

Chapter 14: God is with us

Once again our study will become less prescriptive. We will read from the New Testament Gospel's, which detail the life, ministry, and purpose of Jesus Christ. The word Gospel is derived from the Old English words "*god spel which means good news.*" (Hoare) The four accounts written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John demonstrate how Jesus is the Promised One (Messiah) who we discussed in the previous chapter. Let us now open the scriptures to learn about the most important man in human history.

Those who are to come

Read Luke 1.

Remember from the previous chapter that Elijah the prophet will precede the Messiah. In verses 13-17 when the angel announces to Zacharias that his wife Elizabeth will have a son who will go before Him (note that the use of a capital H in this word implies deity which in this case is referring to the Messiah) 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*" (Luke 1:17 (NKJV)). This is a direct fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6 which we previously studied and Gabriel (the angel of the Lord) quoted in part to Zacharias inside the temple.

From verses 26-38 we learn that Gabriel tells Mary that she will conceive a son and that she will call Him Jesus. Already we see Gabriel proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah by mentioning that He will be called "*Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David*". (Luke 1:32 (NKJV)) It is also important to consider the significance of His conception. In verse 35 Mary is told that she will conceive by the Holy Spirit, which makes Jesus the Son of God (for God is manifested in the Holy Spirit). Therefore Gabriel's words to Mary confirm that the prophecies, which we studied in the previous chapter, will be fulfilled by the birth and life of Jesus.

In verses 57-80 we learn that Zacharias' son will be called John. Notice the prophecy that was given to his father. How he speaks of being delivered from their enemies, redemption, and salvation. This confirms to us that Jesus is the Messiah and that John is Elijah who is to come and prepare the way for Him. Consider also the mention of redemption and salvation in this chapter. This is God's great plan, to bring the people to redemption and salvation firstly by preparing them using John's ministry and then through the teachings and works of Jesus.

The Birth of The Messiah

We have previously discovered that the identity of the Messiah can be traced through His genealogy. It is written that He will come from the line of David and His family history is documented in Matthew 1:1-17. And Mark 3:23-38

Now read Luke 2 to learn about the birth and childhood of Jesus.

Please note that another word is used in the New Testament instead of Messiah. In verse 26 we see the word Christ. Using the Interlinear Bible and Strong's Concordance we learn that its definition is as follows:

Christ – 5547 (Greek) – anointed.

This word has the exact same definition as Messiah. The only reason this word is used is due to the fact that the New Testament was written in Greek instead of Hebrew as this language was in use in Israel at the time of Jesus and became quite popular as Greeks began to integrate themselves into Jewish society. As an interesting side note the Old Testament scriptures were translated by 70 Greek Scholars into their language, and were compiled into a book called the Septuagint. This took place slightly before the birth of Jesus, which allowed the testimony and word of God to reach the Greek people. Therefore this was one of the contributory factors, which caused the New Testament scriptures to be written in Greek, as this was a more modern and more internationally used language at that time.

Let us return to our study and consider the humble birth of Jesus described in verses 1-7. This is not a typical birth for a king. Rather than being born in a palace with servants and pleasant surroundings He was born in a stable and laid in a manger. (a trough or box, which is used to hold food for animals in a stable) Therefore from His birth God gave Jesus a humble beginning. Born to an ordinary and simple family, without riches who came from Nazareth, which was a poverty stricken area at that time.

The humble beginning of Jesus is a part of the prophecy given to us in Isaiah 7:10-15, which states that: *"Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good."* Honey is sweet but curds are made from milk mixed with either lemon juice or vinegar. Therefore curds have a bitter taste in comparison with honey. This prophecy is not literal but it is intended to describe the circumstances of Jesus' life. Living a humble existence with a poor family enduring bad times and enjoying the blessing of good times as opposed to trusting in riches, but also having the full richness of being God's son and the role of Messiah. Therefore because of the humble beginning which God gave to Him He was able to choose good over evil being aware not just of the consequences of His actions but also having the example and lesson of living a simple life, uncluttered by the entrapment of riches, which taught Him to appreciate the love of family and a life of faith rather than trusting in material wealth.

Notice also in verses 8-20 that Jesus is acknowledged as the Messiah by the angels who tell the shepherds about his birth. Consider how it is the task of the angels to announce His birth. This is because Jesus' identity was God's best kept secret. Even the prophets did not fully perceive His identity but as we previously discovered, hidden glimpses of Him were given in the Old Testament. Only some characteristics of His identity were revealed and His purpose. Also one important prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. This is written Micah 5:2 which clearly states that the Messiah will be born in this location.

In verses 21-32 Simeon prophesies about Jesus. He recognises Him as the saviour, the one who will bring salvation (to deliver from sin) as was revealed to him by God through the Holy Spirit. Consider how strange this was for Mary to hear. She was told that she would conceive despite her virginity the Son of God, but Simeon prophesied in her presence that He will be salvation and

revelation to the Gentiles. This is a key word that is used in his prophecy, which reveals more about Jesus' purpose. This word is used to describe a person who is Non Jewish. Someone who is not a part of the children of Israel and therefore someone who does not believe in God. Therefore he prophesied that Jesus would bring salvation and revelation to all nations.

We must also consider what is mentioned in verses 36-39 when Anna gave thanks to God and spoke about Jesus to all those who "*looked for redemption*". Not only was Jesus sent to bring salvation to the people but the people were also actively seeking redemption for their sins. Relate this back to our study in chapter 12 and remember our conclusion that God is seeking true repentance from us, and whilst Jesus was busy learning and questioning in the temple to prepare Himself for ministry, John was preparing the way for Him, seeking those who sought redemption, to prepare them for the coming of the Saviour.

Prepare the way

"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.

Malachi 3:1 (NKJV)

As prophesied in Malachi 3:1 John (The Baptist) prepared the way for Jesus. Read Luke 3 to discover how John The Baptist accomplished this.

Once John had received his instruction from God, he began to teach that those who wished to repent from their sins should be baptised. (to be dipped in water which symbolises dying to your old life and being reborn into a new life. See Romans 6:1-4). Notice how John distinguished the act of repentance from true repentance. In verses 7-14 he challenges those who have come to be baptised to be truly repentful. He reminds them that simply completing this as a ritual but not actually demonstrating repentance by changing their behaviour will not be acceptable. He commands the people to adopt a more charitable nature, to consider others before themselves, and to act according to God's will in all their daily business. This is a direct fulfilment of the prophecy mentioned in Malachi 4:6 that "*he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers*" by challenging them to demonstrate acts of loving kindness to one another and to abstain from any form of deception. He also teaches them to turn their hearts back to God through true repentance.

The purpose of John's ministry was to prepare the way for Jesus. The baptism of water as mentioned by him in verse 16 demonstrates repentance of sin but the baptism that Jesus provides, will be of the Holy Spirit. Therefore John informs the people that Jesus will cause those who believe to effectively die to their old sinful life and be reborn to a new life, being saved from the consequences of their sin by the power of God through the Holy Spirit. What great joy it must have been for John, when Jesus was revealed to him as the Messiah when he baptised Him. (verses 21-22) It was at this point that Jesus' ministry began and John's mission of preparation was fulfilled.