

# Small Beginnings

Luke 1:5-7

## 1. Introduction.

- a. Last time we talked about Luke as physician, historian, theologian, and pastor.
- b. The purpose of Luke's writing is to bring certainty (v.4).
- c. The formal introduction (1:1-4) is written in a high-level Greek to model formal history, but the Birth Narrative (1:5-2:52) is written in a very archaic style of Greek.
  - i. Luke's purpose for doing this is to transfer the mindset of his readers back into the Old Testament.
  - ii. If a Gentile were to read the Old Testament, most likely they would be reading from the Septuagint (LXX), which was written in an archaic style of Greek. By switching to this archaic style in the Birth Narrative, Luke's already drawing attention to Old Testament promises (c.f., Malachi 4).
    1. You can trace the anticipation of Israel's Messiah all through the Old Testament. It was an anticipation established by God through prophetic texts (e.g., Isa. 53).
    2. As you follow the theme, the promise of a Messiah is God's final word to Israel before 400 years of Silence (Malachi 4:2).
      - a. He promises to send His Messiah before His final judgment of all things.
      - b. This Messiah will come in righteousness to restore creation to its rightful place before its righteous Creator.
    3. It's also prophesied that this Messiah will be accompanied onto the scene with a forerunner (Malachi 4:5-6). This is how the Messiah would be recognized.

## 2. V. 5.

- a. As all good historians attempt to do, Luke locates his account in real time and history by identifying a reigning official—King Herod.

b. Background of Herod.

- i. Gave himself the title of “Herod the Great.”
- ii. His Father (Antipater) was appointed Procurator over Judea by Julius Caesar. As a result, Herod ended becoming Prefect (i.e., a high ranking official) over Galilee. He was very effective. (Example: dealt with the problem of the Sacarii—a group of anti-Rome terrorists).
- iii. Was granted the title of “King of the Jews” by the Roman Empire.
  1. Herod wasn’t fully Jewish, so He made some political moves to try and endear himself to the Jewish people.
    - a. Married a Jewish heiress of a powerful family (Mariamne of the Hasmonian family).
    - b. Provided tax breaks, built infrastructure, provided food during the famine of 25BC, etc.
  2. While he was publicly successful, he was personally corrupt.
    - a. His paranoia led to the murder of many family members.
    - b. Ordered prominent members of society to be executed on the day of his death, so there would be weeping in the land.
    - c. After hearing the prophesy of a coming king, he ordered the slaughter of every male child in Bethlehem and the surrounding area, for fear of being overthrown (Matt. 2).

c. Zacharias.

- i. His name means, “God remembers.” Such a fitting name, given this is the beginning of God being faithful, as He remembers His promise of old.
- ii. He was a priest of little significance.
  1. There were 18,000 priests in Israel.
  2. Zacharias and Elizabeth would have been akin to an old country pastor couple.

iii. Priests were God's ordained means to implement His theocratic rule.

1. In order to be a priest, you had to be a decedent of Aaron.
2. Priests cared for the spiritual needs of Israel, and functioned to uphold the societal laws outlined in the Old Testament Law.
3. To be a priest was to be in a privileged position.

iv. Abijah.

1. The Levitical priesthood began with Aaron.
2. Aaron had four sons.
  - a. Two of the them died (Nadab and Abihu).
  - b. The other two were Eliazar and Ithamar.
3. Eliazar and Ithamar had a combined total of 24 sons. From these 24 sons came the 24 divisions of the priesthood. One of the sons was named Abijah.
  - a. Abijah was the 8<sup>th</sup> division— the division to which Zacharias belonged.
  - b. Each division was required to serve in the temple twice a year for the period of one week.

3. V.6.

- a. The couple are described as righteous in the sight of the Lord.
  - i. At this point in Israel's history, most of the nation was apostate.
  - ii. The only righteousness they possessed was that of self-righteousness. They were legalists and external conformers to the law—they were righteous in the sight of men.
  - iii. Righteousness in the sight of God begins on the inside of a person. We are made righteous by faith (i.e., trust) in a promise of God. For us, this means trusting in the promise that our sin is truly forgiven by what Christ has done on our behalf.

- iv. Inward righteousness works itself outward into an external holiness. This is how Luke describes this couple, but focuses on their inward righteousness—a righteousness in the sight of God.
- b. A topic that usually arises regarding the Old Testament is the question of how an Old Testament saint could have been regarded righteous, especially since they weren't trusting in Jesus Christ.
  - i. The answer is always faith in a particular promise of God (c.f., Heb. 11).
  - ii. For those who believed God, the work of Christ retroactively covered their sin.
  - iii. In the case of Zacharias and Elizabeth, they were trusting in the promises that the Old Testament people had been given up to that point (i.e., "all the commandments and requirements of the Lord" [1:6]).

#### 4. V.7.

- a. Luke is establishing a contrast.
  - i. Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God, but likely unrighteous in the sight of men.
  - ii. The barrenness of Elizabeth would have garnered much shame in an honor/shame society.
    - 1. Barrenness was regarded as a curse of God (Deut. 28:15, 18).
    - 2. The culture would have assumed someone in their family sinned. This is especially true, considering the Old Testament repetition that children are a blessing from God.
  - iii. Luke reports they were righteous in the sight of God to make certain we understand that Elizabeth's barrenness had nothing to do with their sin. As we'll see in coming weeks, she's about to be the blessed mother of the forerunner—John the Baptist.

#### 5. Conclusion.

- a. I spent some time developing a little bit of background to help us remember that this is history—it's a record of what really happened. It's designed to lay before us the faithfulness of God to His own promises.

- b. It's also an account which demonstrates that God works through small beginnings and insignificant people. He always comes to the weak and the broken so that He might display His strength.

#### Small Group Question

1. What stood out to you in this sermon?
2. What does it mean to be righteous in the sight of God? How is this accomplished?
3. What is our responsibility in light of Christ's work? How is this shown in your life?
4. Who in your life needs to hear the story of righteousness from you? How well are you able to share this news?