

## II. INTRODUCTION

### §2: THE PROMISE OF THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Luke 1:5–25

#### Zacharias and Elizabeth Introduced

1:5–7

5 There was in the days of Herod, king of Judea, a certain priest with the name Zacharias of the division of Abia; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

6 And they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord blamelessly.

7 And they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in their days.

#### Zacharias Serves in the Temple

1:8–10

8 Now it came about, while he was performing his priestly service before God in the fixed succession of his division,

9 according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to come into the temple-sanctuary of the Lord to make an incense offering.

10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of the incense offering.

#### The Appearance and Message of the Angel to Zacharias

1:11–17

11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense.

12 And Zacharias was troubled when he saw *him*, and fear came upon him.

13 But the angel said to him: Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your entreaty has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will call his name John.

14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will by no means drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

16 And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.

17 And he himself will go on ahead before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers back to children, and disobedient ones to the frame of mind of righteous ones, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

#### Zacharias' Unbelieving Response

1:18

18 And Zacharias said to the angel: How shall I know this?

For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in her days.

#### The Reprimand of the Angel

1:19–20

19 And the angel answered and said to him: I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to proclaim as good news these things to you.

20 And behold, you shall be silent and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which shall be fulfilled in their proper time.

### The Mute Zacharias Before the People

1:21–23

- 21** And the people were waiting for Zacharias and were wondering at his delay in the temple-sanctuary.
- 22** But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple-sanctuary; and he was nodding to them and remained mute.
- 23** And it came about when the days of his religious service were fulfilled, he went back to his house.

### Elizabeth Becomes Pregnant

1:24–25

- 24** And after these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant; and she kept herself hidden for five months, saying:
- 25** Thus the Lord has dealt with me in the days in which He looked upon *me* to take away my disgrace among men.

### Notes

1. **Herod (Lk. 1:5).** Herod the Great was king over all Palestine from 37–4 B.C. He is mentioned in the N.T. only here and in Matt. 2:1–22. There were several other rulers with the name Herod. See the charts on “The Family of Herod the Great,” and “Rulers of Rome and Palestine” in §14.
2. **Priest (Lk. 1:5).** The priests were of the sons of the tribe of Levi through Aaron’s descendants. The charts accompanying this section show the relationship of many people who are referred to in the N.T.
3. **The division of Abia (or Abijah, Lk. 1:5).** At the time of David the priestly families were divided into 24 groups—16 groups from the descendants of Eleazar and 8 groups from the descendants of Ithamar (1 Chr. 24). Abijah was head of the 8th of the 24 divisions. Each division was responsible for the temple service for one week at a time, from Sabbath to Sabbath, twice a year. Apparently, all priests served together in some fashion at the Feast of Tabernacles (1 week) and perhaps at the Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread (1 week). Adjustments were made for bringing the cycle into harmony with the calendar year.

According to Ezra 2:36–39 only 4 of the 24 divisions are represented in the list of those returning to Judah from the Babylonian captivity. These 4 were divided into 24 new divisions, and the old names of 1 Chr. 24 were given to the new divisions. We do not know how many priests there were at the time of the N.T., though according to some estimates the numbers range from 18,000 to 20,000, somewhat less than 1000 priests per division on the average.

4. **The temple of the Lord (Lk. 1:9).** There are two Greek words generally translated “temple” in our English Bibles. One word (naos) generally refers only to the temple-sanctuary proper, i.e. the building in which was the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The other word (hieron) generally refers to the whole temple precinct including sanctuary (naos), courts and other buildings. See the diagrams on page 19. [Naos = temple-sanctuary is used in Lk. 1:9,21,22.]
5. **He was chosen by lot (Lk. 1:9).** Historians record that since there were so many priests at this time, the coveted honor of offering incense in the temple was granted to any given priest only once in a lifetime. For the burning of incense, see Exod. 30:1–10. [We do not know if Zacharias officiated at the morning or evening service.]
6. **Right of the altar (Lk. 1:11).** From the perspective of one facing east toward the door of the temple, that would be on the south side of the altar between the altar and the candelabrum.
7. **No wine or liquor (Lk. 1:15).** See Num. 6; Judges 13:4–5; 1 Sam. 1:11.

8. **Elijah (Lk. 1:17).** Elijah was one of the most prominent of the O.T. prophets. The historical account of him is found in 1 Kings 17–21; 2 Kings 1–3; 9:36; 10:10,17; 2 Chron. 21:12. The O.T. ends with a prophecy of hope concerning the return of Elijah, Mal. 4:5–6, which is quoted here in Lk. 1:15. We will discuss the relationship between Elijah and John the Baptist more thoroughly later.
9. **Gabriel (Lk. 1:19).** There are only two angels mentioned by name in the Bible: Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Lk. 1:19,26) and Michael (Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7).