

## 1. Zacharias Was Burning Incense in the Temple

Today, we are beginning a new series of topics on the lessons that we want to teach our physical and spiritual children from the book of Luke. The four Gospels each present a different focus as they introduce us to the life of Christ. Matthew presents Christ as the promised King. Mark presents Christ as the Servant. Luke presents Christ as the Son of man. John presents Christ as the Son of God. In this series of topics, we want to help our children understand why it is so important that Christ is the Son of man.

In Luke 1:1-4, we read, “Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” Here, we see Luke explains why the Lord led him to write the book of Luke.

Luke had become a part of the team traveling with Paul at the city of Troas. Acts 16:10 says, “Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Paul had just been given the vision by God. In that vision, God had shown Paul a man of Macedonia pleading, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” This verse says that when Paul had seen the vision that immediately “we” sought to go to Macedonia. This is the first time that Luke uses “we” in the book of Acts because this is the place where he had joined the team with Paul. The “we” is used many times through of the rest of the book of Acts.

In Acts 21:8, we read, “On the next *day* we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was *one* of the seven, and stayed with him.” Except for the twelve days that Paul was gone from Caesarea to Jerusalem, Paul spent the next two years after the trip to Jerusalem in prison in the city of Caesarea. At the end of those two years Acts 27:1 says, “And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to *one* named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment.” Here, we see that the “we” is used again showing that Luke traveled from Caesarea to Rome with Paul. This meant that during those two years, Luke had the opportunity to interview many people who had seen Christ, including several of the apostles. As a result, we see that Luke researched the many accounts that had been written about the life of Christ and also had the opportunity to interview many eyewitnesses who had seen and talked to Christ personally.

The Lord led Luke to do this careful research and interview these many eyewitnesses so that he could have a very clear understanding of the life of Christ even though Luke had not personally met Christ. Luke did this because the Lord had led him to write an orderly account of the life and ministry of Christ to Theophilus so that Theophilus could have a written copy and know for certain the things that he had been taught about Christ. The name “Theophilus” means *friend of God*. Matthew, Mark and John were all Jews and so they had grown up learning the Old Testament and knew the Jewish background of Christ. In contrast, Luke and Theophilus are Gentile names. Some

historians say that Luke grew up in the city of Antioch. As a result, the Lord led Luke to write this book to Theophilus to be a special help and to give understanding to all the people who had not become familiar with the Old Testament as they were growing up. This would probably apply to many of you that are reading this topic.

Luke called Theophilus “most excellent Theophilus”. Since this title was usually given to governors or other highly respected leaders, it is probable that Theophilus, to whom this letter and the book of Acts were written, was a government official in the Roman government or a highly-respected leader. As a result, we will see several times in the book of Luke references to the Roman rulers that were in power at the time various events happened that are recorded in the book of Luke. This makes it possible to give accurate dates to those events by comparing those Scriptures to the same events in Roman history.

John the Baptist was the one who the Lord sent to prepare the way for Christ. As a result, Luke began his orderly account about the life and ministry of Jesus by introducing the parents of John the Baptist. Luke 1:5-7 says, “There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.” Here, we see that John was born during the time that Herod the Great was the Roman governor in Judea. We also see that Herod was given the title King of Judea.

The father of John the Baptist was a Jewish priest by the name of Zacharias and he was of the division of Abijah. All of the descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses, served as priests among the Jews. In the time of David, about one thousand years earlier, the priests had been divided into 24 divisions. 1 Chronicles 24:5, and 24:10 say, “Thus they were divided by lot, one group as another, for there were officials of the sanctuary and officials *of the house* of God, from the sons of Eleazar and from the sons of Ithamar...the seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah.” Here, we see that Zacharias was in the eighth division of the priests. Each of the 24 divisions of priests would serve at the temple about two weeks out of the year. We will see that Zacharias and all of the priests of division eight were serving at the temple at the time that the Lord sent an angel to speak to Zacharias.

We learn several things about Zacharias and his wife, Elizabeth. Elizabeth was also a descendent of Aaron. Both the husband and wife were righteous in the sight of God. We also see that they walked in all of the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. In fact, they are described as “blameless”. However, there was one thing that caused them to have sorrow in their lives. One of the greatest desires of every Jewish family was to have a child because the Jews thought that if a couple did not have a child, God was not pleased with them. We see that Zacharias and Elizabeth had no child. The word “barren” means *a woman who has not conceived a child*. Now, it seemed like it was too late for them to have a child because they were both getting older.

Luke 1:8-10 says, “So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his

division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.” Division eight of the priests were serving at the temple at the particular time that this event took place. As a result, Zacharias and the nearly one thousand priests of his division were at the temple carrying out the ministry of the priests.

Each morning and each evening, one of the priests was chosen by lot to be the one to go into the temple to offer incense and put oil in the lamps. Since each division of priests had nearly a thousand priests, many of the priests never had the opportunity during their entire lifetime to offer incense because only one priest would be chosen by lot for each day. Since the priests were only at the temple for about two weeks out of the year, that meant that only a few priests in each division would get the opportunity to offer incense each year. Once they had offered incense, they did not get that opportunity again. As a result, many of the priests never had that opportunity.

However, we see that God did cause the casting of lots to give Zacharias the opportunity to offer incense. We see that his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. Exodus 30:7-8 says, “Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.” This must have been one of the greatest opportunities Zacharias had in his entire ministry to offer incense.

The times that the priest went into the temple to offer incense each morning and each evening were both times when the people gathered in the Temple Court for prayer. About thirty-five years later, Acts 3:1 says, “Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*.” These times were very important to the Jews who were in Jerusalem. We see that the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. This multitude included both the other priests and also all of the other Jews in Jerusalem who came to worship God.

As Christians, 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray without ceasing.” This is a reminder that we can pray at all times about all things. However, one of the things that we also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn is the importance of having times each day when they set aside time for personal prayer to the Lord and meditation on His Word. This is the way that they build their personal fellowship with the Lord. 1 John 1:3 says, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Later in that chapter, we see that we walk in fellowship with the Lord as we walk in the light. Christ gave us an example in Mark 1:35 where we read, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” In the same way, we give our children an example as we spend time in prayer and meditation each day. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children the importance of prayer and meditation each day.