

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JESUS THE MESSIAH
THE SILENCE IS SHATTERED! THE BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOHN THE
BAPTIZER – Week 3

430 years of darkness! 430 years of silence – no prophets warning the children of Israel – no angelic visits – no revelation from God! AND THEN – that silence was shattered!

Between 6 BC and 4 BC, two special baby boys were born in the land of Israel - Jesus and John. . . and they were related. Mary was a relative of Elizabeth (Luke 1:36). The lives of John and Jesus were intertwined.

God had chosen John as the HERALD of the Messiah:

Isa. 40:3 – “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’”

Mal. 3:1 - “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, even the Messenger of the covenant, in Whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,’ says the LORD of hosts.”

John was born into the priestly family of Aaron – under the tribe of Levi. Jesus, though born into poverty, was from the royal line of David. They were born six months apart. Gabriel, an angel sent from God prophesied/proclaimed both births. The accounts of both births in the Gospels are ANNOUNCEMENTS. They are announcements regarding the glory of God – the grace of God! AND, these announcements so connect the OT with the NT! AND, with these announcements the silence is broken! God was about to reveal to the people His Anointed, the Messiah, JESUS!

John MacArthur had an exchange with a Rabbi whom MacArthur described as one of the most well-known rabbis in America. The Rabbi, in his visit with MacArthur, said, “I understand the Old Testament, I’ve spent my whole life in the Old Testament, but I don’t understand how a Jewish rabbi should view the New Testament. How . . . how am I as a Jewish rabbi to understand the meaning of the New Testament in connection with the Old Testament? MacArthur responded with, “Great question. And the answer is, get in the sandals of Zacharias because Zacharias understood exactly what was going on with the arrival of Messiah as it related to the Old Testament.”

We understand the Messiah to be the theme of the NT; Zacharias, the father of John the Immerser/Baptizer, understood the Messiah to be the theme of the OT!

The setting in Israel at the time of John and Jesus – darkness and gloom! Rome was ruling and oppressing the people. The “times of the Gentiles,” since the Babylonians ransacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, continued. The setting centuries before John and Jesus in Israel – darkness and gloom!

However, there was an EXPECTANCY! 430 years of waiting, longing, clinging, anticipating, expecting. . . . And then the angel, Gabriel, was sent to make an announcement to Zacharias, a priest, and to Mary/Miriam, a young virgin in Nazareth.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to proclaim the fulfillment of the prophecies from the OT. The beginning of the Gospels screams that the 430 years of silence has been shattered. Do we ever stop to consider what that was like? We're waiting now, aren't we? We're waiting for God to say to Jesus – it's time – it's time to go get your Bride!

Gabriel told Zacharias that his wife, Elizabeth, would give birth to a son who would be great in the sight of the Lord (Luke 1:15) – who would be the prophet of the Highest (Luke 1:78). Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to a Son Who would also be great (Luke 1:32) – BUT Mary's Son would be the Son of the Highest – the Son of God – the Messiah (Luke 1:32; Psa. 2) – and the Lord God would give Him the throne of His father, David!! And Mary's Son would reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there would be no end. Not only were Elizabeth, Zacharias' wife, and Mary both expecting. The Jewish WORLD was expecting their Deliverer!

The Messiah was about to appear. John would be the HERALD for the Messiah – the Messiah Who would come as the ULTIMATE SACRIFICE for sin. Do you know when the announcement of John's birth was given to his father, Zacharias? At the time of SACRIFICE in the Temple in Jerusalem!

So we read of Zacharias. . . . Do you know what Zacharias means? "Remembered of Jehovah"!!!! The silence is shattered! After 430 years of silence – God remembers. Did God forget? NO – to mankind it seems that God forgets at times. . . . God always remembers!

John's birth was the first point at which God spoke after the "silence." It is the initial appearance of angels following the 430 years. Elizabeth's barrenness and advanced age – which was a double symbol of hopelessness – became the means by which God would announce to the world that nothing is impossible for Him.

Luke 1:5a – *"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah."*

And when did Gabriel's visit to Zacharias happen in history? Luke 1:5, "In the days of Herod, King of Judea." This places us in an accurate moment in history. AND, this gives us the timeframe of the Messiah!

Zacharias was of the division of Abijah - The Temple priesthood was organized into 24 divisions (I Chron. 24:4-19) with each division serving twice a year, it has been believed. Abijah's division – the 8th division (I Chron. 24:10). During a priestly division's period of service at the Temple, specific tasks were assigned by lot (Luke 1:9) – clay cubes. One of the most honored jobs was burning incense, which represented prayers rising to God.

Duties of three priests:

- One removed what had been left on the altar from the previous evening's service – and then, worshipping, retired backwards.
- The second – spread the live coals taken from the burnt offering – and then, worshipping, retired backwards.
- The “organ” (magrephah) sounded and called the people, the priests, and the Levites to worship.
- The priest with the golden censer stood alone in the Holy Place – before him – the heavy veil that hung before the Holy of Holies. Before the veil – the altar of incense.
 - Spread the incense on the altar (incense represented prayers of the people)
 - People outside watched as the “prayers of Israel” ascended upwards.
 - The priest would've waited until he saw the incense kindling then he would have bowed down in worship and reverently withdrawn.

Let's put ourselves in Zacharias' sandals:

- GREAT honor. Mountaintop experience!
- He might've asked the other priests what they had experienced in preparation. . . .
- In prayer – before the Holy of Holies – what do you think he would've prayed?

Luke 1:5b-7 – *“His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous (declared righteous by God because they believed [Gen. 15:6]) before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless (because God had declared them righteous and clothed them with His righteousness). But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.”*

Both Elizabeth and Zacharias were from the tribe of Levi. Zacharias was a priest; therefore, he was in Aaron's line. Elizabeth was in Aaron's line as well. They had a right standing with God – God had declared them righteous.

Being childless in that culture – was a reproach! In that culture blessings were tied to birthrights and family lineage. Barrenness could occasionally be a sign of divine disfavor (Lev. 20:20-21); however, it was not always so (Gen. 30:23; I Sam. 1:5-10). It carried a social stigma, however, that could be humiliating.

Luke 1:8-17 - *“So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will*

be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb (Divine enablement; see Psa. 51:11 and Jer. 1:5. Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed by God in the OT; John was a prophet.) And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also 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 a people prepared for the Lord' (Mal. 4:5-6)."

Gabriel appears. This was the first angelic appearance in 430 years! Gabriel came from the very presence of God!

To Zacharias the news that he and Elizabeth would become parents was – just too good to be true. Zacharias knew the Scriptures – he and Elizabeth walked according to God's commandments. He knew what the prophet Malachi had told the people about Elijah coming before the great and terrible day of the Lord.

Zacharias knew the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12; Gen. 15; Gen. 17) and the Davidic Covenant (II Sam. 7), and the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31). These three covenants God made with Israel. And, God would deliver on those promises. These three covenants are unconditional/unilateral. No conditions had been attached to these three covenants. The fulfillment of these covenants was based solely on God.

Gabriel's message to Zacharias - God had showed up – He was visiting His people – the Messiah would come! And, Zacharias' son would come before the Messiah! The account of John in the Gospels establishes that he, John, is the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah. We see John – and then we see Jesus. John establishes Who the Messiah is!! And so we have the intertwining of the lives of John and Jesus. That intertwining is CRUCIAL in pointing us to the Messiah! This is further proof that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel – the Messiah of the world! He has already come!

CONSIDER: God told Abraham in Genesis 15:12 that his descendants would go to a foreign land and suffer affliction for 400 years?

- Exodus 12:40 tells us that the children of Israel lived in Egypt for 430 years. Acts 7:6 tells us that the children of Israel were afflicted for 400 years.
- In Exodus 2:23-25 we're told that the people cried out to God and He heard and remembered.
- In Exodus 3 we read that God calls and commissions Moses to deliver his people from bondage.
 - After 430 years they were delivered by a deliverer - Moses.
 - Fast forward to the time of Zacharias, after 430 years of no warnings from God, God sends THE Deliverer – JESUS!
- Following a period of no prophets during “the intertestamental period,” God sent forth the Messiah to deliver mankind spiritually.

- Moses was a type of Jesus – Moses was a deliverer looking forward to THE Deliverer! (Deut. 18:18)

Zacharias knew that the promises God made to Abraham and David wouldn't come to pass unless Israel – as a NATION – was forgiven under the New Covenant – and repented.”

NOTE: The barrier to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants for Israel as a whole – lack of repentance.

Israel throughout their history has never been restored as a NATION! That will not occur until the end of the Tribulation after two thirds of the Jewish people will die (Zech. 13:8-9). Upon the third remaining, God will pour out His Spirit and “all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:26) – those who are left (Zech. 12:10ff).

Individual Jewish people have trusted in Jesus for salvation – and for them the New Covenant promises (new heart, Spirit within, new relationship with God) are theirs! The same applies to individual Gentiles.

The New Covenant is the covenant that promises FORGIVENESS. The only hope to receive the promises to David and Abraham is to be forgiven and to have a new heart and a new Spirit. The New Covenant promises an internal transformation.

Luke 1:18-25 – *“And Zacharias said to the angel, ‘How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.’ And the angel answered and said to him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.’ And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, ‘Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.’”*

Zacharias did not believe Gabriel's words (Luke 1:19-20), Zacharias was mute until these things took place. Zacharias emerged from the Temple speechless! Usually the incense offering was followed by a benediction for the waiting worshippers. Zacharias could only gesture. The people perceived that Zacharias had seen a vision (Luke 1:22). Zacharias was silenced by the angel Gabriel when he heard the news about how God was about to reveal Himself to His people!! Zacharias is silent BUT GOD is not silent!

Zacharias completed his week of Temple duties (I Chron. 24:4-19) and then went home to his wife in the hills of Judea (Luke 1:23, 39) and she conceived. Upon discovering she was pregnant, Elizabeth went into five months of seclusion. Her five-month seclusion seems to be an act of devotion to God as we read of her deep gratitude to the Lord in Luke 1:26, “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

Luke 1:57-66 – “Now Elizabeth’s full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, ‘No; he shall be called John.’ But they said to her, ‘There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name.’ So they made signs to his father—what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, ‘His name is John.’ So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, ‘What kind of child will this be?’ And the hand of the Lord was with him.

Elizabeth told the people at John’s circumcision and naming that their son’s name would be John (so Zacharias had written this previously to her) (Luke 1:60). And Zacharias confirmed Elizabeth’s words when he wrote John’s name on a writing tablet.

- Irony – the father of the herald of the Messiah – mute.
- The proclamation from the outset is NOT from Zacharias – it’s FROM GOD (Luke 1:57-64)!!
- Unbelief cannot speak. (Gabriel had told Zacharias that he did not believe his words)
- Faith restored his speech.

Jesus’ entire life – including the calling of John - had to be supernatural – His birth, life, death, and resurrection. John’s birth was so connected to Jesus’ birth and life! John fulfills OT prophecy. He is the voice of the one crying in the wilderness who would come before the Messiah and identify the Messiah! We can then know Who the Messiah is!

John, is born! The birth of his son is an historical happening! Zacharias now knows that the Messiah is about to arrive. So Zacharias bursts out in song. In this song (Luke 1:67-79), he connects the Messiah’s arrival with the salvation of his people – the salvation of Israel. In particular, Zacharias understands that the coming of the Messiah means the fulfillment of three covenants that God made with Israel: the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant.

And, so we read. . . .

Luke 1:67-79 - ⁶⁷ Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

⁶⁸ “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited and redeemed His people,

⁶⁹ *And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David, (Davidic Covenant)*

God has visited His people – God has showed up.

“Redeem” – to buy out of the market place (slaves/bondage); a COST was involved.

John was born – who would herald the Messiah. Zacharias speaks as if the Messiah’s entrance into the world had already occurred. “. . . He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation. . . .” It’s a done deal!

The Hebrew word for “horn,” *kehren*, means strength. It denotes power/killing power. It’s a common expression in the OT for a powerful person – drawn from the animal kingdom. The horn of an animal was its formidable (fearful/dreaded) strength that often was used by the animal to kill its prey. With its horn, it pushed to conquer.

Psalms 132:17 – this horn is from the house of David and He is the Anointed – the Messiah – “*There I will make the horn of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.*”

Zacharias quickly speaks of the Messiah – as this horn. “In the house of His servant David” – the Messiah would be from the house of David (II Sam. 7). Zacharias is speaking of the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. John was born of Zacharias and Elizabeth who were of the tribe of Levi. BUT of Whom is Zacharias speaking in v. 69? Zacharias is speaking about Jesus – before Jesus’ incarnation – but that God has already raised up this horn of salvation – Jesus. It’s a done deal. God promised the Messiah. Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8).

⁷⁰ *As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,
Who have been since the world began,*

⁷¹ *That we should be saved from our enemies (Davidic Covenant)
And from the hand of all who hate us,*

Psalms 110:1-2 – “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!”

This is the Jewish mindset re: salvation – it was more of a physical deliverance. God promised them a Kingdom with the Messiah ruling and using a rod of iron (Psalm 2:9) to break resistance. However, throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, the physical deliverance always looked forward to a spiritual deliverance (Jer. 31:31ff; Eze. 36:24-27).

⁷² *To perform the mercy promised to our fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob)
And to remember His holy covenant, (Abrahamic Covenant)*

⁷³ *The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: (Abrahamic Cov.)*

⁷⁴ *To grant us that we,
Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,*

⁷⁵ *In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. (Davidic Cov.)*

It is through God's mercies that we are saved! Zacharias understands that it is God's mercy that would change them. Transformation is an act of mercy – it's not something we can earn by works.

It was on the MERCY seat that the blood of bulls and goats was splattered. The MERCY seat covered the ark of the covenant with the "broken" law inside! The MERCY seat was a buffer between our holy God and man's fallen nature. The MERCY seat was a type of Jesus – it pointed to Jesus. He is our Mediator!

As Zacharias continues to sing this song of salvation, we can grasp that he envisions this happening SOON!

Zacharias speaks of the Abrahamic covenant (promising the land, seed/Seed, blessing) which will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom. It is at that time that Israel will be restored and will receive the land God promised them and serve King Jesus Who will reign from David's throne in Zion!

⁷⁶ *"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;*

For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,

⁷⁷ *To give knowledge of salvation to His people (Israel; the Jews)*

By the remission (forgiveness/removal of sin) of their sins, (New Covenant)

Zacharias is speaking of his son, John, who was called to preach the need of repentance on the part of the nation of Israel. To prepare their hearts for God's way of righteousness!

Zacharias speaks of forgiveness – of the New Covenant – God's provision of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31ff) – new heart, Spirit within them, new relationship: They shall be My people and I will be their God, and forgiveness – REMOVAL – of sins!

And how will this come about?

⁷⁸ *Through the tender mercy of our God,*

With which the Dayspring from on high has visited^[e] us;

This is all because of the tender mercies of God in sending the Messiah!

In this word “tender” (*splanchna* in Gk), we see God’s heart. Tender refers to the inner organs, the bowels – the seat of tender affections, kindness, benevolence, compassion. So, it speaks to the heart. Tender mercies – the deep-seeded desire of God for showing favor, kindness and mercy to undeserving sinners. The very nature of God is mercy.

In Exodus 33:18, Moses says to God, “Please show me Your glory.” God tells Moses that His goodness will pass before him – and God speaks of His compassion and mercy.

In Zacharias’ song, connected to God’s tender mercies (salvation/New Covenant) is the Dayspring from on high – the Messiah – the Sun of righteousness (S-u-n: the out-ricing of God the Father’s divine glory; Jesus doesn’t reflect the divine glory. He is the divine glory!! John 1:14 – “And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us and we beheld His glory. . . .”

Dayspring – lit. - dawn/sunrise - Messianic reference:

Isa. 9:2 - the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Isa. 60:1-2 – “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you;”

Mal. 4:2 – “. . . the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.” (healing – Isa. 35:4-5; Isa. 53:5).

John 8:12 – “I am the Light of the world!”

Many of the ancient Rabbis (prior to 1100 AD) believed that “light” in Scripture refers to the Messiah.

⁷⁹ *To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,
To guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

Zacharias knew that the promises God made to Abraham and to David could not be totally fulfilled until the New Covenant was fulfilled. The New Covenant which is the covenant that offers forgiveness!

The only hope to receive the promises God made to Israel through Abraham and David would be through forgiveness – the removal of sin (not just the covering of sin). They would need a new heart and God’s Spirit indwelling them.

⁸⁰ *So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.*

This is speaking of John – who was in the desert clothed in camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist (Matthew 3:4) eating locusts and wild honey. WHY?

How was Elijah dressed? II Kings 1:8 – “A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist. And he said, ‘It is Elijah the Tishbite.’” John came in the spirit and power of Elijah (this is what Gabriel told Zacharias – Luke 1:17).

Jesus said, “Elijah has come already and they did not know him.” (Matt. 17:11-13 [Mount of Transfiguration account])

Matt. 11:14 – Jesus told the Jewish people that if they were willing to receive Him as their King – John would be the Elijah who was prophesied to come.

Zacharias’ blessing/prophesy provides us with such a tremendous link to the Hebrew Scriptures. Zacharias speaks of the Abrahamic Covenant (v. 73 – the oath God swore to Abraham), the Davidic Covenant (vv. 69, 71, 74 – saved from our enemies), and the New Covenant (v. 77 – remission/forgiveness of sin through the Dayspring from on High – the Messiah) – all those covenants – God made with the Jewish people – and they are all fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.

The Abrahamic Covenant promises the land to the Jewish people, the Messiah as King on His throne along with the blessing to all the families of the earth, which speaks of salvation through the Messiah. The Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom where only those who are saved will enter into at the outset of the Kingdom.

The Davidic Covenant – the Messiah sitting on the throne – will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom.

The New Covenant – based on Jesus’ shed blood (this cup is the blood of the New Covenant. . . .) – which was promised to the house of Israel and the house of Judah – to Israel as a nation – will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom when God will restore Israel and all in Israel – at that time – will be saved! (Jer. 31:31ff; Dan. 7:27; Hosea 5:15; Zech. 12:10ff; Matt. 23:37-39)

Individuals have been given the blessings of the New Covenant (a new heart, God’s Spirit, a relationship with God and complete forgiveness of sin [Jer. 31:33-34]).

The promise of the New Covenant for the NATION of Israel will not be fulfilled until the Millennial Kingdom.

Will it happen? YES! God’s will is NEVER thwarted!

HOMEWORK

Read Luke 1:26-56

Read Isaiah to get the BIG PICTURE of the Bible!

How important are the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants in understanding Scripture?

Abrahamic – Gen. 12:1-3; Gen. 15; Gen. 17

Davidic – II Samuel 7:12-29; Psalm 89:1-37

New Covenant – Jer. 31:31-34; Eze. 36:24-27