

BaptistWay Bible Series for December 6: Ending the long wait

November 25, 2009

Our next 18 lessons focus on the Gospel of Luke. We will cover the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ, ending our study on Resurrection Sunday 2010.

Five lesson units include the following: 1) Jesus' Birth and Childhood (1:1-2:52); 2) Preparing for Ministry (3:1-4:13); 3) Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (4:14-7:50); 4) Journeying to Jerusalem (13:22-16:31); and 5) Jesus' Death and Resurrection (23:1-24:48).

If you were a first-century librarian and came across the Book of Luke for the first time, your task would be to classify this book. This would be no easy task. The book would not fit under any conventional classifications. It is not an epic, a biography, nor is it a purely historical record. So you read the entire account and decide the best term to describe it is "good news."

The word "gospel" or "good news" appears several times in the book, and without realizing the impact of your decision, you have just created a new classification for the written word—a gospel. The story of Jesus is good news for all who will hear and believe.

What the Bible says ...

Luke begins his Gospel with a brief preface in 1:1-4. His was not the first account written about Jesus. He drew from several sources and sought to compile an accurate account. He identifies the recipient of his work as one named Theophilus (v. 3). Though the meaning of this name is "one who

loves God,” there is no reason to think Luke was not writing to an actual person.

The opening chapter describes the announcement that a son would be born who would prepare the way for the birth of God’s Son. Zechariah, a local priest who served in the temple area in Jerusalem and his wife, Elizabeth had longed for a child, but had eclipsed the typical child-bearing years.

While Zechariah was attending to his duties within the temple, the angel Gabriel visited him and announced Zechariah and Elizabeth would give birth to a son, whose name would be John. Gabriel identified the destiny of this child: “Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (vv. 16-17).

Zechariah’s response was incredulous: “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years” (v. 18). The account ends with Gabriel gently rebuking the priest for his skeptical response. The angel informed Zechariah he would be mute until the child was born. The passage concludes with Elizabeth becoming pregnant and saying to herself over and over again: “The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people” (v. 25).

What the Bible means to me today ...

Are you waiting for something? Have you given up on God because certain prayers are yet to be answered? The passage at hand raises these and other questions. One must be very cautious when applying these verses to life situations. Consider the following cautions.

Caution 1. Just because your desire/prayer request has not come to pass

does not mean God is punishing you. Note Zechariah and Elizabeth longed for children of their own, but they kept on living lives of faith, looking to God for guidance.

Caution 2. Never give up on the desires of your heart. I have known family members who prayed daily for one another. One wife prayed for years for her husband to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. When he finally crossed the line of faith and became a believer, it was the result of those constant, fervent prayers offered across many years.

Caution 3. If God does the miraculous in your life, do not respond with cynicism and unbelief. God may not mute your words, but Scripture tells us he honors faithfulness and obedience.

Caution 4. Many times, we entertain only one answer from God—yes. We must never ignore two other possible answers to our prayers—no or wait. God’s timing may simply mean we must wait. Such was the case for the parents of John the Baptist.

Caution 5. Never forget we are involved in God’s big picture. The promise of a son to Zechariah and Elizabeth was the “beginning of the end” of the wait for the birth of God’s Son, our Savior, Jesus. When I am committed to Jesus, to his followers, and to his world, then I must see my life in relationship to others. God used an elderly Jewish priest and his wife in preparing the world for the birth of his Son. God continues to use people like you and me to accomplish his will. Are we willing to give our lives for the fulfilling of God’s will? Or are we so focused on ourselves that we cannot see the opportunities before us?

What are we waiting for?