . . ." Other versions read *"joy and delight,"* ^{NIV} *"be glad and have great delight,"* ^{BBE} *"joy and rejoicing"* ^{DARBY} *"very, very happy,"* ^{IE} *"Gladness and exultant joy,"* ^{WEYMOUTH} *"a joy and an exultation,"* ^{MONTGOMERY} and *"joy and exultant delight."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

When Sarah gave birth to the promised son Isaac she said, *"And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me"* (Gen 21:6). Knowing the nature of the son to whom she had given birth, Zacharias and Elizabeth could fulfill the Solomon proverb, *"The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice"* (Prov 23:24-25).

The Western world of our time would certainly not rejoice at an aged woman giving birth to a child. The experience of the birth itself, and the duties that attended motherhood would certainly be viewed as something less than desirable. However, for a people who had been cultured to see childbirth as the result of the Lord's working, and that it was a blessed and God-ordained experience, it is viewed quite differently.

MANY SHALL REJOICE AT HIS BIRTH
" . . . and many shall rejoice at his birth. . ."

Those who knew Zacharias and Elizabeth, also perceiving childbirth as a blessing from the Lord, would rejoice in the birth of John the Baptist. In fact, the more they learned about the circumstances leading to that birth, the

is written, *"On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life"* (Josh 4:14).

God told Nathan the prophet to tell David, *"And I have been with thee whithersoever thou hast walked, and have cut off all thine enemies from*

Men who are truly "great" have been made so by God, and they are preeminently "great" in His sight. I have known a few such men in my time, and have praised God for the privilege of knowing them.

more they would rejoice. This was a people among whom were those who *"looked for redemption"* (Lk 2:38) – and this birth had to do with the coming redemption.

HE SHALL BE GREAT IN THE EYES OF THE LORD

" . . . For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord . . ."

It one thing for someone to be *"great"* It is quite another for a person to be *"great in the eyes of the Lord."* The Son of God would say of him, *"For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he"* (Luke 7:28).

God told Abraham, *"I will bless thee, and make thy name great"* (Gen 12:2). Jacob said of Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim, *"he [Manasseh] also shall be great: but truly his younger brother [Ephraim] shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations"* (Gen 48:19).

God told Joshua, *"This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee"* (Josh 3:7). And, it came to pass, as it

before thee, and have made thee a name like the name of the great men that are in the earth" (1 Chron 17:8). It is no wonder that David proclaimed to the Lord, *"Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all"* (1 Chron 29:12).

Men who are truly *"great"* have been made so by God, and they are preeminently *"great"* in His sight. I have known a few such men in my time, and have praised God for the privilege of knowing them. They excelled in their work of the Lord. Their understanding was more thorough and focused. None of them regarded themselves as great, but when you were around them, you sensed their greatness – that God had raised them up as holy sentinels to declare what He wanted the people to know. The people did not make these men great. God did!

HE SHALL DRINK NEITHER WINE NOR STRONG DRINK

" . . . and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink . . ." Other versions read, *"he will drink no wine nor liquor,"* ^{NASB} *"he is never to take wine or other fermented drink,"* ^{NIV} *"never drink wine or beer,"* ^{CSB/CEV/ERV} and *"He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks."* ^{NLT}

“Strong drink” has to do with fermentation, distillation, or the aging of drink in which it obtains inebriating properties. *“Wine”* has to do with the fruit of the vine, which can ferment in the belly, causing drunkenness – as in the case of Noah, who became drunk by drinking fresh grape juice from his vineyard (Gen 9:20-21).

We infer from this that John the Baptist was a Nazarite, who was also forbidden such drink (Num 6:3). There the word *“vinegar”* is used, which speaks of fermentation.

Using the reasoning of the Scriptures on this matter, the reason for the proscription of John drinking any wine or strong drink was that at no point could his mind be muddled, or his thinking distorted. His commission simply did not allow for such a status.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were to ensure John at no time drank any wine or strong drink – not even accidentally, when if it was offered to him by someone else. It is axiomatic that this aged couple took the mandate from heaven with the utmost seriousness.

HE SHALL BE FILLED WITH THE

that is given and cultured by God Himself. Solomon affirmed that worldly wisdom did not know *“how the bones do grow in the womb”* – then adds, *“even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all”* (Eccl 11:5).

Like Jacob was designated as the favored one while in the womb (Gen 25:23), and Jeremiah was set apart *“before”* he came *“forth out of the womb”* (Jer 1:5), as well as Paul, who was *“separated” “before”* he was born ^{NRSV} (Gal 1:15).

This is the only infant said to have been filled with the Holy Spirit from the mother’s womb. It is a most remarkable phenomenon, and should arrest our attention. This is one of those wonderful works that only God can do – and He apparently does not do it often. This confirms the absolute uniqueness of John the Baptist who stood as a mighty sentinel and an evangel between the Old and New Covenants – for *“all the Law and the prophets prophesied until John”* (Matt 11:13), or *“were until John”* (Lk 16:16).

HE SHALL TURN MANY OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

“. . . And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. . . .”

At this point, the work of John the Baptist is shown to have differed from that of the Elijah prophesied by Malachi. Malachi said, *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”* (Mal 4:6). John did not do this, for the very people to whom he ministered were the ones who called for the death of Jesus of Nazareth. But he was a forerunner of Malachi’s Elijah, coming in his spirit and power. Jesus said the people were *“willing for a season to rejoice in his light”* (John 5:35). But no national change was wrought by his ministry. That kind of change would be wrought AFTER Jesus had risen from the dead, returned to heaven, and commenced

This is the only infant said to have been filled with the Holy Spirit from the mother’s womb. It is a most remarkable phenomenon, and should arrest our attention. This is one of those wonderful works that only God can do – and He apparently does not do it often.

Priests were also forbidden to enter the Tabernacle if they drank wine or strong drink. The penalty for doing so was death, for it would impair their judgment (Lev 10:9-11; Ezek 44:21). Solomon told his son, *“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted”* (Prov 31:5).

Among other things, this infers that no feast or ceremony of the Law required the drinking of fermented wine. Either that, or John was exempted from such observances.

In Scripture *“the fruit of the vine”* is distinguished from these other forms of drink. The *“fruit of the vine”* is what comes from the vine, not the vat, or a vessel used for fermentation. Jesus referred to the cup of the Lord’s Table as *“the fruit of the vine”* (Matt 26:29; Mk 14:25; Lk 22:18).

HOLY SPIRIT FROM HIS MOTHER’S WOMB

“. . . and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb. . . .”

Other versions read, *“while yet in his mother’s womb,”* ^{NASB} *“even from birth,”* (with footnote, *“or from His mother’s womb,”* ^{NIV} *“even before His birth,”* ^{NRSV/BBE} *“while still in his mother’s womb,”* ^{CSB} *“even before he is born,”* ^{GWN} *“while yet in his mother’s womb,”* ^{NAU} *“at the time when he is being born,”* ^{IE} *“from the very hour of his birth,”* ^{WEYMOUTH} *“from the hour of his birth,”* ^{MONTGOMERY} *“still from the belly of his mothers,”* ^{ABP} *“from his very birth,”* ^{GOODSPEED} *“from the moment he leaves his mother’s womb,”* ^{MESSAGE} *“even in and from his mother’s womb.”* ^{AMPLIFIED}

Most of the versions represent *“from his mother’s womb”* as being from the time John was formed in the womb. That is where life begins – life

His mediatorial work and intercessory ministry.

HE SHALL GO BEFORE HIM IN THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIJAH

“ . . . And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias . . . ”

Other versions read, “with the spirit and power of Elijah,”^{NRSV} “equipped with the spirit and power of Elijah,”^{CEB} “a man of rugged spirit and power like Elijah, the prophet of old,”^{LIVING} “in a powerful way, like Elijah,”^{IE} “with the same power and spirit that Elijah had,”^{CEV} “He will be powerful like Elijah and will have the same spirit,”^{ERV} “in the style and strength of Elijah,”^{MESSAGE} and “he will [himself] go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah.”^{AMPLIFIED}

As I have already pointed out, when the disciples asked Jesus about the teaching of the ascribes, that Elijah “must first come,” Jesus answered, “Elijah shall first come, and restore all things” (Matt 17:10). At that time, John the Baptist had already been martyred. Other versions read, “Elijah is coming first and will restore all things,”^{NKJV} “to be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things,”^{NIV} “Elijah is indeed coming,”^{NRSV} “Elijah truly has to come and put all things right,”^{BBE} “Elijah is indeed coming first to get everything ready,”^{NLT} and “Elijah does come and will get everything restored and ready.”^{AMPLIFIED}

Malachi’s prophecy, therefore, was not fulfilled by John the Baptist. However, John’s ministry was like that of Elijah of old: the Elijah of Malachi. However, Elijah would come **after** the Messiah had come, and before “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal 4:5). while John the Baptist came and ministered **before** the coming of the Messiah. John would turn “many” of Israel to the Lord their God, Malachi’s Elijah would “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers,” lest the Lord “come and smite the earth with a curse” (Mal 4:6).

Not even Christ’s coming to earth was designed to gain domestic peace, turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and visa versa. He dispelled

that notion by saying, “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law” (Luke 12:51-53).

However, when the Elijah of Malachi’s prophecy comes, he will “restore all things.” Aside from this, as stated previously, when John (who was

because of Jesus (John 7:43; 9:18; 10:19)

HE SHALL TURN THE DISOBEDIENT TO THE WISDOM OF THE JUST

“...to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. . . .”

This refers to the “many” of the children of Israel which John turned to the Lord. Proportionately, they were by no means the majority. The whole city of Jerusalem, with the exception of a few souls, rejected Jesus, and did not know the time of their visitation (Lk 19:14) – even though God had faithfully reported that the Kingdom of

“For a season” (John 5:35), John shook the society of the Jews, but the effect of his preaching soon began to diminish.

filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb) was asked if he was Elijah, he clearly stated, “I am not” (John 1:21).

Why, Then, Did Jesus Say John the Baptist was Elijah?

In the very text where Jesus affirmed Elijah was yet to come, He said to His disciples, “But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, **and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed.** Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them” (Matt 17:12). That is, Elijah was, so to speak, in John the Baptist. That is why he came “in the spirit and power of Elijah.” **The people were exposed to the kind of ministry of which Malachi prophesied.** However, it was not yet time, and therefore the people “knew him not” – which would not be the case with ther Elijah of Malachi’s prophecy. The people did everything to him that they wished. They went out to hear him. They asked questions of him. They repented at his word and were baptized. However, the people were not united together, nor were they readied to receive Christ Jesus. In fact, there were divisions among the people

God was at hand, and had identified Jesus of Nazareth as “the Lamb of John that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

“For a season” (John 5:35), John shook the society of the Jews, but the effect of his preaching soon began to diminish.

TO MAKE READY A PEOPLE FOR THE LORD

“ . . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Other versions read, “to make ready a people whose hearts have been turned to the Lord,”^{BBE} “to prepare unto the Lord a perfect people,”^{DOUAY} “prepare a people fit for the Lord,”^{NAB} “cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly,”^{NLT} “to make a people perfectly ready for the Lord,”^{WEYMOUTH} “to prepare for the Lord a people being carefully prepared,”^{ABP} “get people ready for the Lord,”^{CEV} “cause people who are not obeying God to change and start thinking the way they should,”^{ERV} and “in order to make ready for the Lord a people [perfectly] prepared [in spirit, adjusted and

disposed and placed in the right moral state)" AMPLIFIED

John prepared the people by calling them to repentance – individual and national repentance (Matt 3:2,8,11; Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3,8). This involved the development of the following.

⇒ A proper view of God.

- ⇒ A proper view of sin.
- ⇒ The conviction of sin.
- ⇒ The persuasion to cease sinning.
- ⇒ Sorrow for having committed sin.
- ⇒ The changing of the mind about sin.
- ⇒ The confession of sin.

⇒ A public acknowledgment, by baptism, of the built of sin and the resolve to no longer yield to it.

This is still how people are prepared, or get ready for the Lord. **Until men are convicted of sin, resolved to no longer in rebellion to God, and ready to do whatever God tells them, they are not ready for Jesus.**

WHEREBY SHALL I KNOW THIS?

"¹⁸ And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. ¹⁹ And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings."

WHEREBY SHALL I KNOW THIS?

"And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. . . ."

The response of Zacharias confirms the weakness of the flesh.

This should teach us that alertness and vigilance do not come easily. Unbelief can rise suddenly, even when you are serving the Lord in the right place, and at the right time. If you have not experienced such a phenomenon, you probably will in due time. Though unwanted and unwarranted, it does happen.

I AM GABRIEL

" . . . And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings."

sent on missions, they can navigate through questions and unwarranted responses, and even pronounce judgments. In all of this, they are doing the will of the Lord, but they are characterized by wisdom, as inferred by David in Second Samuel 14:20.

Think of the rationality that was displayed in the angels that delivered Lot from Sodom.

- ⇒ They pulled Lot inside the house when he stepped out to reason with the perverted men of Sodom (Gen 19:10).
- ⇒ They smote the men with blindness who sought to enter Lot's home (Gen 19:11).
- ⇒ They inquired if Lot had any other relatives in Sodom, saying that if he did, he should bring them to his house (Gen 19:12).
- ⇒ In the morning the angels hastened Lot, telling him to take his wife and two daughters and flee from the city, lest they be consumed (Gen 19:15).
- ⇒ When Lot lingered, they took hold of the hands of Lot, his wife, and his daughters, brought them out, and placed them outside the city (Gen 19:16-17).
- ⇒ When Lot discerned he could not make it to the mountain of refuge in time, he requested that he be allowed to stay in one of the cities

This should teach us that alertness and vigilance do not come easily. Unbelief can rise suddenly, even when you are serving the Lord in the right place, and at the right time.

That does not make it excusable, as the angel's response will establish. Note, that Zacharias was engaged in the work of the Lord, and was in the holy place. Further, the Holy Spirit has described him as a man who was *"righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless"* (Luke 1:6). Yet, such a man, in the process of serving God in an appointed place, and at an appointed time, has this moment of spiritual lapse.

We have records of *"Gabriel"* appearing to Daniel (Dan 8:16-27; 9:21-27), Zacharias (Lk 1:11-19), and Mary (Lk 1:26-29). The name *"Gabriel"* means *"CHAMPION OF GOD."* MCCLINTOK & STRONG'S He communicated to Daniel the explanation of the ram and the he-goat (Dan 7), and the meaning of *"the seventy weeks"* (Dan 9:21-27).

Angels are rationale beings, not mere robots, as it were. When they are

slated for destruction, until the calamity was passed. The angel responded, "See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken," adding "Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar" (Gen 19:21-22).

When Israel was delivered from Egypt, the Lord assigned the leadership to an angel. "For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off" (Ex 23:23). And again,

"Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee" (Ex 32:34). The discretionary powers of this angel are revealed in the Lord's words concerning him: "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. **Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries**" (Ex 23:20-22).

What We Can Learn From This

While this is actually a studied opinion, it has been profitable for me to think upon it. **It appears to me that when God gives some personality a work to do, there is a certain amount of wisdom that is allocated with the commission.** This wisdom will enable the individual to make certain assessments, and proceed confidently to move out upon their implications. Care must be taken not to operate in the flesh. **A truly spiritual posture assumes the individual is absorbed with what God is leading him to do.** This does not exclude seeking for special direction if things are not clear to the individual. Also, confidence in this area of ministry involves in "the full assurance of faith" (Heb 10:22).

THE RESULT OF UNBELIEF

" ²⁰ 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."

The instant response of the angel indicates the seriousness of questioning the word of the Lord in any way. **Men are, in my judgment, too tolerant of those who have doubts, and question what God has promised or said.** Such people should take note of this incident.

THOU SHALT BE DUMB

"And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak . . ."

Other versions read, "you will be mute," ^{NKJV} "you shall be silent," ^{NASB} "you will be without voice or language," ^{BBE} "you will remain silent, unable to speak," ^{CEB} "you will be unable to talk until the day this happens," ^{GWN} "be silenced and have no power of speech," ^{NJB} "you are to be stricken silent, unable to speak until the child is born," ^{LIVING} "You won't be able to talk," ^{IE} "you will be kept silent," ^{ABP} "you will not be able to say a thing," ^{CEV} "You will lose your speech," ^{ERV} and "you will be and will continue to be silent and not

Does the response of Zacharias seem innocent, or something that should be graciously overlooked? Or, is there anyone naive enough to think this is an isolated incident that has nothing to do with us?

able to speak till the day when these things take place." ^{AMPLIFIED}

Once again, this was in answer to the following question posed by Zacharias: "**Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years**" (Luke 1:18).

Does the response of Zacharias seem innocent, or something that should be graciously overlooked? Or, is there anyone naive enough to think this is an isolated incident that has nothing to do with us? Of course, if that was really the case, why is it in the Scriptures in the first place? How can **all Scripture** be "profitable" to us (2 Tim 3:16-17) if some of it has nothing to do with us?

When the Lord says to us, "I will

never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb 13:5), are we to respond by saying, "How can I know this?" If we are told, "His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet 1:3), is it right to respond, "How can I be sure of this?" If we are told, "if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him" (1 John 5:15), are we at liberty to ask, "But how can I know I am asking for something that is according to the will of God?"

Is this really an acceptable manner in which we are to respond to the

promises of God?

Since the church has made a place for psychiatric analysis, the elevation of self esteem, and other such things, the kind of question Zacharias posed has become common, and is being treated as though it was normal and acceptable. However, this holy angel, who was Gabriel, obviously is opposed to such thinking.

Speaking as Zacharias did was so unacceptable, that the gift of speech was taken from him for at least nine months. He would not be able to utter an audible word, to either God or man.

UNTIL THE DAY

“ . . . until the day that these things shall be performed . . . ”

If the truth of what Gabriel had said dawned upon Zecharias during the period from then to the birth of John the Baptist, he would be unable to utter it. He would not be able to verbalize praise, or confession, or petition. **A single unacceptable uttered sentence brought this judgment.**

BECAUSE YOU DID NOT BELIEVE MY WORDS

“ . . . because thou believest not my words . . . ”

Other versions read, *“because you did not believe my words,”* ^{NKJV}

What men might call doubt, Gabriel called unbelief! What others might view as simply not understanding, Gabriel said was not believing. Still others might choose to view this as simply being weak. Gabriel said it was not believing.

“because you didn't believe,” ^{CEB} *“you didn't believe what I said,”* ^{GWN} *“you didn't believe what I told you,”* ^{LIVING} *“you have not believed my message,”* ^{GNB} *“you did not believe my announcement,”* ^{ISV} *“you won't believe me.”* ^{MESSAGE}

What men might call doubt, Gabriel called unbelief! What others might view as simply not understanding, Gabriel said was not believing. Still others might choose to view this as simply being weak. Gabriel said it was not believing.

I wonder how much of our inability is actually traced back to not believing! That is certainly something to think about.

WHICH SHALL BE FULFILLED IN THEIR SEASON

“ . . . which shall be fulfilled in their season.”

Because the announcement was of something God had determined to do, **it would be done.** The fulfillment of this word in no way depended upon man, even though it would be fulfilled among men. Because it was related to the coming of the Messiah, **nothing would deter it,** or cause it to fall to the ground. **This was, in fact, an unconditional promise – like every Messianic promise.** There are things that God does that are absolutely **unconditional** – and they all have to do with the coming and work of the Messiah – His birth, His protection, His growth, His ministry, His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension, His exaltation, His present ministry, and His coming again. **In fact, it is their unconditionality that gives them their unmitigated power.** Obviously these are the things we should emphasize and expound with godly power.

THE PEOPLE WAITED, MARVELED, AND PERCEIVED

“ ²¹ And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he tarried so long in the temple. ²² 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 PEOPLE WAITED

“And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he tarried so long in the temple. . . .”

Apparently, the ministry of

Zacharias was ordinarily within a certain time frame. Under the law, it was a routine associated with specific activities, with apparently no room for additional involvements by the priest.

However, this proved to be no ordinary occasion, and what was being accomplished could not be completed within the ordinary time allotted for the burning of incense.

I gather that Luke's record is a summation of what took place when Gabriel appeared and commenced his

revelation. I do not know how we can otherwise account for the extraordinary length of time involved – a period so lengthy that it caused the people to marvel, be amazed, or wonder. They knew how long it ordinarily took to minister the burning of incense, and the time Zacharias was in the sanctuary had far exceeded that period of time.

WHEN HE CAME OUT

“ . . . And when he came out, he could not speak unto them . . . ”

Finally Zacharias emerged from

Bathed in the Scriptures, as the minds of this people were, they knew of Divine appearances, the appearance of angels, and visions – events that were speckled throughout their history. Therefore, while it was not a common experience, it was not a strange one.

the sanctuary – but he could not speak, providing a long awaited explanation for his delay.

THEY PERCEIVED HE HAD SEEN A VISION

“ . . . and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.”

Other versions read, *“they realized,”* ^{NIV} *“they saw,”* ^{BBE} *“they understood,”* ^{DOUAY} and *“they [clearly]*

perceived.” ^{AMPLIFIED}

How did they know Zacharias had seen a vision while in the sanctuary? We assume there was something visible about him that suggested this to them. He had been face-to-face with a holy angel, who stood in the presence of the Lord. Was there a heavenly glow upon the angel that was transmitted to the face of Zacharias, like occurred when Moses saw the afterglow of God’s glory (Ex 34:29-30)? It is not difficult for me to see that this could very well have been the case.

However, it is more likely that their conclusion was drawn by him beckoning to them. Other versions read that *“he kept making signs to them,”* ^{NASB} *“he kept motioning to them,”* ^{NRSV} *“he made signs to them,”* ^{RSV} *“he continued making signs unto them,”* ^{ASV} *“he gestured to them,”* ^{CEB} *“he communicated to them with signs,”* ^{CJB} and *“they realized from his gestures and his silence.”* ^{NLT}

Bathed in the Scriptures, as the minds of this people were, they knew of Divine appearances, the appearance of angels, and visions – events that were speckled throughout their history. Therefore, while it was not a common experience, it was not a strange one. Also, I do not doubt that the gestures of Zachariah in some way put the people in mind of key appearances recorded in the Scriptures.

I gather that the details of what Zacharias had been told could not be conveyed by gestures – only the fact that he had a vision while going about his duties in the Temple – more specifically, in the Holy Place.

HE DEPARTED TO HIS OWN HOUSE

“²³ And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.”

The period of Zacharias’ assigned duties had not yet been completed. He was apparently to enter the Temple Holy Place for a period of time, not simply for a single day. We know this from the remainder of the text.

AS SOON AS THE DAYS OF HIS MINISTRATION WERE ACCOMPLISHED

“And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished . . .” Other versions read, *“the days of his priestly service,”* ^{NASB} *“his time of service,”* ^{NIV} *“his period of his Temple service,”* ^{CJB} *“week of service”* ^{NLT} *“the remaining days of his Temple duties,”* ^{LIVING} and *“his term of*

priestly service.” ^{MONTGOMERY}

Some have assumed this period was seven days in length, as the New Living Translation suggests:–i.e. *“Week of service.”* This is based upon a text in the ninth chapter of First Chronicles, which outlines various duties of the Levitical priesthood (1 Chron 9:10-44). The rotation of their service is described in these words, *“And their brethren, which were in their villages, were to come after seven days from time to time with them”* (1 Chron 9:25). Thus, the reasoning that the period of service was seven days in length. I do not doubt that this was the actual circumstance.

At any rate, whatever the length of his service, he had to complete his time without speaking, and with the nagging memory of how he had reacted

to the word of Gabriel the angel, who, so far as the record is concerned, never again appeared to him.

I suppose it is worth noting that while we can be forgiven for foolish moments and responses, they do have a humbling and nagging presence that leaves us regretting hasty words, and thoughtless responses.

HE DEPARTED TO HIS OWN HOUSE

“ . . . he departed to his own house.”

Which means, Zacharias had to leave home for the duration of his service as a priest.

Unless Gabriel appeared to Elizabeth as well as to Zacharias, as he did to Mary in the announcement of the conception and birth of the Savior (Lk

1: > 26-29), Zacharias would have to communicate the news to Elizabeth without speaking. Perhaps he informed her by means of a *“writing tablet,”* as he did when announcing the name of their newborn son – *“John”* (Lk 1:63).

Once he had returned home, Zacharias had nine long months to think

about the remarkable visitation he had from heaven, the mighty angel that delivered it, the message that was communicated to him, the unbelieving response he gave, and the penalty for that response.

It is well to remember that while sin can be graciously, forgiven,

sometimes we have to live with the painful memory of how foolish we were. This can be borne, of course, but it is best not to have to do so. Far better to walk in the light as He is in the light, living out our lives to the glory of God in everything we do, however minuscule or significant it may appear to be.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 10/3/14. We will continue our series of lessons in the Gospel of Luke. The second lesson will cover verses 24-38 of chapter 1: “ELIZABETH CONCEIVES, AND THE ANGEL GABRIEL APPEARS TO MARY.” The entrance of the promised Seed draws closer, and God-ordained events begin to take place rapidly. As the time approaches, it will be within the context of two miraculous births, with the later being the greater. Thw two women who are involved are at opposite ends of the spectrum of age: ong young, and one old. When they receive the announcements, one is barren, and one is a virgin. Both women are holy, and respopnd to what the promised births with praise and honor. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.