



MESSIAH KING'S HERALD ANNOUNCED

Luke 1:5-25

Today we continue our series *Yeshua Messiah King*. Based on the four Gospels, our goal is to recover the Jewish context in which Jesus lived, taught and presented Himself as Israel's *Messiah King*. Please turn with me to Luke chapter one.

Play Blank Slide - No Cue - Sound Up on computer channel.

What do you think when you hear this sound?

An important message is coming. We stop what we're doing and pay attention. Something critical is happening.

Two thousand years ago something critical happened in Israel. In fact, it was the most important thing to happen in human history since the creation of the world. How did God get His people's attention?

He sent a MESSENGER.

He told His people He would send a MESSENGER, first through Isaiah:

ISAIAH 40:3-5 (ESV)

3 A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

He told them again through the last prophet, Malachi of the Hebrew Scriptures:

MALACHI 3:1 (ESV)

¹ "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

The point is, **The coming of the MESSENGER signals the coming of Messiah!** When the MESSENGER arrives, the Messiah is near!

Thus Dr. Luke begins the story of Jesus, not with Jesus, but with Zechariah, the father of the MESSENGER.

LUKE 1:5-7 (ESV)

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. **6** And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. **7** But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Herod the Great reigned from 37BC to 4AD. Because of His renovation, the Jerusalem Temple was not only the center of Jewish worship but a point of national pride.

The priests that served in the Temple were from the Tribe of Levi. King David divided the Tribe of Levi into 24 courses. There was one High Priest; below him were 24 Chief Priests. Under the Chief Priests

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were the common priests organized in 24 courses called *mishmarot* or “watches”. Each “watch” served in the Temple twice a year for one week at a time, from Sabbath to Sabbath. It is estimated there were 18,000 priests in the days of Zechariah.

Both Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were from the Tribe of Levi. The name Zechariah means “Jehovah remembers.” The name Elizabeth means “The Oath of God”. Putting the two names together we have “Jehovah remembers His oath.”

Luke describes Zechariah and Elizabeth as *righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord*. This does not mean they were sinless, but when they did sin, they offered the proper sacrifices according to the Law of Moses. They were part of the righteous remnant of Israel. We will meet them in heaven. Luke mentions they were childless and advanced in years. In rabbinic tradition this meant they were over sixty years old. They remind us of Abraham and Sarah.



Temple service was a privilege. Serving in the Holy Place was a special honor. Morning and evening the Candlestick and Altar of Incense required tending. By casting of lots, one priest was chosen to tend the Candlestick and another chosen to tend the Altar of Incense. Tending the Altar of Incense carried the greater honor. Tending the Altar of Incense involved removing the cold ashes, setting hot coals and sprinkling incense. The smoke rising from the Altar of Incense symbolized the acceptable prayers of God’s people.

Zechariah was selected to “burn Incense”; he was given the privilege of tending to the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place.

But “burning incense” had a down side.

Leviticus 10 records Nadab and Abihu improperly burned the incense before the Lord and were struck dead. Rabbis taught that any priest who burned the incense improperly would also be struck dead. Just before death, they would see the Angel of Death standing at the right side of the Altar of Incense.

LUKE 1:8–17 (ESV)

8 Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

Rather than death the angel brought Zechariah wonderful news; he and Elizabeth would be the parents of God’s MESSENGER. They were to name their son John. In Hebrew his name is *Yochanan* which means “Jehovah is gracious”.

The angel revealed six things about John the Baptist, God’s MESSENGER, whom Zechariah would father.

- *...great before the Lord (15a)¹*
- *...must not drink wine or strong drink (15b)²*

¹Years later Jesus Himself said, *Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.* Matthew 11:11 (ESV)

- ...filled with the Holy Spirit (15c)³
- ...lead a repentance movement (16)⁴
- ...minister in the spirit and power of Elijah (17a)⁵
- ...make ready a people prepared to receive Messiah (17b)⁶

We would expect Zechariah to be overjoyed at the news he and Elizabeth would be the parents of God's MESSENGER.

But we would be wrong.

LUKE 1:18–23 (ESV)

18 And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." 19 And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." 21 And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 And 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 And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

Little wonder the people were concerned at Zechariah's delay. They worried he might have been struck dead.

Why Zechariah questioned Gabriel in unbelief is unknown. That he questioned in unbelief is made clear by Gabriel and by being struck mute. Even though Zechariah's response was faithless, God was faithful.

LUKE 1:24–25 (ESV)

24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

Even as God's plan for the nation of Israel moves forward, He blesses this dear elderly couple. Conceiving and carrying John the Baptist brought healing to Elizabeth. Childless wives were despised for failing to perpetuate their husband's line. John freed his mother from further reproach.

The coming of the MESSENGER signals the coming of Messiah!

Two additional thoughts.

The coming of the MESSENGER, John the Baptist, clearly fulfills Isaiah's prophecy and Malachi's prophecy. Isaiah wrote 700 years and Malachi wrote 400 years before Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah. This could not happen if the Bible is simply the product of the human mind. Fulfilled prophecy is one of the lines of evidence that convinces us the Bible is God's revelation to mankind. Fulfilled prophecy in the past also convinces us that future prophecies will be fulfilled such as all the prophecies connected to the Second Coming of Jesus.

² John the Baptist was to be a Nazirite from birth (Numbers 6:2-8). The Nazirite Vow was voluntary and could be made by both men and women. It was a giving of one's self to God above and beyond the call of the normal person. Whether John remained a Nazirite all his life or for a set period of time is not clear from the Gospel accounts. While the Nazirite Vow required abstention from alcohol it does not imply anything inherently evil about drinking alcohol.

³ To be *filled* means to be "controlled". The Holy Spirit is mentioned often in rabbinic writings, but in Judaism, the Spirit is not a distinctive personality, but an influence or a symbol of God. In Rabbinic Judaism the Holy Spirit is considered to be responsible for divine revelation. The rabbis taught that with the death of Malachi the Holy Spirit departed from Israel. If true, the angel made clear that the Holy Spirit was returning with the birth of God's special MESSENGER, John the Baptist.

⁴ John's ministry would be to turn the children of Israel back to God by telling them to repent. His purpose was to prepare a group to accept the Messiah once the Messiah was identified.

⁵ John will have a special ministry to the believing remnant of Israel just as did Elijah. The angel actually quotes Malachi 4:5-6 which speaks of Elijah coming in the last days and restoring Jewish families.

⁶ The mission of God's MESSENGER is to prepare a people who will accept Messiah once the Messiah is clearly identified.

Finally, don't miss the irony in this story. Zechariah is experiencing the greatest honor of his priestly career tending the Altar of Incense in the majestic Holy Place standing before the Curtain on the other side of which is the Ark of the Covenant and Cherubim and Mercy Seat. The purpose of the Altar of Incense is to symbolize the prayers of God's people as they worship God and bring their needs to God believing that God hears and answers their prayers. Yet when given the message from none other than the angel Gabriel, Zechariah doesn't believe God.

We can't psycho analyze Zechariah to diagnose why he responded in disbelief. But what we do know is that if we don't guard our hearts, good spiritual rituals like coming to church services, singing, giving, communion, serving can become routine and even dull our senses. Let's fight that drift and keep our hearts and minds fully in the moment.