

CHAPTER 1

Overview of Luke 1

Chapter 1 of Luke focuses on two main characters—Zacharias and Mary. These are two ordinary people living relatively ordinary lives. But God reached down into human history and revealed Himself to them in unique, personal and dramatic ways. Zacharias is a priest, doing his normal duties in the temple. He would be no different from a pastor of a local church showing up on a Sunday morning to preach. Mary, on the other hand, is a young woman, 16 or 17 years old, living in a small, insignificant city in Galilee, “the land of the Gentiles.” But both of these individuals have something in common—they have an intimate relationship with God. Read and observe how, by having a very personal, vital and intimate relationship with God, He reaches down out of eternity and affects their lives forever.

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us,

2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word,

3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus;

4 so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

What to look for in Luke 1

1. As you read each paragraph ask, “How is God speaking to me *personally* through His word?”
2. Look for God’s global plan for mankind. Ask, “*Why* is God doing what He is doing?”
3. Look for the love relationships that exist between the principle characters.
4. Look for the ways in which the main characters, Zacharias and Mary, express their relationship to God.
5. Look for the “servant” theme in chapter 1.
6. Look for the foreshadowing of God’s plan to reach out, not just to the Jewish nation, but to all mankind.
7. Look for the phrase, “...filled with the Holy Spirit.” Ask the question, “What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?” Does it mean “speaking in tongues” as some Christians insist?

1:1-4 Luke is a Gentile, that is, not a Jew and not of the “chosen race.” That is an important point to remember when reading and interpreting Luke’s account of the life of Jesus. More than any other of the gospel writers, Luke will record Jesus’ encounter with Gentiles during His earthly ministry, and how Jesus extends His love to Gentiles by His acceptance of them and His affirmation of their faith. Therefore, when reading the Gospel of Luke, note particularly God’s love and healings extended to the Gentiles through His Son, Jesus.

Luke was the personal, well-educated, multilingual physician of a Gentile nobleman whose name was Theophilus, as indicated by the address of “most excellent.” The name Theophilus means “one who loves God.” Some scholars have speculated that Theophilus was not a real person, but a fictional device used by Luke. This writer takes the position that Theophilus was a real person. Through God’s general revelation and loving elective grace, Theophilus was drawn to seek and know the one true God, to whom the gospel of Jesus Christ was eventually presented, resulting in his acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. As a wealthy nobleman, Theophilus probably had at his disposal

the Old Testament scriptures, specifically the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. As a new convert to Christianity, and being one who sought truth in all matters, Theophilus commissioned Luke to investigate in detail the background and life of the one to whom he had committed his life. One can see in Luke's diligent investigation of the life and death of Jesus great love and respect for his noble master. Perhaps it should also be noted that at the time of Luke's intensive investigation, he has already been a traveling companion of the apostle Paul, and may have done most of his firsthand investigation in Jerusalem while Paul spent two years in prison in Caesarea (Acts 23:23 – 26:32).

Lastly, a key phrase in Luke's introduction are the words "the exact truth." Exact truth is critical to understanding love, for the word *love* requires exact definition if we are to know what true love is. Therefore, God's love cannot be separated from God's truth, for one cannot know true love apart from knowing God's truth. Biblical love is defined by biblical truth, and all biblical truth points to God's love. The theme of love—God's love for mankind and His unfathomable grace to the Gentiles—is a key concept in Luke's presentation of the life of Jesus Christ.

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

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

7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.

1:5-7 Luke makes it very clear to his readers that Zacharias and Elizabeth were "righteous in the sight of God." ("Zacharias" is the same as "Zechariah" in other translations.) They were righteous because they conducted their lives in a manner consistent with "all the commandments and requirements of God." (We will see later in the New Testament that the commandments of God relate primarily to how people treat one another.) The fact that they had been married many years, yet had no children, posed a conundrum for both this couple and their priestly friends. An underlying belief at the time was that God was withholding from Zacharias and Elizabeth the blessing of children because of the superstitious belief that there was sin in their lives, and Elizabeth was under a kind of curse. That is why Luke makes it very clear that Zacharias and Elizabeth were "walking blamelessly"—they were not being punished for personal sin, but being prepared for God's plan. Of course, neither Zacharias nor Elizabeth knew any of this, which makes their faithfulness to one another all the more meaningful. Their trust in God, in fact, served as a testimony that love and respect for one another characterized their relationship. According to rabbinic tradition, Zacharias would have been justified divorcing Elizabeth and taking another wife who could bear him a son to carry his family name. He chose instead

8 Now it happened *that* while he was performing his priestly service before God in the *appointed* order of his division,

9 according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

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

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

12 Zacharias was troubled when he saw *the angel*, and fear gripped him.

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

14 “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 drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb.

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

17 “It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

to remain monogamous and faithful to Elizabeth. He did not reject her because she could not live up to his expectations and fulfill her role as a wife by providing a son. Therefore, perhaps the greatest sign that they were “walking blamelessly” was that they had a long, loyal and loving relationship.

1:8-17 Zacharias’s love for Elizabeth is finally going to bear fruit, the fruit that he had always longed for. It was his faithfulness to her that enabled this moment to happen. Had Zacharias not been faithful and loving toward Elizabeth because she could not bear children, this turning point in history would never have happened.

Remember that both Zacharias and Elizabeth were “advanced in years.” This means that Elizabeth was past childbearing years, as Sarah, Abraham’s wife, had been. It is quite likely that Zacharias was *still* praying for Elizabeth to become pregnant. Most likely, they had both resigned themselves to the reality that they would have no children, but there was always hope, like in Abraham’s case. Here is a clear case of what it means to love God with all your heart, mind, strength and soul. Zacharias continued to love Elizabeth in spite of the fact that she bore him no child. Whether or not our love for God is real is validated when things don’t go our way, when God does not allow us to have our heart’s desire. Whether or not our love for God is real is also validated when we continue to show love to those who perhaps disappoint us, or fail to live up to our expectations. The true test of love for God is continuing to worship and trust Him when things don’t work out, and to continue to love others in spite of the fact that we feel they may have let us down.

Notice, too, that the angel appears to Zacharias when he was faithfully performing his priestly service. His faithful service to God was one way of demonstrating his love for God.

1:8-10 As was the custom in performing priestly duties, Zacharias had been chosen “by lot” to burn the morning incense. Burning incense was considered a sacred event requiring everyone to leave the temple. This custom of everyone leaving the temple stemmed from two unfortunate events in the Old Testament, when two sons of Aaron died for offering “strange fire” while offering incense (Lev. 10:1-3), and a number of Korahites died while offering incense during Korah’s rebellion (Num. 16). No one but a descendant of Aaron was to offer incense, and for their protection, all others waited outside the temple in silent prayer. When Zacharias is delayed coming out of the Holy Place, many of the worshippers probably wondered if he, too, had been judged by God and died (v. 21).

There is another wonderful lesson in this event. The smoke of incense is symbolic of prayer. David writes in Psalm 141:2, “May my prayer be counted as incense before You.” And in Revelation 5:8, incense is described as “the prayers of the saints.” When the angel declares in verse 13 that “your petition has been heard,” it is answered at a time when Zacharias is offering incense. For the reader, this is confirmation that God hears *and remembers* all our prayers, whether uttered in childhood or as young adults, whether offered in desperation or want. God does not hear our prayers because *we* are faithful to pray, but because *He* is the God of love, and He hears our prayers because He loves us.

1:15 There are two important points to emphasize about this verse. First, this verse is absolute proof that being “filled with the Holy Spirit” has *nothing* to do with speaking in tongues. This will be discussed later in the commentary. The second point is even of greater importance: while in “his mother’s womb,” John is considered by God to be *a living human being, a person in His eyes*. And so it is with *all those* who those who are in the womb.

1:16-17 The angel refers directly to the very last writing prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi. He is referring to Malachi 4:5-6, and he is saying that Zacharias’s son will be a fulfillment of that prophecy, well known to the Jews who were waiting for the reappearance of “Elijah.”

“...to turn the hearts”—True love can be demonstrated only by an act that comes from the heart. When fathers love their children, their hearts are turned back to them, meaning they are more interested in their children’s spiritual well-being than their own. Notice, too, that an “attitude of the righteous” is measured here by two conditions: (1) how fathers respond to their children, and (2) hearts that are “prepared for the Lord.” Both are relational in nature, and both indicate hearts shaped by love.

1:18-20 “because you did not believe”—To the skeptical observer, it might first appear that Gabriel’s pronouncement of silence seems harsh and unloving. Our love and trust in God always requires shaping and defining, and the most loving thing God can do for us at times is to discipline us like a loving father, for the purpose of refining our faith. Proverbs 3:12 states, “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines.” This hard lesson for Zacharias verifies that God loves him enough to help him grow in his faith. Instead of being an unloving thing to do, God did the most loving thing—He strengthened his faith with an unforgettable lesson.

18 Zacharias said to the angel, “How will I know this *for certain*? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.”

19 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 bring you this good news.

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

21 The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple.

22 But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute.

23 When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.

24 After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying,

25 “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked *with favor* upon *me*, to take away my disgrace among men.”

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth,

27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.

28 And coming in, he said to her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord *is* with you.”

The angel identifies himself as Gabriel, the same angel that appeared to Daniel, as recorded in Daniel 9:21.

And finally in this section, note the phrase “fulfilled in their proper time.” This is one of the most important phrases a Christian must learn. Prayers are answered “in their proper time.” We Christians live in a fast-food, microwave world where we expect our prayers to be answered immediately. But God answers prayers when He is ready to answer prayers, not when we are ready to receive the answer. In truth, some of our prayers may be answered only after we have long departed from this earthly body.

1:21-23 As noted above, Zacharias is delayed in coming out of the Holy Place after burning the incense, and the people are concerned for his well-being. When he finally appears, the people waiting outside notice that something has changed...he is unable to speak. (The Greek implies unable to hear as well.) No doubt, his appearance was changed, as if having been shaken to the core, what some might say, “Having seen a ghost.” The people immediately interpret his condition as having seen a vision, which almost always involves an angel.

What happens immediately afterward is not elaborated on by Luke, and he sums it up by writing that Zacharias was obviously obedient to the words of Gabriel and fulfilled his part of God’s plan.

1:24-25 The subject of the narrative now switches to Elizabeth and her response. Her perspective was to see that, even in her old age, God had dealt “with favor” upon her, which means God had extended His grace to her in the most wonderful way. Herein lies the heart of true worship. We worship God not to earn His favor, but because He has already abundantly *given* us His favor. In Elizabeth’s case, God not only saw to it that she became pregnant, but in doing so moved her from “dis-grace” to pure grace. God not only gives us the desires of our heart, but gives us what He deems best for us. God not only demonstrated His love for Elizabeth by seeing that she became pregnant, but He demonstrated His love by simply meeting her emotional needs.

1:26-38 Again, Luke changes the subject of the narrative. He now focuses on the young woman Mary and God’s plan for the birth of mankind’s Savior. The same angel who visited Zacharias now visits Mary. Mary is a “virgin”: that is, she has not had any sexual intercourse whatsoever. Those who deny the Virgin Birth completely ignore verse 34 which relate Mary’s concern that she has never been with a man.

29 But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.

30 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

31 “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

32 “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;

33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”

34 Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”

35 The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.

36 “And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.

37 “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

38 And Mary said, “Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

There are a number of important pieces of information in the first two verses. “The sixth month” would be the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. The city of Nazareth is located in Galilee, also called “Galilee of the Gentiles.” This is significant when compared to Isaiah’s messianic prophecy in 9:1: “But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light....” Also, the context in **verse 27** is clear that Mary is a virgin (in its simplest sense) and is engaged (promised) to Joseph, a legally binding covenant. Note, too, that Joseph is a descendant of David. This observation is important because the Jews knew very well that the Messiah would be a descendant of David (see Isa. 9:7 and 11:1-5). Lastly, “Mary” is her Greek name; her Hebrew name is “Miriam.”

1:28-30 Mary is called “favored one.” That means one who is under the grace of God. The force behind God’s grace is His love. All God’s grace is based on His love. God chose her out of His divine providence. She was chosen, not because she deserved to be chosen or was an especially saintly person, but because God chose her. Mary is receiving from God the pronouncement of His great love for her. The angel also includes, “The Lord is with you,” a personalized version of “Immanuel” meaning “God with us.” Gabriel, knowing Mary would be terrified by such an appearance, lovingly reassures her that things are okay, that God has for her a special blessing. Only God knows that one day she will be torn with grief, and may even ponder the thought, “Is God with me?”

1:31-33 “Jesus” is the Greek name for “Joshua”; that is, “Savior,” or one who delivers. The title “Son of the Most High” would be title well known in the Gentile world, and the term “Lord God” refers specifically to the God of Israel. Here we see a foreshadowing of God’s love that will be extended to the Gentiles through the gospel.

1:34-35 Gabriel now informs Mary how she will become pregnant. Her pregnancy will not be by a man, but by the Holy Spirit. Theologically, the Virgin Birth is necessary so that Jesus would be born without original sin; that is, the genetic defect passed through men that results in mankind’s propensity for sin. For Jesus to be able to take away the sins of all mankind on the cross, He must be fully divine and a perfect man. Only by the sacrifice of a perfect (unblemished) man could there be a worthy sacrifice to a holy God, and only an infinite being could cover all the sins of all mankind. The only one who can

39 Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah,

40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb!

43 "And how has it *happened* to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?

44 "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.

45 "And blessed *is* she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

fulfill these requirements is the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God. Therefore, out of love God is offering up His only Son, as out of love the Son of God will offer up Himself on the cross.

1:36-37 If Elizabeth can conceive in her old age, then it is not impossible that Mary can conceive by the Holy Spirit.

1:38 To be a bondservant is to be one who is wholly devoted, lovingly devoted, to the will of the Master. Notice, too, that she is not a bondservant of a man, but of God Himself. She allows God's love to own her. And, it is quite possible that she conceived at the moment she believed, for it will be only a short time from now that she will visit Elizabeth, and at the time of the visit, Mary is already pregnant.

There is a wonderful analogy found in **verse 38**. Just as the Holy Spirit was to "overshadow" Mary when she believed, so, too, is the person who receives Jesus Christ by faith and becomes His bondservant. That person also is overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and becomes a new creation. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature...." It is an analogy of new birth through the agent of the Holy Spirit. As Christ was created physically in Mary's womb, He is "created" spiritually in the heart of those who receive Him. The spirit of Christ is literally born in believers, which is why Paul writes, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

1:39-45 This is a remarkable encounter between two pregnant women. Elizabeth announces that her six-month-old fetus can experience "joy."

Here again, note that being "filled with the Holy Spirit" has *nothing* to do with speaking in tongues, but it has *everything* to do with "expression," for she utters prophetic words she could not have known; that is, that her cousin Mary is not only carrying a child, but carrying "the Lord." Being filled with the Spirit, then, means *uninhibited expression*—in this case speaking—that glorifies God and what He is doing or has done through His Son Jesus Christ. In the Book of Acts, this expression is always vocalized, and sometimes it is vocalized in tongues as a sign that the Holy Spirit is the One behind the expression, thus providing proof to the apostolic leadership.

There is no doubt in Elizabeth's expression that beyond the love and respect that existed between this very young woman and a much older, experienced woman, there is an additional layer of special love that now exists because of the child that Mary is carrying. Jesus Christ will be the special revelation of love that comes from God. This love is now already being experienced by two women who are rejoicing in the Lord. Obviously, after Mary told Elizabeth of her encounter with the angel Gabriel, Elizabeth

46 And Mary said: “My soul exalts the Lord,

47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

48 “For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.

49 “For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name.

50 “AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.

51 “He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered *those who were* proud in the thoughts of their heart.

52 “He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, And has exalted those who were humble.

53 “HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed.

54 “He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy,

55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever.”

56 And Mary stayed with her about three months, and *then* returned to her home.

57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son.

58 Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy

blisses her for believing what God had told her. Faith allows us to experience the joy of seeing God’s will fulfilled.

Oh! That the details of this magical encounter and what each person knew about the other had been written into a book! But Luke’s emphasis is clear: the focus is on the One who brings joy, and upon those who believe what has been spoken by the Lord.

1:46-55 The song (psalm) that Mary composes, probably within days of her encounter with Gabriel, relates how she feels about being considered worthy to bear the Son of God. Can you imagine her excitement? Mary may have been anywhere from 16-17 years old, a mere child by our standards but, in Jesus’ day, old enough to be engaged. What Mary recognizes in her song is that God has seen fit to bless the humble. Not only was she but a child herself, she was of extremely humble means. In Mary’s upbringing, her parents taught her that her true identity, and her most fulfilling one, was to be a bondservant (*doulos*, bondservant) of the Lord. She obviously attributes her attitude of first being a servant of God to the blessing she has received from God. In her song, she recognizes a number of God’s characteristics:

- He has regard for the humble
- He is the Mighty One
- He is holy
- He is the God of mercy
- He has mercy on those who fear Him
- He has done mighty deeds
- He scatters the proud
- He brings down rulers
- He exalts the humble
- He fills the mouths of the hungry
- He vilifies the rich
- He has given help to Israel
- He spoke to Abraham and his descendants

Mary’s love for God, therefore, is expressed by her words of worship and by her servant’s heart. Isn’t that the way Christ should be born in all of His followers?

And it is through lyrics and melody that Mary expresses her joy and gratitude. So it is with sincere and devout Christian song writers today who desire to express their worship of the Lord through music. The Christian today can be blessed by those Christian musicians who are true bondservants of the Lord.

1:56 Mary returns home after Elizabeth’s baby is born.

1:57-58 Elizabeth conceived naturally, Mary supernaturally. One child will proclaim Christ, the other will be Christ. So it is when the Holy Spirit

toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.

59 And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.

60 But his mother answered and said, “No indeed; but he shall be called John.”

61 And they said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.”

62 And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called.

63 And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, “His name is John.” And they were all astonished.

64 And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed*, and he *began* to speak in praise of God.

65 Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea.

66 All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, “What then will this child *turn out to be*?” For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

68 “Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,

69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant—

70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—

71 Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US;

72 To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant,

73 The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,

74 To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear,

enters each believer. Through the Holy Spirit, believers are not only sent to proclaim Christ, but to be like Christ. It is the supernatural being conceived in the natural, and all are born out of God’s love and mercy.

1:59-66 The officials have come to circumcise the child according to the law of Moses. It is on this day that the child is officially given a name. John is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Yohanan*, meaning “Jehovah has been gracious.” Indeed, God had been gracious to Zacharias and Elizabeth, and that is the way God’s love works. Through His love, He demonstrates His abundant grace to His children, and at the same time carries out His will. There is a powerful lesson in this. More than any other way, God carries out His plan both for our benefit and for His. The grace in that is His allowing His children to be part of His plan. In this case, biblical love was the avenue through which Zacharias and Elizabeth experienced God’s love. By fulfilling the law and being faithful and loving to one another, God is now using them to be an instrument by which He will carry out His divine plan. As a result of Zacharias’s and Elizabeth’s love, they are now the proud parents of the last Old Testament prophet, John, who will be called “the Baptist.” God confirmed their love for one another by filling Elizabeth with the Holy Spirit when Mary visited, and now, God is about to reconfirm His love for them by allowing Zacharias himself to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And all of this is a result of Zacharias and Elizabeth being faithful and loving to one another.

1:67 This is the third time that Luke uses the phrase “filled with the Spirit.” Here again, there is no relationship to tongues. But there is a relationship to verbally expressing praise, worship and truth. A careful reading of the New Testament demonstrates that Luke, in his Gospel and in Acts, is *the only writer to use the phrase “filled with the Spirit.”* The only exception is that Paul uses the phrase one time in Ephesians 5:18 and, again, it has nothing to do with speaking in tongues.

1:68-79 This is one of the great scriptural declarations about the redemptive love of God. To be redeemed means to be purchased back or released, always with a price. The price will be the “horn of salvation,” a phrase used only by David (2 Sam. 22:3, Ps. 18:2) to signify God’s power to deliver from an enemy. Indeed, the phrase refers to a Deliverer provided by God Himself through the “house of David.” Only God’s love could provide such a

75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

76 “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS;

77 To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins,

78 Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,

79 TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

80 And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

deliverance, and only God’s infinite love could provide a Deliverer for the whole world. It is God’s love that causes Him “to remember His holy covenant,” and it is because of God’s love that those who serve Him can serve Him without fear, for “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). It is clear, too, by Zacharias’s song of praise, most likely offered at the time of John’s circumcision, that Zacharias recognizes that the only way to salvation and deliverance is through “the forgiveness of their sins,” something that can only happen if God is loving enough to provide a way for mankind to find redemption. It is God’s love that “the tender mercy of our God” is expressed, and it is only because of God’s infinite love that His redemption will be offered “upon those who sit in darkness.” This beautiful acknowledgement of God’s saving love is itself filled with a love for God that goes beyond the law of Moses, beyond ritual, even beyond Judaism itself. It is an expression of love for God that rejoices in the discovery of “the way of peace.”

There is one other aspect of Zacharias’s song that the reader should grasp—it praises God’s global plan and is in no way self-focused. Zacharias is able to see the big picture of God’s plan, and his words reflect his desire to fit into God’s plan. One would think that his prayer of praise would be more focused on personal blessings, rather than global ones. But that is not the case. This is an example that the true blessings of life come when we attempt to fit into God’s plans, and not attempt to have God fit into ours.

1:80 John’s father prophesied that his son would be a prophet, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness” (Isa. 40:3). Out of gratitude for God’s love, Zacharias has turned his only son over to God. Like Abraham, Zacharias demonstrated his love for God by offering up his only son as a holy and living sacrifice.

Questions for Your Personal or Group Reflection

1. We know from chapter 1 that God spoke to Zacharias and to Mary through the angel Gabriel. How has God spoken to you? What changes will you make in your life as a result of reading Luke 1? How will this affect your relationships? How will this affect your prayers and praises to God?
2. Is there anything in your life spiritually that you consider “impossible”? As you identify the seemingly “impossible” thing, apply Gabriel’s words, “Nothing will be impossible with God.” (Of course, if it is a part of God’s plan!) Are you able to take this teaching and apply it to your own life? In doing so, remember that God doesn’t work out His plan overnight. What is possible may take years, or even a lifetime. What spiritual limitation do you have that can change the impossible to the possible?
3. Did you observe the phrase, “...filled with the Spirit”? Have you determined what it means to be filled with the Spirit? Who initiates being filled with the Spirit, and what must have gone on in the life of the believer in order for the Spirit to fill you? What kind of relationship do you have with God that can enable you to be filled with the Spirit, and what kind of a lifestyle are you living that will set you up to be filled with the Spirit if the Spirit so chooses?
4. How has God spoken to you concerning God’s discipline of Zacharias? What is the difference between Zacharias’ questioning the angel Gabriel, and Mary’s? Why do you think Mary was not disciplined for asking, “How can this be...?”
5. How has God spoken to you about Mary’s response concerning the blessing God has bestowed on her? How *could* she have responded in regard to God’s special blessing (boasting, pride, etc.)?
6. What was Zacharias doing when Gabriel appeared to him? What was Mary doing when Gabriel appeared to her? What is the common theme, and if Gabriel were to appear to you, what would you be doing?
7. What has chapter 1 taught you about God’s love, His desire for you to experience His love, and how He wants you to express His love?

The Discipler's Commentary

Fill-in Outline for the Disciple

Luke 1

1:1-4 – Luke's introduction to his gospel: he was Theophilus's _____

Key words: "...having investigated everything _____"

Purpose for writing: so that Theophilus may know "the _____"

A lesson: In order to know the exact truth, we must study _____

1:5-25 – The account of the priest Zacharias's encounter with the angel _____

Gabriel announces to Zacharias that he will be the father of _____

Zacharias and Elizabeth will give birth to a son by _____

Zacharias is disciplined by Gabriel because he requested _____

A lesson: Asking God for a sign instead of trusting by faith may result in _____

1:26-38 – The account of Mary's encounter with the angel _____

Gabriel announces to Mary that she will give birth to Jesus, the " _____"

Luke makes it *very clear* that Mary, though engaged to Joseph, is a _____

Mary will give birth to a son by _____

A lesson: With God, _____

1:39-56 – The account of Mary's encounter with Elizabeth and Mary's _____

A lesson: Sometimes wonderful news from God can result in joyful _____

1:57-79 – The account of the birth of John the Baptist and Zacharias's _____

A lesson: When we are faithful and obedient to God, _____

1:80 – The account of the life of John the Baptist before he became an official _____

A lesson: Those who are wholly devoted to God do not necessarily lead an _____

The Discipler's Commentary
Answer Outline for the Discipler
Luke 1

1:1-4 – Luke's introduction to his gospel: he was Theophilus's personal physician

- *The discipler may want to introduce the other gospel writers, and that Luke was the only one who was not an eyewitness.*
- *Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the "Synoptic" writers (lit. "through the same eye")*
- *Luke was a very educated and intelligent man from Macedonia (Greece); an employee of Theophilus, which means "Lover of God."*

Key words: "...having investigated everything carefully from the beginning"

- *See commentary for how Luke was able to investigate "everything carefully."*

Purpose for writing: so that Theophilus may know "the exact truth" (about Jesus Christ)

- *It is obvious that Theophilus was a Gentile who had become a Christian, and was wealthy enough to send Luke on a mission to verify the details of the gospel.*
- *Luke ended up a traveling companion of the apostle Paul.*
- *Luke includes details that the other gospel writers do not include, and it seems certain that he had personal interviews with Mary, the mother of Jesus.*

A lesson: In order to know the exact truth, we must study God's word

- *The discipler does not want to skip over the important lessons that can be learned. Here, the discipler wants to encourage critical thinking on the part of the disciple, perhaps by asking, "What other lessons do you think can be learned from this short section?" The same principle should be applied to all the other lessons that follow. (Note: the heading is "A lesson," not "**The** lesson," as there are many lessons to be learned. The ones provided here are only suggestions.)*

1:5-25 – The account of the priest Zacharias's encounter with the angel Gabriel

- *"Gabriel" means "Man of God." He appears to be the angel who announces good news.*
- *A brief description of the duties of a priest may be appropriate.*
- *This may be a good place to dwell on Zacharias's and Elizabeth's character (see v. 6)*
- *The discipler may want to describe what being barren meant to a woman in those days.*

Gabriel announces to Zacharias that he will be the father of John the Baptist

- *This would be a good place to list all the men named "John" in the New Testament. Differentiate especially between John the Baptist from the apostle John.*

Zacharias and Elizabeth will give birth to a son by natural means

- *Note the similarities between this encounter and Abraham's encounter with the angels in Genesis 18.*

Zacharias is disciplined by Gabriel because he requested proof (a sign)

- *Because he was a priest, Zacharias should have known better, especially knowing the story of Abraham. In essence, Zacharias was asking for a supernatural sign rather than relying on faith. After all, he is encountering an angel in the Holy Place.*

A lesson: Asking God for a sign instead of trusting by faith may result in discipline

- *Or withholding of blessings, or not receiving what we are asking for, etc.*

1:26-38 – The account of Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel

- *The discipler may want to elaborate on where the small town of Nazareth was in relation to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, using a map if necessary. The discipler may also want to go into some explanation about arranged marriages in those days, and Mary's probable age.*

Luke 1

Gabriel announces to Mary that she will give birth to Jesus, the “Son of God”

- *A number of subjects could be explained in this section, as long as it does not detract from the key points. Such subjects could be the importance of being a descendant of David and “throne of David,” the meaning of the name “Jesus” (aka “Joshua” meaning “Savior” or “Deliverer”), and Mary’s response to Gabriel (“bondslave”).*

Luke makes it *very clear* that Mary, though engaged to Joseph, is a virgin

- *That Mary was a pure virgin at this time needs to be emphasized. To get around the miracle of the Virgin Birth, liberal scholars come up with all sorts of speculative ideas, such as Mary was raped by Roman soldiers, or that Joseph himself had violated Mary.*
- *In those days, to be “engaged” meant that a legal promise had been made between the families.*

Mary will give birth to a son by supernatural means (by the Holy Spirit)

- *This would be a good place to explain the Roman Catholic doctrine of Immaculate Conception; that it doesn’t refer to Jesus’ birth, but to Mary’s, a doctrine contrived to advocate that Mary herself was born without sin (“Mother of God” doctrine).*
- *That Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit means that Jesus was born without sin, and therefore perfect human and fully divine. He was born the God-Man, which makes His death on the cross all that more significant.*

A lesson: With God, nothing is impossible

1:39-56 – The account of Mary’s encounter with Elizabeth and Mary’s song of praise to God

- *Point out that Mary had plenty of time to compose this song, often referred to as the “Magnificat.”*

A lesson: Sometimes wonderful news from God can result in joyful singing

1:57-79 – The account of the birth of John the Baptist and Zacharias’s prophecy

- *Note that in this chapter, the phrase “filled with the Holy Spirit” is used three times, and in no instance is there an association with “speaking in tongues.” In all instances, there is “praise to God.”*
- *Note that Jesus and John the Baptist will be cousins.*

A lesson: When we are faithful and obedient to God, wonderful things happen

1:80 – The account of the life of John the Baptist before he became an official prophet

- *We will learn much more about John the Baptist and his message in chapter 3.*

A lesson: Those who are wholly devoted to God do not necessarily lead an easy lifestyle

- *Finally, as the disciple how God is speaking to him or her personally through this chapter.*