

## **The Preparer for the Lord of the Kingdom (Luke 1:5-25)**

Historical Notes:

1. Herod the Great (ruled 37-4BC) was ruling all of Israel during the time of Jesus's birth. He was born of Idumean ancestry. The Idumeans were said to be the descendants of the Edomites. Herod's father partnered with the Roman government when they invaded and defeated the Hasmonean dynasty which had ruled Israel for over 100 years. Herod was installed as a client king to rule the entire territory they had acquired.
2. Zachariah the priest was of the course of Abijah (1 Chron 24:1-19; 2 Chron 8:14). One of the 24 courses who were tasked to handle sacrifices and burn incense during a two-week period outside of festal celebrations. He was, as was expected, to marry a woman of Israelite birth and of priestly stock, Elizabeth.
3. Note the focus on the Jerusalem temple in the story. Remember, in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, the temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians. But now great progress had been made on it by Herod the Great. He and his sons would carry on the work of rebuilding the temple until it was completed in the 60s AD.

Lessons from the coming of the Lord's preparer

- **The God's Blessings come for the Barren (vv. 5-14)**

While Zacharias did his perfunctory duties, the Lord sent an angel to appear before him in the temple. He had a chance of a lifetime to burn incense in the presence of the Lord. God's presence had not shown up in the temple in years. The Maccabean rebellion was a response to the desecration of the temple and it had been cleansed through their removal of the Seleucid forces. The celebration of Hannukah was started to commemorate the victory of the Maccabees over the Seleucids and the reclamation of the temple. Despite the fact that the temple had been reclaimed and cleansed, little had been reported of the visible showing of God's presence in the temple. When Zacharias had performed his duties, it was a shock to see the appearance of a divine figure in the temple to say anything.

Gabriel (Dan 8:16; 9:21) had appeared with good news. Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were both blameless, meaning they kept the laws requirements, would have a child. They, though righteous, were barren and well over child-bearing age. Yet, the Lord saw fit, just like had had with Abraham and Sarah, to send a miracle child through them. God blessed them though they were deemed barren. And in their blessedness, it was meant to spread throughout the world.

- **Be careful about Doubting God's Deliverance (vv. 15-20)**

Zacharias's response suggested cognitive dissonance. He could not accept the notion that he could have a child, probably since he had tried so many years. It did not matter that he was speaking to an angel that had come from heaven. He could not see God's deliverance coming and God answering not only his prayer but Israel's prayer of salvation. His doubt led to him being made mute for a season.

- **God's Covenant leads to a miraculous Conception (vv. 21-25)**

God's promise of John's birth meant that fruit must be produced. Sarah went through the normal process of conception because God's covenant promises must be fulfilled. The coming of the kingdom of God would be in the same way.