

## Matthew 1, Luke 1

### Ep 184: CFM

#### The Intertestamental Period

What were the biggest events that shaped the world of Jesus and the apostles?

I think that really for us to understand Jesus' world and how it worked, we need to go back a few hundred years to **Alexander the Great** and his conquest of the world that he lived in during the 4th century. Alexander basically conquered the whole of what many people in his day and in his region called the whole of the world, including of course the Holy Land, meaning the land of Judea Palestine and as a result of his conquests the whole of that enormous vast area certainly learned to speak Greek, but not only that, they were thinking quite different ways due to the world created by Alexander and his successors.

On the whole Alexander pretty much forced his views on much of the area down as far south as Egypt and as far east as India, and thus the world became fundamentally changed. And then after that, after Alexander's death there arose a great Syrian King known as **Antiochus Epiphanes**, at the start of the second century B.C., and he came to extend his Empire southwards, he marched down and took Jerusalem and desecrated the temple and made it impossible for loyal Jews to worship that and so then there was a **3 year revolutionary movement** led by the **Maccabees**, and in about three years defeated Antiochus Epiphanes, they cleansed the temple and that was enough actually to establish him and his family as the acknowledged Royal House for the next 100 or so years. These 100 years burned in the collective memory of Jewish people. They wanted their own space, their own royal house. *And they wanted Rome gone.*

In seeing this, we can see the events which are shaping the consciousness of Jewish people at the time of Jesus, because they were all thinking "*that's what we want to happen, only this time we want it really to last, really to work,*" and so it was crushing to the Jews when the Romans came into their land and conquered them. This happened in the middle of the first century BC when Pompey took Jerusalem in 63 BC and then after that when **Octavian who became Augustus** became the first Roman Emperor, then Judea became part of the Roman empire, and it was taxed, and it was ruled, and from my reading, these taxes were crushing to the people. Many of them were hurting.

And so there were long memories, horrible memories of these wave upon wave of imperial, ambitious, pagans, overtaking of the local Judean culture and lands... ***it was that context within which we can understand the aspirations of Jesus and his contemporaries***, that one day God would come and do FINALLY, what they always wanted him to do, the things that were said in the Psalms and in the prophets that he would do... and so as the Jewish people of Jesus' day looked back in time and really thought about who they were and what they were praying for and so on, they wanted their God to come back and do something which would enable their culture to flourish, not the Greek one that was forced upon them. These Jews wanted THEIR religion to be preeminent, they wanted THEIR temple to be cleansed once and for all, and they wanted to feel God's presence with them politically.

They desired that God and his people would finally get it together and be on the same page. And they also wanted above all for their ***God to be king***. So that instead of Caesar ruling over them the Jews would have their one true God instead of a pagan monarch. And so for us, in order to understand the

New Testament, we must understand how the Jews in Jesus's day looked at their whole history, as they had it in their scriptures. For this we need a rough time line. A rough sense of the sequence of events, which go back to of course to Abraham, back to David and Solomon, then in a sense, our story really starts back when Assyria took Israel, the northern kingdom, the northern tribes, back in 721 B.C., leaving just Judah and Benjamin with some residual Levites ministering in the temple, and so on (there were of course, survivors from the other tribes that had migrated south during 722-21, think Lehi's ancestors).

The Judean monarchy then lasted until the Babylonians invaded and destroyed the temple in 586 B.C., resulting in a 70-year exile in Babylon. Most of the people went into Babylon, not all of them came back, and indeed from that day to this, the Jews have been scattered around the world. But in 539 or 538 B.C., Cyrus, the new King over Persia, conquered Babylon, and, as part of his reforms, he (to everyone's astonishment) restored Judea and gave orders for temple to be rebuilt and for the city to be re-established and so on.

After the rebuilding the Second Temple, the Jews went through the following "time periods":

### **Important Time Periods and Events**

#### **The Persian Era 536-336 B.C.E.**

The Second Temple is constructed. The Jews seek to regain their autonomy and rebuild their religion after the return from the Babylonian Exile.

#### **The Greek Era 336-323 B.C.E.**

This is the beginning of the Hellenization of the ancient world after Alexander the Great's conquest of the known world. Jews begin to speak Greek and the learned Jews who want to preserve their religious traditions know that eventually the ideas and texts of their religion will need to be accessible in the Greek language.

#### **The Egyptian Era 323-200 B.C.E.**

With the death of Alexander in 323 B.C.E., the Greek empire became divided into the Diadochi, or the four rival families that succeeded Alexander. The most notable Diadochi include Ptolemy, Antigonus, Cassander, and Seleucus as the last remaining at the end of the Wars of the Successors, ruling in Egypt, Asia-Minor, Macedon and Persia respectively, all forging dynasties lasting several centuries. Ptolemy Soter gained dominance over Egypt and soon ruled over Israel. According to Josephus, Ptolemy II was desirous to collect every book and thus had the Hebrew scriptures translated into Greek for his library. Legend has it that this translation took place in 72 days and was a miraculous event.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Syrians and Antiochus Epiphanes 200-166 B.C.E.**

---

<sup>1</sup> The Antiquities of the Jews, Flavius Josephus, Book 12; chapter 2.

When the Syrians defeated Egypt in the battle of Panium in the summer of 200 BCE<sup>2</sup>, control of Judea passed to Syria. Under the rule of Antiochus III the Great the Jews were given a period of tax relief,<sup>3</sup> and the Jews were allowed to live according to the law of their forefathers. Everything seemed to go well until the Hellenizing party replaced the high priest and set off a political conflict that brought Antiochus to Jerusalem. In 168 B.C.E., Antiochus set about destroying every distinctive characteristic of the Jewish faith, forbidding sacrifices, circumcision, and observance of the Sabbath and feasts. He pillaged the city of Jerusalem and killed many of the inhabitants. He also stole the money from and desecrated the Jerusalem Temple by offering a sacrifice to Zeus.<sup>4</sup> The Jews who would not bend to Antiochus Epiphanes' will were whipped and crucified, while their wives were also executed.<sup>5</sup>

### The Maccabean Era 165-63 B.C.E.

An elderly priest named Mattathias, of the house of Hasmon, lived with his sons in a village northwest of Jerusalem. When a Syrian official tried to enforce heathen sacrifice, Mattathias rebelled, slew the Syrian official, and fled to the mountains with his family. Many of faithful Jews joined him. After the death of Mattathias, three of his sons carried on the revolt in succession: Judas Maccabaeus (166-160 BCE), Jonathan (160-142 BCE), and Simon (143-134 BCE). These men had such success that by 165 BCE, they had retaken Jerusalem, cleansed the temple, and restored their Jewish worship. Today, Jews around the world commemorate this event as the Feast of Hanukkah. Finally, under the leadership of Simon, the Jews received their independence (142 BCE).

### The Roman Era 63 BCE – The Gospels

The independence of the Jews ended in 63 BCE, when Pompey entered Jerusalem as a conqueror and representative of Imperial Roma. Aristobulus II, claiming to be the king of Israel, locked Pompey's forces

---

<sup>2</sup> The battle took place near the spring of Banius, the location that is the backdrop to the events in Matthew 16.13-20. The Egyptian forces lost around 17,500 – 20,800 soldiers in this battle, and the Syrian forces gained control of the land of Israel.

<sup>3</sup> "I would have observed as to those other materials which will be necessary, in order to render the temple more glorious; and let all of that nation live according to the laws of their own country; and let the senate, and the priests, and the scribes of the temple, and the sacred singers, **be discharged from poll-money and the crown tax and other taxes also**. And that the city may the sooner recover its inhabitants, **I grant a discharge from taxes for three years to its present inhabitants...** We also **discharge them for the future from a third part of their taxes**, that the losses they have sustained may be repaired." Josephus, [Antiquities, 12.3](#), emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> And when the king had built an idol altar upon God's altar, he slew swine upon it, and so offered a sacrifice neither according to the law, nor the Jewish religious worship in that country. Josephus, [Antiquities, 12.5](#).

<sup>5</sup> **He also compelled them to forsake the worship which they paid their own God**, and to adore those whom he took to be gods; and made them build temples, and raise idol altars in every city and village, and offer swine upon them every day. **He also commanded them not to circumcise their sons**, and threatened to punish any that should be found to have transgressed his injunction. He also appointed overseers, who should compel them to do what he commanded. And indeed many Jews there were who complied with the king's commands, either voluntarily, or out of fear of the penalty that was denounced. But the best men, and **those of the noblest souls, did not regard him, but did pay a greater respect to the customs of their country than concern as to the punishment** which he threatened to the disobedient; on which account they every day underwent great miseries and bitter torments; for they were **whipped with rods**, and their bodies were torn to pieces, and **were crucified**, while they were still alive, and breathed. **They also strangled those women and their sons whom they had circumcised**, as the king had appointed, hanging their sons about their necks as they were upon the crosses. And if there were any sacred book of the law found, it was destroyed, and those with whom they were found miserably perished also. [Josephus, Antiquities, 12.5](#), emphasis added.

out of Jerusalem. This angered Pompey, and after a three month siege, Pompey was able to penetrate the walls and inflict heavy casualties on Jerusalem. Pompey even entered into the Holy of Holies, at the protest of the priests at the temple.

In 47 BCE, Julius Caesar appointed [Antipater the Idumaean](#) procurator of Judea. Herod I, the son of Antipater, eventually became the king of the Jews around 40 B.C.E. Although Herod the Great, as he was called, planned and carried out the building of the new temple in Jerusalem, he was a loyal Hellenist and detested the Hasmonaean family. He killed every descendant of the Hasmonaean family, even his own wife Marianne, the granddaughter of John Hyrcanus.<sup>6</sup> Then he proceeded to murder his own two sons. It has been reported that Augustus said, "It is better to be Herod's pig than his son."<sup>7</sup> Whether he said that or not, it does seem evident that being in Herod's family had a certain amount of risk involved. This is the Herod who is on the throne when Matthew tells us of the birth of Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

### Matthew: The Man

Each gospel writer approaches his testimony of the life and ministry of the Savior in their own way. Matthew focused on demonstrating that the events in Jesus' life were in fulfillment of Old Testament types and shadows. Matthew's audience was most likely the Jewish people—those who were familiar with the writings of the Hebrew Bible, what Christians today call the Old Testament. Matthew continually works to incorporate the ancient prophecies of the Hebrew Bible into his narrative to portray Jesus as the Messiah who had been spoken of anciently. To a generation who expected a much different Messiah than Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew's gospel worked to smooth out these expectations into a tapestry of ideas and motifs that showed Jesus as the one described in the Psalms and in the prophetic texts of the Jewish people. He was the son coming out of Egypt (Hosea 11.1), as well as the one who to come out the stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11.1). He is the one born of a virgin (Isaiah 7.14) and the one crying in agony "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Ps. 22.1). Matthew paints Messianic prophecies in bright new colors and redefines them in terms that the Jews had never before imagined, thus recontextualizing old scripture, writing them anew on the hearts of the Jewish people of his day who accepted Jesus as a Messiah sent to be king of the world and savior of their souls.

As for Matthew's life, we do not know very much. He was also called Levi, the son of Alphaeus, a publican, or tax collector. He was 'sitting at the receipt of custom, and [Jesus] said unto him, Follow me.

---

<sup>6</sup> Herod was ruthless and paranoid. But Herod had to be ruthless, and he had good reason to be paranoid. He inaugurated his reign by executing the inner circle of Hasmonaean family members who were his enemies. He also married Mariamne, a descendant of the Hasmonaean family, in an effort to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the Jewish people. Still, most Jews did not accept his reign. It is important to remember that even **the Hasmonaean family** were considered illegitimate by some Jews because **they were not from the line of David**. Herod came from Idumea (Edom), and his presence on the throne was an offense to both pious Jews and Hasmonaean supporters, some of whom had close ties to Mariamne. In viewing Herod in his historical context, we can see that Herod was completely surrounded by political enemies. It is understandable why he was paranoid. Herod's response to these real or imagined threats was to be ruthless and to rule with an iron fist. Over the course of his life, he would execute many of his closest friends, advisors, and relatives, even **murdering his own wife Mariamne** in 29 BCE, an action which would cement his power in the region but would also inflict serious mental damage to his psyche.

<sup>7</sup> Macrobius, [Saturnalia](#), Harvard University Press, 2022. See also: Alonzo Gaskill, "Matthew's Account of the Birth of Christ," *The Nativity*, Deseret Book, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> For more on Herod and his family tree, see: Day, [Herod the Great and the Herodian Family Tree](#).

And he arose and followed him' (Mark 2:14). Publicans were disdained by the Jews who considered them puppets of a heathen regime.

One scholar explained the tax system in this manner:

In Roman times, the right to collect transport tolls and other minor taxes in a given area was farmed out to private companies or individuals who bid for the privilege. Whatever they could collect above their bid was their profit. It was a system that invited and rewarded incredible dishonesty. Those who participated in such a business were considered by the Jews to be totally without moral scruples. Publicans were believed to be so certainly dishonest that they could not legally give testimony in a Jewish court. The owners of these tax franchises were usually Romans, but they often hired Jews (like Matthew/Levi) to do the actual tax collecting. These Jewish publicans were despised even more than the Romans. Not only did they rob and cheat their brethren, but they also served the enemies of their people. Thus they were viewed as both robbers and traitors.<sup>9</sup>

## Matthew 1

### The Genealogy of Jesus

#### Fourteen Generations: Matthew 1.1-17

Matthew is playing with the genealogy here, as he is seriously skipping several people in this genealogical line! Why is he doing this? Some say that perhaps Matthew is using a technique called gematria to teach a spiritual truth.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps Matthew is using what some call “the number of David,” as the number 14 equates to David’s name (דוד) in the Hebrew language. Letters were used in place of numerals in the first century, with the Hebrew consonants dalet (d) and waw (w) representing four and six, respectively. David is spelled דוד *dwd* in Hebrew consonants, which is equivalent to the number fourteen (four plus six plus four). Thus, Matthew’s focus on fourteen generations could very well have been his emphasizing Jesus’ kingly role as the Son of David and rightful heir to the throne.

#### “Trouble Makers” in the Text<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Stephen E. Robinson, *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> See: [What is Gematria? Hebrew Numerology, and the Secrets of Torah, MyJewishLearning.com](#), accessed 11.13.22. The article emphasizes that “while gematria was used periodically in the Talmud and Midrash, **it was not central to rabbinic literature**. The rabbis occasionally employed gematria to help support biblical exegesis, but did not rely on it heavily. They were much more invested in the use of logical reasoning and argumentation to support their positions.” One famous example of gematria is in the interpretation of Genesis 14:14, which appears in the Baraita of the Thirty-two Rules and in other Talmudic and Midrashic references. This verse mentions the 318 men that made up the household of Abram (later in Genesis, God changes Abram’s name to Abraham), whom he took with him to defeat the armies that had recently attacked his kinsman. The numerical equivalent of the name “Eliezer” (Abram’s servant) is 318. Because of this, some have suggested that Abraham only took Eliezer and not the 318 other men. However you interpret these ideas, it is interesting that these kinds of connections have been found in Biblical texts. For further study, see: Friedrich Weinreb, [Roots of the Bible: An Ancient View for a New Outlook](#), Friedrich Verlag, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> I use this title in a loving way. Many important women in my life have described themselves as “trouble-makers,” a title that they have worn as a badge of honor. I see the women in Matthew’s list as powerful women in this sense.

The genealogy is unusual in citing women, non-Jews, and morally questionable characters among the ancestors.<sup>12</sup> The mention of these women (Mary, Tamar, Rahab<sup>13</sup>, Ruth, and Bathsheba) has fascinated interpreters over the years.<sup>14</sup> As some of the women on this list may be associated with sin or being involved in dubious activities, some have seen the inclusion of these women to stress that Jesus came to redeem mankind from sin. There is another, and perhaps better explanation. As noted by Weren, “A different explanation, still current, is that **the four women are all foreigners**. Ruth is Moabite, Rahab is from Canaanite Jericho, and Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, is Hittite. That Tamar is also of foreign origin is deduced from the meagre indications in early Jewish literature.<sup>15</sup> The presence of these non-Jewish people points in a universalistic direction: **Jesus has foreign blood in his veins**. He has indeed sprung from the people of Israel, but Matthew makes it clear at the very beginning of his book that Jesus is also important for the Gentiles.”<sup>16</sup>

Bible scholar Raymond Brown speaks of “something extraordinary or irregular in their union with their partners,” a deviation from the current pattern; the five women are outside the normal course of events and serve to show that precisely through these eccentric individuals God effects the fulfilment of Israel’s history.<sup>17</sup> After analyzing the text of Matthew 1, Weren draws this conclusion:

What insights does this analysis yield for the role of Mary and the four other women? The reader might wonder about the fact that in Matt 1:1–17 **men are given such a large share of attention. They are many, and they are mentioned by name**. The women are far in the minority, and one of them, Uriah’s wife, is not even referred to by her own name. **Men, it seems, are the principal protagonists of Israel’s history, and women function only as a means**

<sup>12</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> There are some problems with Rahab that must be addressed. According to Matt 1:5, Rahab is the wife of Salmon and the mother of Boaz. Nothing can be found in the Old Testament to substantiate this claim; the stories about Rahab in Josh 2 and 6 speak neither of her marriage nor of her motherhood. What is more, she lived at the time of the entry into the promised land, while Boaz lived at the time of the judges (Ruth 1:1). The name Rahab is spelled differently in Matthew (Ραχάβ) and in the LXX (Ρααβ). Still, it is almost certain that Matt 1:5 speaks of Rahab of Jericho, not of anybody else... In Josh 2 and 6 **Rahab is a Canaanite woman who works as a prostitute in Jericho**, where she lives detached from her clan, in a house of her own against the city wall. **At the risk of her life, she takes the two Israelite spies into her house**. She ignores the king’s command to give the two men up and makes sure that they get away safely Weren, p. 118, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> Wim J.C. Weren, “The Five Women in Matthew’s Genealogy as Paragons of Virtue,” *Studies in Matthew’s Gospel Literary Design, Intertextuality, and Social Setting*, Brill, 2014, p. 107-124.

<sup>15</sup> Gen 38 does not give a clue about Tamar’s ancestry. That she was Canaanite (so, e.g., Gundry, *Matthew*, 14), is contradicted by *T. Judah* 10 and *Jub.* 41:1–7. According to these texts, Er hated her because his mother was from the daughters of Canaan, whereas Tamar was a daughter of Aram, and consequently came from Mesopotamia, the homeland of Abraham, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel (cf. Heil, “Narrative Roles,” 539). For more information see Richard Bauckham, “Tamar’s Ancestry and Rahab’s Marriage: Two Problems in the Matthean Genealogy,” *NovT* 37 (1995): 313–329.

<sup>16</sup> Weren, *Studies in Matthew’s Gospel*, p. 108, emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> Weren, p. 108. See also: Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 73. See also Krister Stendahl, “Quis et Unde? An Analysis of Matthew 1–2,” Pages 69–80 (74) in *The Interpretation of Matthew* (ed. Graham Stanton; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995, 2d ed.): “The common denominator for these four women [Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba] is found in that **they all represent an ‘irregularity’ in the Davidic line**, an irregularity which is not only overcome by God’s recognition of them as mothers of Davidic descendants: exactly by the irregularity the action of God and his Spirit is made manifest.”

by which their male counterparts secure their futures. **Yet it is precisely this idea that is being undermined by the text.** The narrator mentions five women, linking them to one another by means of the preposition ἐκ. Thus, he interrupts the continuity that would have existed. **If it had not been for the five women, Israel's history would not have reached its goal.** Furthermore, the narrator adds the Holy Spirit to the company of the five women. This divine force is also introduced by means of the preposition ἐκ. This implies that the five women do not act of their own accord, but are activated by the Spirit of God.<sup>18</sup>

### What All Five Women Have in Common

Weren works to give reasons why all five women in Matthew's genealogy are included, finding commonalities. All these women experienced unusual circumstances that placed them in a dangerous position.<sup>19</sup> All five of these women were in a unique circumstance to perpetuate the Kingdom of Israel. Had these women not acted, Israel's history would have been cut short. These women were actively engaged in bringing about God's purposes, even at the risk of their very lives.<sup>20</sup>

### Two Genealogies

"We can wait, as we must, to learn later whether ... Matthew's or Luke's account of Jesus' Davidic descent is correct. (See Matt. 1; Luke 3.) Meanwhile, the Father has, on several occasions, given us Jesus' crucial genealogy: 'This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'"<sup>21</sup>

"...Matthew proceeds to outline what appears to be the ancestry of the Lord, but we can't quite figure out how it fits in with other scriptural passages, at least in the form it has come to us. Luke gives another account that does not agree with that in the book of Matthew. We suppose it may be that one of them is a kingly, royal genealogy, intended to indicate his position and place as the one to sit upon the throne of his father David; the other is possibly a genealogy either of Mary or Joseph—we can't be sure."<sup>22</sup>

### Joseph and the Angel: Matthew 1.18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the

---

<sup>18</sup> Weren, p. 115.

<sup>19</sup> The situation in which the women consequently find themselves is precarious for one of the following reasons: they can be accused of violating the laws supposed to guarantee the integrity of a family, clan, or people, or they no longer enjoy the protection of the law, or they incur the risk of forfeiting their previous protected position altogether if the law is exercised—even the risk of being put to death on the basis of the law. Weren, p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> The new situations which the women face reveal hidden possibilities enabling them to contribute to the development of the house of Israel. Israel's history would have been cut short prematurely, or would have been completely different, had these women not mapped out alternative paths to the future. Some of the women cleverly take advantage of ambiguities and lacunas in the legal order, and they meet support as well as resistance from male persons who surround them. Weren, p. 122.

<sup>21</sup> Elder Neal A. Maxwell, *Ensign*, November 1984, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, "Who Shall Declare His Generation?" *BYU Studies*, vol. 16 (1975-1976), Number 4 - Summer 1976, p. 555.

Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1.18-21)

### **Jesus: The Son of a Mortal Mother and an Immortal Father: Matthew 1.18-25**

President Russell M. Nelson explained that the Atonement of Jesus Christ “required a personal sacrifice by an immortal being not subject to death. Yet He must die and take up His own body again. The Savior was the only one who could accomplish this. From His mother He inherited power to die. From His Father He obtained power over death”<sup>23</sup>

### **Thou shalt call his name Jesus: Matthew 1.21<sup>24</sup>**

"Jesus is the individual name of the Savior, and as thus spelled is of Greek derivation; its Hebrew equivalent was Yehoshua or Yeshua, or, as we render it in English, Joshua. In the original the name was well understood as meaning 'Help of Jehovah,' or 'Savior.' Though as common an appellation as John or Henry or Charles today, the name was nevertheless divinely prescribed, as already stated. Thus, unto Joseph, the espoused husband of the Virgin, the angel said, 'And thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.'"<sup>25</sup>

### **A Virgin: Matthew 1.23**

Behold, a virgin<sup>26</sup> shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. (Matthew 1.23)

Greek: Ἰδοὺ, ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον, Μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεός.

### **Elder Holland**

To all of our mothers everywhere, past, present, or future, I say, “Thank you. Thank you for giving birth, for shaping souls, for forming character, and for demonstrating the pure love of Christ.” To Mother Eve, to Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, to Mary of Nazareth, and to a Mother in Heaven, I say, “Thank you for your crucial role in fulfilling the purposes of eternity.” To all mothers in every circumstance, including those who struggle—and all will—I say, “Be peaceful. Believe in God and yourself. You are doing better than you think you are. In fact, you are saviors on Mount Zion, and like the Master you follow, your love ‘never faileth.’” I can pay no higher tribute to anyone.<sup>27</sup>

### **Luke: The Man**

Some very significant things can be said about Luke, but the most prominent fact about him is that he was not prominent. With normal early Christian modesty, he does not directly name himself in his

<sup>23</sup> President Russell M. Nelson, “Constancy amid Change,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 34.

<sup>24</sup> καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν – “you will call his name Jesus.” The Greek Ἰησοῦς (pronounced ee-ay-sooce'), is of Hebrew origin יהושע (pronounced yeh-ho-shoo'-ah), and means “Jehovah is salvation.” It is a combination of two Hebrew words: “LORD” יהוה (pronounced yeh-ho-vaw') and “save” שׁוּע (pronounced yaw-shah').

<sup>25</sup> James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 33.

<sup>26</sup> παρθένος – A virgin. A marriageable maiden, a woman who has never had sexual intercourse. One who is free from uncleanness and whoredom attendant on idolatry, and is thus chaste.

<sup>27</sup> Elder Holland, “[Behold Thy Mother](#),” October 2015 Conference.



writings, nor is he mentioned except incidentally in the New Testament. So a relatively obscure person consistently appears as the author of Luke and Acts, the largest and most impressive block of writing in the New Testament from a literary and historical point of view. Contrary to the patristic debate that arose from the lack of "Paul" within the book of Hebrews, alternative authors are not suggested for the Gospel of Luke in the probings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. For instance, several decades before the scribe made his oldest known copy, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, repeatedly named Luke and quoted from his Gospel in order to expose the inconsistencies of heretics.<sup>28</sup> History regularly speculates on what is probable, but it is most responsible when dealing more realistically with what is known. On the level of likelihood, a number of careful scholars ask about the authorship of Luke: "If people were guessing, would they not be much more likely to come up with an apostle?"<sup>29</sup> And on the restricted question of fact, Luke is the only author mentioned by the prominent church fathers and important hand-written copies of the Gospel in the early Christian centuries...<sup>30</sup>

The other reliable insights to Luke's life come from his writings, since Christian traditions about him are late and carry no discernible link to the first century. But looking at Luke through his Gospel is only half the story, for **he contributed two major books to the New Testament**. Since he wrote the Gospel, **he also wrote the Acts of the Apostles**, for its preface tells Theophilus that the "former treatise" recorded Jesus' life to the resurrection and ascension. (Acts 1:1-2.) Theophilus appears twice in the New Testament, on both occasions in the prefaces tying Luke to Acts. Since this name basically signifies "friend of God," this could be Luke's literary device for writing to those who "feared God," the Gentile seekers who infiltrated the Jewish synagogues in Acts and Josephus; "Theophilus" could also be a well-educated Christian convert who merited "most excellent," a title of social or administrative status. (Luke 1:3.) In either event, Acts clearly continues the Gospel and adds significant insight into Luke and his purposes. **The two books are also welded together by a distinctive prose that favors classical style and formal grammar** not characteristic of other New Testament writers.

While Acts says nothing of Luke directly, there are autobiographical glimpses. The most subtle is worth passing mention. Ante-Nicene fathers sometimes gave Luke's home as Antioch, though it is hard to be sure whether this is valid tradition or an inference from Acts. If only the latter, it is still worth considering, for Luke's vivid detail about Paul begins about the time that Luke became a companion of the apostle. Paul had labored in Jewish areas and branches for about a decade until his official call to the Gentile work, when Barnabas came from the Twelve and brought Paul from Tarsus to Antioch. (Acts 11:19-26.) Before that event, Luke's record of that apostle is spotty, but full detail on his missionary work begins immediately after Paul comes to Antioch. Luke features only the Gentile missions from this time, either because of the subject, his own call, or first knowing Paul in the vicinity of Antioch, the base of operations for Paul's international labors. These interrelated possibilities justify an educated guess that Luke first knew Paul soon after the converted Jew from Tarsus was called to labor with Gentile converts in Antioch, some fifteen years after the crucifixion.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1 and 3.10.1-4. Quotations from church fathers in this article may be found in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956. For a survey of early patristic comments on Luke, see Daniel J. Theron, *Evidence of Tradition*, Baker Book House, 1958, pp. 41-65, 69-71.

<sup>29</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1974, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Testimony of Luke," *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, Deseret Book, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

## The Gospel of Luke

The Gospel of Luke is unique in at least two ways. First, **it is the longest Gospel**. In NA, Matthew occupies 87 pages, Mark (through 16:8) 60 pages, and John 73 pages, while Luke takes up 96 pages. A comparison of verses reveals a similar count: Matthew has 1,071 verses, Mark has 678 verses, John has 869 verses, while Luke contains 1,151 verses. Second, **it is the only Gospel with a sequel**. As such Luke not only introduces Jesus and his ministry, but also shows how that ministry relates to the early church era. This linkage enables Luke to discuss how God brought his salvation in Jesus, how the earliest church preached Jesus, and how they carried out their mission to both Jew and Gentile. **The two volumes and their message are virtually inseparable, despite the canonical division**. Luke's Gospel often lays the foundation for many of the issues whose answers come in Acts. Luke–Acts highlights God's plan. It explains how Jew and Gentile could end up as equals in a community planted by God, even though that community's roots were originally grounded in a promise to Israel.<sup>32</sup>

### Luke 1: The Announcement from Gabriel to Zacharias, Elizabeth, and Mary

1. Luke's Introduction: Luke 1.1-4
2. Zacharias and Elizabeth: Luke 1.5-7
  - a. Elizabeth is "barren": Luke 1.7<sup>33</sup>
3. Zacharias at the altar, his vision of Gabriel: Luke 1.8-22
  - a. John shall bring joy (Luke 1.14) to those around him.
  - b. John will be filled with the Holy Ghost (Luke 1.15).
  - c. John will not drink strong drink (Luke 1.15). Some see this as a Nazarite vow. I say this is uncertain.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Darrell Bock, [\*Luke 1:1-9:50 \(Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament\)\*](#), Baker Academic, 1994, p. 34 electronic version, emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> Ἐλισάβετ ἦν στεῖρα "Elizabeth was barren." στεῖρα can mean "stiff and unnatural," and is connected to the English word sterile. Latin: *sterilis*.

<sup>34</sup> John lives a life of discipline. The restriction from wine represents special consecration. **In the Hebrew Bible, such a restriction existed for priests when they were performing their duties** (Lev. 10:9). **A more permanent restriction existed for the Nazirite, who could make a vow not to drink during his or her whole life** (Judg. 13:4–5) or could vow to refrain for special periods (Num. 6:1–21). The strongest Old Testament parallel to the wording here is 1 Sam. 1:11, an allusion to Samuel, who was presented as Israel's first prophet. By this parallel, John's office is implicitly affirmed. The term σίκερα (*sikera*, strong drink) is a Semitic loanword, going back ultimately to Akkadian *šikaru* (Klostermann 1929: 8). It refers to intoxicating drink not made from grapes and includes drinks like barley beer (Fitzmyer 1981: 326). **The restriction does not say anything inherently evil about drink**, but points to a special consecration that is above the call of the normal person... Such a vow usually was voluntary; but in the rare cases where it was not, the imposition of the vow revealed a special person called of God. Raymond Brown (1977: 269, 273–74) suggests that Luke framed the account after the Old Testament parallels, but if that had been the case would not Zechariah have committed John to the vow? It cannot be denied that a pattern of God's actions with great individuals is present here. However, the variations argue against Lucan creation of a parallel, since more agreement might be expected if the details were fabricated. **From this verse some conclude that John is a Nazirite** (Leaney 1958: 41; Plummer 1896: 14; Fitzmyer 1981: 326). **For others the absence of an instruction not to cut his hair shows that John is not a Nazirite, but an ascetic** (R. Brown 1977: 274; Marshall 1978: 57; Klostermann 1929: 9; Gray 1899–1900). **It is hard to be sure, since nothing more is made of his abstinence**. Rather the stress is on John's prophetic office. If Luke 7:25, 33 is any guide, the asceticism of a prophet is the point of the description here. John is specially set apart to God, as his lifestyle will indicate. The presence of God's Spirit with John underscores his prophetic role. Such an association is used elsewhere to refer to great people of God.<sup>45</sup>

- d. John will turn many to the Lord (Luke 1.16).
  - e. John will go forth before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elias (Luke 1.17).<sup>35</sup>
4. Elizabeth conceives: Luke 1.24-25
    - a. “He looked on me, to take away my reproach”: Luke 1.25
  5. Gabriel visits Mary: Luke 1.26-38

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing<sup>36</sup> which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (Luke 1.35)

### **The faithful willingly submit to God’s will: Matthew 1.18-25, Luke 1.26-38**

Like Mary, we sometimes find that God’s plans for our life are quite different from what we had planned. What do you learn from Mary about accepting God’s will?<sup>37</sup>

6. Mary comes to Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth: Luke 1.39-56
7. Elizabeth delivers John: Luke 1.57-58
8. John is circumcised and Zacharias prophesies: Luke 1.59-80
  - a. Note the Messianic prophecies and expectations in Luke 1.71-74. These expectations will carry over throughout Jesus’ ministry. The expectation of being delivered from one’s enemies is throughout the Hebrew Bible. What if the enemy Jesus came to deliver men from, and John came to prepare men to receive, was the deliverance from sin and death?<sup>38</sup>

---

God’s Spirit is very active in the infancy events (1:35, 41, 67; 2:25–27; Marshall 1978: 58; Tiede 1988). Darrell L. Bock, [Luke 1-9:50 Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament](#), Backer Academic Publishing, 1994, , p. 127-128 electronic version.

<sup>35</sup> This puts John in a special position liturgically, as the priest who is to introduce initiates into the present of Yahweh. This is the position Elias holds. See David Butler’s commentary on this subject: [The Goodness and the Mysteries: On the Path of the Book of Mormon’s Visionary Men](#), CreateSpace, 2012, p. 31-37.

<sup>36</sup> This Greek bit reads, “καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ, “and the holy thing which will be born will be called the Son of God” (my translation). While ἅγιον “holy” is in the neuter, I would probably translate this as “The Holy One that is being born will be called the Son of God.” The reason ἅγιον is in the neuter and not masculine (both neuter and masculine accusative singular use the same form here), is due to the participle γεννώμενον being in the neuter, rather than γεννώμενος, the masculine form of the verb.

<sup>37</sup> [January 2–8. Matthew 1; Luke 1: “Be It unto Me according to Thy Word,”](#) New Testament 2023, ChurchofJesusChrist.org, accessed 11.17.22.

<sup>38</sup> Only a God could bring about this miracle of resurrection. As a teacher of righteousness, Jesus could inspire souls to goodness; as a prophet, he could foreshadow the future; as an intelligent leader of men, he could organize a church; and as a possessor and magnifier of the priesthood, he could heal the sick, give sight to the blind, even raise other dead; **but only as a God could he raise himself from the tomb**, overcome death permanently, and bring incorruption in place of corruption, and replace mortality with immortality... **Ever since mortality came upon Adam, men had feared death, the one enemy which could never be conquered**. Herbs and medicines, prayers and surgery, medicine-men and priests, sorcery and magic, all had been used for millenniums in an attempt to overcome or at least to postpone death—but, in spite of all the machinations and efforts of men in all the earth, up to this time they had failed; and the rich and poor, ignorant and educated... all had gone down in death and gone back to mother earth. Spencer W. Kimball, [Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball](#), “The Godhead,” Deseret Book, 1982.