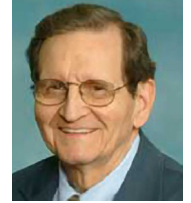


## The Announcement of the Birth



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In our last session, we saw the world prepared for the coming of the Lord Jesus. But the first event in this sequence was not the birth of Christ or even the announcement of the birth of Christ, but rather the announcement of the birth of the person who would announce the Lord Jesus Christ, John the Baptizer. Actually he's called John the Baptist, but personally I'd rather call him "John the Witness." Nothing against the Baptist, but he really came as a witness. As we will see, God sent this man called John to be a witness.

We turn to section 4 in the Harmony, this is in Luke 1:5-25; this is really the beginning of the New Testament. This is the first word from God in 400 years that we have a record of. It begins "in the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a certain priest named, Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. He had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth." So this is just bursting in on the scene now to prepare for the birth of Christ, and I will mention this in advance: The birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus Christ were in a sequence. They were in a combination. It's like A and B. So that when A happens, then B is going to happen. So everything we're reading here about the coming of A is automatically part of the coming B. It necessitates the coming of Messiah.

This cycle that is mentioned here, the cycle of Abijah, of course, refers back to I Chronicles 24:10 when David divided the priesthood into various cycles, and each came in and served for a couple of weeks. You'll notice they were righteous. They were walking blamelessly. According to the commandments and requirements of God, they had no child. Elizabeth was barren. They were both advanced in years. So in the space of three verses here we find out a lot about these people. We find that they were people that had been disappointed in life, people who were very religious, people who were very devout.

And then as for the one time in his life probably, Zechariah comes in to serve in the temple for a two-week period. He is chosen by lot to burn incense. The place he burned the incense was right in front of the great curtain, the great veil of the temple. You remember in the configuration of the tabernacle and later on in the temple, within the holy place, were the table of showbread, the golden lampstands, and then right against the divider between it and the Holy of Holies was this altar of incense. And this spoke of prayer. This was a theologically oriented visual aid in which they could see, not the prayers going up, but smoke like the prayers going up. And this was the responsibility of Zechariah as he came in on this turn of duty.

The whole multitude was waiting outside in prayer. And the angel appeared to him to the right of the altar of incense, [and] as he saw the angel he was troubled. It seems every time an angel appears, the person gets very troubled or afraid. Zechariah was troubled and fear gripped him, and the angel said, “Don’t be afraid, your petition is heard; your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son” (Luke 1:13). They had been praying for this undoubtedly for years and years. “And you’re going to give him a name, and his name is going to be John. And you’ll have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth” (Luke 1:13-14).

Now, I want to mention here that there is a progression, there is a beginning here of what we might picture as a wedge of certain simple basic things which are said, but later on they become more and more complicated, more and more deep and almost mysterious. First of all, when he says that “you’ll have joy and gladness” (Luke 1:4)—“Yes, of course, if my wife is going to bear a son like Sarah.” And perhaps he thought of Sarah and Abraham. Maybe they had read the story of Sarah and Abraham, thinking: Could this ever happen to us? And now there will certainly be joy and gladness, and many will rejoice. Can you imagine his ideas of the family rejoicing about what was going to happen!

But then he goes on to something deeper, and this is where the wedge gets a bit thicker. “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He’ll drink no wine or liquor. He’ll be filled with the Holy Spirit while he’s yet in his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). That’s unusual. “And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God” (Luke 1:16). It is he who will be a forerunner. And then you’ll notice the quotation here: “the power of Elijah ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children,’ the

disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, and to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). This is a very heavy statement to be made. And, of course, Zechariah recognizes this. And this is a quotation from the last two verses of the Old Testament (Malachi 4:5-6): “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

What’s happened here is that God has been silent for 400 years; and if you can picture a plate broken with a jagged edge on each side, and you put the plate back together and the two edges fit perfectly. In Malachi 4, the last two verses in the Old Testament is one side of that jagged edge and in Luke 1, here, we have the other side; and they dovetail together. So the last thing that God has said in the Old Testament is that one is going to come in the power of Elijah and turn the hearts of the children back to the fathers and so on. And the very first thing that God says in the New Testament is exactly the same thing. So He’s picking up as if the 400 years hadn’t happened in between in terms of His revelation, which is an amazing situation here.

Zechariah says, “How am I going to know this for certain? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years” (Luke 1:18). In other words, he didn’t trust the word of the angel. He didn’t believe this word of the angel, and he’s resisting it almost. And he says, “How am I going to know?” And the answer is: “I am Gabriel.” That’s how you’ll know. It’s who I am. “I’ve come from the presence of the Lord. I’ve been sent to speak to you.” (Luke 1:19). My very presence here is the evidence of the authority of my message. And then because God knows the hearts—and through this situation, of course, the angel would know his heart—he said, “You’re going to be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words” (Luke 1:20).

I want to stop there for a moment and suggest a principle that we’re going to see down through the life of Christ. And from time to time I’m going to mention some of these principles and then refer back to them. This principle is that we are not always given the object of evidence as to what’s going on in the heart of a person. But God knows what goes on in the heart. And God’s reaction—whether it’s in the person of Jesus Christ or in the person of a messenger, an angel He sends out—God’s reaction is

always based on what's actually happening in the heart. A good illustration of that, for instance, is in John 8 when a woman is taken in adultery. And He said, "Go and sin no more; neither do I condemn thee, your sins are forgiven." Well, what evidence was there? We don't have any objective evidence that we can see, overt. But Christ knew her heart. We find the opposite to be true, for instance, with Simon the Pharisee who had a bad heart (Luke 7:36-50). God knows what's going on in the heart, and as a result He reacts in that way. So in this case, although we have the words of Zechariah questioning this, we don't have any objective evidence that he is really not believing. But the reaction shows that he wasn't believing.

Similarly, in the case of Mary, Mary said, when it's announced to her she's to have a child, she says, "How shall this be, because I have not been with a man?" (Luke 1:34). And yet the answer is very positive and very commendatory. Why? Because God knew what was in the heart of Mary, that it was positive. So keep in mind that principle.

So he didn't believe. He is really unbelieving. The news was too good for him to take in. And [the angel] says, "You're going to be silent and not able to speak, because you didn't believe my words" (Luke 1:20). So he [Zechariah] goes out, and he has the greatest news story of all time. Talk about a scoop. He now has the information that the forerunner of Messiah is about to be born. And the forerunner of Messiah means that Messiah will have to come in his lifetime. So, they've narrowed this whole thing down. It is 700 years since Isaiah was prophesying this. And now it's narrowed down to within just a few years. So, he comes out and they all want to know what was going on because he was in there an extra length of time. He makes signs to them. He remained mute—I'd like to have seen those signs. I don't think that Zechariah was any great mime expert, but he tried to maybe express himself on that. And he comes home, and he can't even tell Elizabeth. And so Elizabeth finds herself pregnant, and after five months we find the scene changing now up to Nazareth.

So we've gone from the hill country of Judea. The camera fades out, we might say, in the hill country of Judea and zooms in on this girl up in Nazareth (1:26). Six months into the pregnancy of Elizabeth, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth—just sort of a very ordinary place, very ordinary person—to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was

Joseph. I'm sure you're aware of the marriage arrangements in those days. Let me just outline it here because we're actually going to see some implications of this in parables that Jesus uses concerning the marriage feast and so on.

The sequence would go like this. There are three stages to the whole marriage sequence: The first was that the relatives of the perspective bride and groom would get together, usually uncles or some relative, and they would decide on the price that was to be paid for the bride, the dowry. This was not buying the girl. But rather, it was compensating the girl's family for the loss of her as a helper. Sometimes they were shepherdesses and whatever else, and they'd have to replace this person. And so they didn't want to just lose her and there had to be compensation. So this was the bride price. Which, of course, is very common in many parts of the world today still. When that was paid, that made a contract that the girl was to be the bride of that young man. Then they waited for upwards of a year, usually about a year. This was partly to show the virginity of the girl, her purity and so on, and for other reasons. So there's that whole long waiting period during which time this is considered to be a marriage. But they did not live together. But legally it was a marriage. So if there's any breaking of this, there had to be a divorce. And, of course, if any fault were found in either of them, especially the woman in this case, then they would have to repay the bride price, and there would be a great problem over it.

And then at the end of this period, the bridegroom would go to the house of the bride and they would have a great weeping celebration there, so to speak, in which the mother and father of the bride say a tearful goodbye and [have] a great banquet there. And she is taken away from her family and taken over to the family of the bridegroom to live. And as they go back to the bridegroom's home, there of course would be a great feast there. That is called the marriage feast or the wedding feast, which we have in other Scriptures (Matthew 22:1-14; Revelation 19:7-9; John 2:1-11; etc.). And by the way, when they get back there, it's important that the building be lighted because darkness was a symbol of death and light was a symbol of life. And as they would get back there, the relatives of the bridegroom would be back there with lights. And that's the background of the story of the five foolish virgins of the ten virgins, because they were relatives of the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-13).

So he [Gabriel] comes to her [Mary]. They've already had the first stage of this marriage sequence. She's engaged to this man. Not engaged in our normal sense, but it's a final contract. He comes in and he says, "Hail, favored one" (Luke 1:28). The word favored here is a passive word. It does not mean that Mary herself had earned any favor, but rather that she was perceived as one with favor. She had received grace. She was greatly troubled, like in verse 12 [when] Zechariah was greatly troubled with statement when the angel appeared, wondering what this meant. And he [Gabriel] says, "Don't be afraid, you've found favor with God [grace]. You're going to bear a Son, and you'll call His name Jesus" (Luke 1:30-31). Notice the parallels in these two announcements. There are a number of parallels. In each case: (1) the angel appears, (2) there is an initial fright, (3) bewilderment, and (4) then, there's the announcement of what's going to happen, and (5) the announcement of the name of the child.

Then, just as in the case of John, the angel goes on to note a number of unusual things about this baby that's to be born. "You'll call His name Jesus" (Luke 1:31). Which, of course, is Joshua, Yeshua. It means Savior. "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32). Now, obviously, this is a term for deity because, although all may be called sons of God in the sense that God created them, "the Son of the Most High" has obviously a special meaning in this context. "The Lord will give Him a throne, the throne of His father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:32-33). Again, we move into the unusual in this case.

I'd like to go back and read from the Davidic covenant in II Samuel 7. Notice the words that are used in verse 12:

When thy days be fulfilled [He's speaking to David] and you will sleep with your fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy own body and I will establish his kingdom. And he will build a house for My name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. [So there you have the kingdom and the house and the throne.] I will be his Father, and he will be My son. If he commit iniquity [This is speaking of Solomon particularly], I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the children of men. But My mercy will not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul whom I put before thee. Thy house and thy kingdom shall be established before



thee, thy throne shall be established forever.

This, again, is an amazing reference back to the Old Testament. So it's as though God were picking up where He had left off 1,000 years before with the Davidic covenant promising the throne, the house, and the kingdom. The throne, speaking of the right to rule: We speak of this, for instance, in the British throne. We say, "Who is on the throne at a certain time?" The throne is symbolic of the right to rule. The house refers to the nation, Israel—the house of Israel. And the kingdom is more than the house of Israel. It includes this rule of God, which we'll see more of later speaking of the kingdom referred to by the Old Testament prophets that was to come, in which Messiah was going to rule.

And so this prediction is of the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant with these three elements in it. I don't know how much Mary knew about the Davidic covenant. But she goes back to her particular concern in this situation. Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin? (Luke 1:34). She has never been with a man.

Then in verse 35—this marvelous statement about how Christ is to be born, about his paternity—the angel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God." Son of God—generated by God.

Incidentally, there is a parallel to this in our own situation where "what is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). And "He gives us the right to be called the sons of God" (John 1:12) as we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit. So it is the same Holy Spirit who physically gave a body—that is, created the situation in which Jesus could have a physical body and thereby be called the Son of God in the unique sense. And then we, who are born of Adam, are regenerated to be called the sons of God.

By the way, in referring back to the announcement of John's birth, John is related to a prophet, Elijah. And Jesus is related to a king, King David—sort of an interesting parallel here.

Then in verse 1:36, without waiting for any questions further by Mary, he offers her some evidence. He says, "Your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son in her old age." Probably they had thought much about Elizabeth and had family consultations

on this: “What’s wrong with Elizabeth? She doesn’t have any children, everybody else does.” And so on. And they’re old now. It is hopeless for them. And this would again burst in the scene, and I see this as the first of a series of confirmations to Mary of the uniqueness of the child she is to bear and of the intervention of God in this whole situation. (I’m going to notice some of these as we go along, but I think it’s one of the first ones.) He says, “She’s conceived a son in her old age; and she who is called barren is now in her sixth month” (Luke 1:36). Three months from now Elizabeth is going to have a baby! And I think he’s telling her this partly to encourage her. I mean, look at the alternative, supposing that if the angel hadn’t told her this and three or four months later she gets word by a runner or somebody coming up from the hill country and says, “Elizabeth has just had a child.” There would be no connection between it. It would lose all the force of it.

But this was so forceful that Mary is going to go down and see Elizabeth. But before that, the angel reminds her that “nothing is impossible with God” (1:37). If angels smiled, I think the angel probably smiled at that point. Because that angel Gabriel had two great good news stories: (1) One, that this old couple that had never had a child was going to have the forerunner of the Messiah, and now (2) this good news to Mary who was to bear the Messiah herself.

Mary’s response? One of submission. The emphasis of this whole scene as far as Mary is concerned is not sinlessness or her so-called immaculate conception before this, but rather submission. “Behold the bond slave of the Lord! Be it done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). This took a tremendous amount of faith. It took very, very great confidence in the person of God and what He had said: This, of the implications for Mary.

Then in section six, Mary goes down to the hill country. Apparently, she doesn’t tell Joseph about this; and she arose and went to the hill country, to the city of Judea. Did she tell anybody else? I don’t know. [Perhaps] she said, “I’m going down to see Elizabeth.”

“Why are you going down to see Elizabeth?”

“Well, I just want to go down and see Elizabeth. I haven’t seen her for a long time.”



She gets down there, enters the house of Elizabeth, and greets Elizabeth. You'll notice that it's at the time of the greeting that the child leaps in her womb (Luke 1:41). So what happens here is that we knock on doors and people open them. But in that culture, as in some cultures today, they will "call out" because you didn't open a door to anybody whose voice you didn't recognize. That's why Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door" (Revelation 3:20). They had to hear his voice in order to identify who was there.

So as Mary comes, she would call out, "Elizabeth! Elizabeth!" And Elizabeth would come. And at that very moment, when Mary speaks as she calls out to her, there is this response. It came about that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greetings, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Notice, Elizabeth is going to be filled with the Holy Spirit and Zechariah is and Mary is. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed among women are you!" (Luke 1:42). Notice in verse 43: "How does it happen to me that the mother of my Lord . . . ?" This is Messianic. She is controlled by the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit has controlled Elizabeth to give testimony to Mary that the Child that Mary is going to bear is the Child of the Holy Spirit. I think this whole thing again is a confirmation to Mary in this unexpected unplanned way.

Then verse 45, "Blessed is she who believed." Now, how would Elizabeth know that? By the control of the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit has control of her. So we have to remember that as the Holy Spirit fills, controls, these people, everything they say is inspired. We might say, "Everything is absolutely true." Not everything that people say is true, but everything that people say when they're controlled by the Holy Spirit is true. And the Holy Spirit is filling them. This is an important factor.

Mary now responds. And as Mary's response, she says, "My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. He has regarded the humble state of his bond slave" (Luke 1:46). And this is this whole great "Magnificat of Mary." This whole great expression of how this is affecting her, what it means to her. [It is the] tremendous response on the part of one who has been faithful, one who has been believing God and [has been] accepting everything that He has for her—accepting His guidance.

But you'll notice that in verse 55 she mentions Abraham: "As he spoke to our fathers, and to Abraham and his offspring forever." And so, she is relating this back to the Abrahamic covenant. You remember in the Abrahamic covenant, God promised a land and a seed and a blessing. And as God gave that promise to Abraham, He did not elucidate on those three: (1) A land, later on—the Palestinian covenant in Deuteronomy 29. We find more detail about what is meant by the land; (2) and then, the seed, we find more detail on that in the Davidic covenant; (3) and then the new covenant, the blessing, as to what that's going to be is elucidated on, expanded in that later covenant.

But Mary perhaps was not thinking of all of those things. But she was remembering that there was to be a promise made to Abraham and his offspring forever. And there was to be a seed. And this seed, of course, has several meanings. It refers, of course, initially to the seed of Abraham, that is, the Jewish people, the people of Israel. And then, secondly, it refers to this seed, this offspring, which is going to be Messiah. And this is what we had in II Samuel 7. And then, later, it will be those who, like Abraham, come by faith—this other seed referred to in Galatians 3.

That brings us to the birth of John, because in verse 56 it says she stayed there for "about three months." Does this mean then that Mary left just before the birth of John? She went there when she was six months pregnant. Well, if Mary was told that the pregnancy of Elizabeth had gone on for six months, and then she takes a little while to get down there, and then she stays for about three months, it is likely she was there for the birth of John. And I think this is rather interesting too. I can't prove it, but I doubt very much that she would have left just before that. If you were Mary, wouldn't you have stayed with Elizabeth until this event took place? So, probably Mary then was an eyewitness to all of this.

Elizabeth gives birth. She brought forth a son. All the neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had displayed his great mercy. Great rejoicing, and they were rejoicing with her: "It came about that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child" (Luke 1:59). That's when they gave him the name. The child had no name for the first seven days. And on the eighth day, they're going to call him Zechariah after the father. And the mother answered and said, "No, he should be called John" (Luke 1:60). How did she know this, if her husband could not

communicate with her? Well, you say, he probably wrote it on a tablet somewhere. Maybe he did, because later on he writes on a tablet for the people. So it's quite possible that he wrote it in some way. It's also possible that the angel, that the Holy Spirit, revealed this to her.

I think there's something rather interesting, almost amusing in the next few verses. They made signs to his father as to what he wanted him called because "There's no other relative called by this name" (Luke 1:61). So they say to the father, "What do you want him to be called?" Why did they make signs to the father? Because the father couldn't speak. But was the father deaf? Not that we know of. Because he couldn't speak, they figured he couldn't hear either and so this was probably an amusing scene. There's no record that he was made deaf, but he was made dumb. So because he couldn't speak, they thought he couldn't hear. So they made signs to him. And what the signs were, again we get into the mime business. How on earth do you make signs to say, "What do you want your son called?"

So he writes, "His name is John" (Luke 1:63), which, of course, refers to grace. And at once, his mouth was open and his tongue was loose. And he had nine months of talk stored up there. It is like videotaping a lot of programs and then playing them all at once. He's got all of this stored up; all that he wanted to say all this time. Granted, he might have written a little bit in the meantime, but he certainly couldn't communicate much. "He opened his mouth, his tongue was loose, and he began to speak in praise of God" (Luke 1:64). Notice the first thing he does, "to praise God." He doesn't complain about the fact that he couldn't speak for nine months. But he praises God and his whole situation.

Fear came on those who were living around them, and all these matters were being talked about in "all the hill country of Judea" (Luke 1:65). Can't you hear it? They didn't have the evening news. They didn't have newspapers. They had word of mouth. And the grapevine was very, very efficient. And the word spread around about how they named this child. This child was born to these old people, and they named him John instead of Zechariah. "Why did they do that?" And somebody said, "There was an angel that appeared." But they hadn't seen the angel appear—all kinds of speculation. Incidentally, this had been going on for nine months—[all the time] Zechariah hadn't been able to speak. So there would be a lot of speculation about that. So we've got

to put ourselves in [their situation] and not see time compressed too much, but stretch it out and take time to feel ourselves into this situation—to see how these people would react to this.

I think, as we study the life of Christ, there is one thing that is going to be most difficult for us because He lived 33 years. And, of course, His early life and His 3 1/2 years of ministry get the most attention, but they're all compressed into just a few pages. And it's very, very succinct. The record of it is very succinct. And it's compressed into just a few verses. And yet, there's a whole lifetime in this. There's a whole life. There are people and their lives and their families that we must pay attention to and try to think into their sandals, as it were.

Then in section nine, Zechariah makes a prediction. The father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us . . ." (This is a technical term, to visit. Prophets spoke of God visiting His people. This means that God intervenes somehow; that He moves in on their scene; that He does something for them.) "For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people" (1:68). That's a prophetic statement—"He has accomplished redemption for His people"—because the Old Testament prophets and David and others, they spoke of the redemption of Israel. And this redemption of Israel had two dimensions to it. There was to be (1) a spiritual redemption as well as (2) a physical redemption, we might say. The spiritual redemption, of course, referred to the forgiveness of sins, the cleansing. And the other part of it would refer to the kingdom life that these redeemed people were to be in.

Whenever we find the redemption of Israel—and we're going to find it again in statements made by these older people as they come into the temple with the baby Jesus—this idea of redemption of Israel includes the idea of salvation, the ultimate forgiveness of sins. The blood of the Old Testament sacrifices never took away sin. It was always on credit. And it's not until the Redeemer comes that there was redemption.

So when he speaks of the redemption of Israel, he's speaking of sins forgiven, cleansing. But then there was a second kind of a promise, a second dimension to the promise made to Israel. And that is that there would be a kingdom established in which David would reign, in which there would be peace and harmony.

A reign in which they would no longer have to fight off the enemy; in which there would be no sickness and no disease and so on. There would be this kind of ultimate redemption. I call it physical. You might call it physical. You might call it political. You might call it social, whatever. It would be “The war is no more!” This is the other facet of redemption.

But it’s very important to notice that these two are tied together and that is where, of course, the Jewish leadership of Jesus’ day made their great mistake. They were thinking of the second without the first. They wanted to see a redemption that would release them from the Roman rule; a redemption that would release them from paying taxes and being subjected to Romans, and so on. But they were not willing to have that redemption that would cleanse them from sin. And this is where John the Baptist’s ministry is going to come in. Because the first word that comes out of his mouth is “repent” (Matthew 3:2). And this repenting has to do with their need for a spiritual redemption, a forgiveness of sins. And this is all encompassed in the idea, I believe, in “the redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation”—horn (speaking of power) of salvation (Luke 1:69). Again, reinforcing this idea, salvation in the house of David, His servant.

So, as Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, is prophesying, he is not starting to talk about John his son. But he is starting to talk about the implications of the birth of John his son, who is to be a forerunner of the one who is to accomplish redemption and who is to bring salvation. And he relates all of this to “the house of David, His servant.” In other words, he is going back to the Davidic covenant: “As He spoke from the mouth of His holy prophets from of old, salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us” (Luke 1:70-71).

Of course, this is speaking of, we might say, political salvation, release. But it was always related to their spiritual condition. You go back to the times of the judges, and the issue was whether or not the people would walk with God. If they did not walk with God, the enemies came in. If they repented, God raised up a deliver and chased out the enemies, and they had peace again. And then the cycle would be repeated. Always there was a linkage between the relationship vertically and what happened horizontally. Then as the people—at the end of the time of the judges—came to ask for a king, the reason they wanted a king was so that they could bypass this spiritual qualification for

peace with their enemies. That's why they got Saul, who wasn't that kind of person. But the person that God sent was David, who was to be a picture, a type, of Jesus Christ, who was to give not only physical redemption, we might say, and political freedom, but also the spiritual redemption on which it depended.

So the basic issue of the kingdom is the spiritual dimension. But as we'll see, I don't believe that that means necessarily that there was only a spiritual dimension to the kingdom. But any physical dimension to the kingdom had to depend on a right relationship with God, which is the spiritual dimension. So in verse 71, then, "salvation." From what? "From our enemies." This is the horizontal. This is the external. "To show mercy toward our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which he swore to Abraham, our father" (Luke 1:72-73). So again, he brings in this Abrahamic covenant: "To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness" (Luke 1:74-75). Notice this is the spiritual part of it. This was the holiness and righteousness which most of the leadership of Israel were not willing to become involved in. "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High" (Luke 1:76). Now, for the first time, he turns to John. And he looks down at this little baby, his own little baby. "You, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways" (Luke 1:76). Now this goes back to Malachi 3:1. And he is quoting here Malachi 3:1, once again, from the last words in the Old Testament, "to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins."

What I'm emphasizing here is that Zechariah's concept, his understanding, of the significance of the birth of his son John was that this was related to the coming of one who would bring spiritual salvation, redemption for His people, a forgiveness of sins. "Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the sun rises from on high shall visit us" (Luke 1:78-79)— speaking of Jesus Christ. "To shine upon those who sit in darkness in the shadow of death." So he was quoting here from Isaiah 9:1-2: "To guide our feet into the way of peace." As we think of the concept of peace, we remember that when the angel came to announce the coming of Jesus Christ, the angel said that "peace be to those who are in right relationship to God"—right relationship to Him. He is called the Prince of Peace, and much said about peace has related to Jesus Christ: "To guide our feet in the way of peace" (Luke 2:14). And, of course, Isaiah 9:6, "the Prince of Peace."



So we have these amazing confirmations: (1) Control by the Holy Spirit, (2) people filled by the Holy Spirit, (3) Elizabeth and then Mary and Zechariah all emphasizing not John, but Jesus. And this A-B relationship that John is there, now Jesus will follow.

Section 10: “The child continues to grow and become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel” (Luke 1:80). So we find that John did not go into the temple. He did not get his orientation there. [Rather], he maintained what we might call “a separate life” and “a different lifestyle.” And he became strong in spirit. He needed to be strong in spirit because of the message he had, because of the opposition he was to get. And eventually, he was literally to lose his head because of his testimony. He was strong in spirit and lived in those deserts.

Now turn with me please to section 2 for a few minutes, which is John 1:1-18. And as we have now completed our preparation for the coming of Christ; we’ve had the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist; we’ve had the announcement of the birth of Christ; we have actually had the birth of John the Baptist and we now leave him growing up.

Now we go back to an amazing part of the Scripture, one of the most beautiful 18 verses of all of Scripture; and this is the first 18 verses of the gospel of John. You recall that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written not long after the time of Christ. Whereas, the gospel of John was written some 60 years after the crucifixion. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “Synoptic Gospels.” They emphasize the life and ministry of Christ seen from three different viewpoints, three different witnesses. Whereas, the gospel of John, written sometime later by the one who leaned on Jesus’ bosom during the Last Supper, is more of an interpretation. There are only seven miracles recorded in the book of John. It was a book of signs. It was written, “that ye might believe,” John said (John 20:31).

So as we begin this gospel of John, in this Section 2, we find this is a prologue. It is an introduction to the incarnation. We almost might say, “a philosophical as well as a theological orientation in preparation for the coming of the second person of the Trinity into this world.” You’ll find that woven in here are some historical references to John the Baptist. But mostly, it is about the fact of the incarnation, the significance of the incarnation.

Notice: “In the beginning was the Word,” back in eternity (John 1:1). And you’ll notice three things said about the Word here: (1) Eternality—the Word was eternal, “in the beginning.” (2) And then, “the Word was with God,” meaning face-to-face, personality. In other words, the Word was not only God, but the Word was with God, that is, speaking of the Trinity. (3) “And the Word was God,” speaking of His deity. He was in the beginning face-to-face with God. And then He created all things (John 1:3). There is a chronological sequence here: He was, He was with God, He was God, and now He creates all things. Contrary to the evolutionary hypothesis, there’s nothing that came into existence that came into existence without Him.

Then we find three key words in the life of Christ and the gospel of John: (1) Life and (2) light, and eventually (3) the word love will come in. “Life was a light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:4-5). I think this word is better taken as not so much comprehension, but in confrontation. The word can mean either to comprehend or to apprehend in the sense of how one is not just understood, but received. And there was a confrontation all through the life of Christ.

Now we find John in verses 6-8: “There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness to the Light, that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came that he might bear witness to the Light.”

And now, this passage shifts from John, in verses 9-11, back to Jesus again. Then in verse 15, “John bore witness of him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, “He that comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.”’ ” This is kind of a summary of John’s approach and John’s introduction of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we conclude this session, we notice that the final statement in verse 18 is: “No man has seen God at any time.” That’s the need for the incarnation. God wanted to become visible: And His “only begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (John 1:18). The word explained is the word from which we get exegesis. He literally led Him out. He interpreted Him in the deepest sense. He’s not just commenting on God. He is revealing God. And the last night of His ministry,

He said, “He that has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). This is the very fulfillment of this.

Verse 14: “The Word [picking up from verse 1] became flesh [God intervening in men’s affairs, becoming flesh] and dwelt among us.” The word “dwelt” is a translation of the word that means “to live in a tent.” He was not here permanently. But “He dwelt among us.” He lived among us. And we beheld, we could see, His glory—“glory as of the only begotten Son of God.” And in the First Epistle of John, he picks up on this very concept of the fact that Jesus was one who could be seen and heard and touched. In our next session, we will go on to see how all this took place in the actual birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.