

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
December 4, 2016

Lesson Text: Luke 1:26-38

Lesson Title: The Promise of a Saviour

Introduction

The first promise of a coming Savior is recorded in Genesis 3:15, *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”* This glorious promise is made in the context of God’s curse on Satan when sin entered the world. So here the gospel, the good news, makes its entrance into human history. For centuries to come, this was the only gospel, the only promise. One small promise with eternal fulfillment.

In the midst of God’s curse on Satan, a message of hope shines forth. The woman’s offspring, a child, will one day come and defeat the Serpent and sin. That offspring is Jesus Christ the virgin born son of Mary.

Hearing God’s Promise (Luke 1:26-33)

Verse 26-27

“And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

The name “Gabriel” means “strong man of God.” Gabriel is one of only two angels named in the Bible. All his appearances relate to Christmas and the coming Messiah. The Muslims regard Gabriel with holy reverence because they believe he gave the Koran (Muslim bible) to the prophet Muhammad. Gabriel would give God’s message, but not to Muhammad.

Gabriel’s face appears first in the Old Testament. He told Daniel the vision of the ram, the goats and the seventy weeks (Daniel 8:16). Gabriel is the first to “reveal” or “make known” the Christmas story in the New Testament. Gabriel first appeared to Zacharias in Luke 1:11-19. He told Zacharias he would be the father to the forerunner of the Messiah. Gabriel’s appearance to Mary was his second appearance. He would later appear to Joseph in Matthew 1:20 to verify Jesus’ royal lineage.

The Promise of a Savior was given to Mary “in the sixth month” of Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John the Baptist. God sent Gabriel unto a “city of Galilee, named Nazareth.” The name “Nazareth” most likely comes from one of two

Hebrew words. *Netser* is the Hebrew word for “branch” or “shoot,” which forms a wordplay for Isaiah 11:1 and Matthew 2:23. “Nazareth” was a remote Jewish village that had been taken by the Romans and turned into a garrison of soldiers. A “virgin” living in a sinful military environment is interesting. God can use a garrison of Roman soldiers to protect His chosen instrument to bring the Savior into the world!

“Mary” first appears in Scripture when the angel Gabriel speaks to her in Luke 1:26-27. Luke tells us “Mary” was “a virgin.” The Greek word for “virgin” is *parthenos* {par-then-os} which means “maiden” or “unmarried daughter.” Although “Mary” was “espoused” or engaged to be married to Joseph, she had not yet had sexual contact with Joseph or any man when she conceived Jesus by the Holy Ghost.

“Mary” was qualified to be the mother of Jesus. Both Joseph and Mary descended from David, so prior to David, they shared the same genealogy. Mary’s branch of David’s family tree can be traced through David’s son Nathan, while Joseph’s branch is the royal line through Solomon. Christ inherited David’s throne through His stepfather, Joseph. Jesus’ blood relationship to David came through Mary who descended from a branch of David’s family.

Verse 28

“And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.”

Meeting Gabriel must have been intimidating for Mary. She was somewhere between the age of twelve and fourteen at the time of Gabriel’s visit. Gabriel’s greeting, “Hail, thou art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee...” was necessary and appropriate. “Highly favoured” means “graced of God” or “endued with grace.” These words do not mean Mary became a dispenser of grace, resulting in prayers being offered to her. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is false doctrine. Mary would be appalled at such heresy!

Mary needed “grace” to be a fit vessel for what was about to happen in her. “The Lord is with thee” declares the comforting presence of God which Mary so desperately needed. She was indeed “blessed among women.” The words mean “favored beyond all others.” No woman has ever lived on earth to whom God has shown such grace.

Verse 29

“And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.”

What the angel said to Mary “troubled” her. “Troubled” means “disturbed, agitated, confused.” Mary was “troubled” because she knew she was a sinner and she could not understand how or why God would grace her in such a manner. How could she be used of God in such a privileged way?

The promise of a Savior should humble each of us as it did Mary. To understand God sent His only begotten Son into the world to save sinners is a humbling truth. Like Mary, we should be “troubled” in the sense we will never understand how or why God has favored us with His saving grace!

Verse 30

“And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.”

Gabriel’s greeting to Mary was both fearful and comforting. Angelic appearances always generated a measure of “fear.” Whatever Gabriel’s glorious form was like and however deep Mary’s “troubled” was, she was able to get beyond it and hear Gabriel’s message, “Fear not.”

Mary had nothing to “fear” because she had “found favour with God.” The “favour” or grace Mary had received from the Lord manifested itself in several ways, recorded in verses 31-33.

Verse 31-33

“And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

First, Mary would “conceive” in her “womb, and bring forth a son.” Every Hebrew woman longed to become pregnant and hoped for a son. Jews, more than any other ancient culture, cherished their children. The blessing of a “son” meant the family legacy would continue for generations to come (Isaiah 7:14). Mary’s “son” would be named “Jesus.” “Jesus” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name “Joshua.” The name means, “the Lord saves” (Matthew 1:21).

Second, “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest.” “Great” is the Greek word *megas*, which means “big, large.” John the Baptist was also called “great” (Luke 1:15) and “*the prophet of the Highest*” (Luke 1:76). Where John the Baptist is called “*the prophet of the Highest*” (Luke 1:76), Jesus is called “Son of the Highest.” Since a son bears his father’s qualities, calling a person someone else’s “son” was a way of signifying equality. Gabriel was

telling Mary the baby she would carry in her womb would be equal to the Most High God.

Third, “the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.” The promised Savior, Jesus Christ, was David’s physical descendant through Mary’s line. Gabriel revealed to Mary her son would become the King of Israel, not in the illegitimate way others had become king, but legitimately as a true descendant of David (2 Samuel 7:16) and Judah (Genesis 49:10).

Fourth, “he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever” emphasizes the Jewish character of the millennial kingdom and the eternal permanence of Christ’s rule over all (Isaiah 9:7; Daniel 2:44). Mary knew exactly what Gabriel meant by these words. She would become the mother of the long-expected Messiah!

Fifth, “and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” The Lord chose David to become king, but even this great man after God’s own heart failed to serve God faithfully. So, the Lord promised David that through his lineage One would come and His kingdom would last forever (2 Samuel 7:13-16). Gabriel promised Mary’s son would be that very king!

Trusting God’s Promise (Luke 1:34-38)

Verse 34

“Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”

Mary was more puzzled at Gabriel’s message than just unbelieving. She is absolutely baffled by what Gabriel has announced to her. Mary does not have the benefit of over 2,000 years of Christian history and the complete canon of Scriptures. She cannot pick up a Bible and find out how all of this works out. She must trust God’s promises as given to her by Gabriel.

“How shall this be, seeing I know not a man” is a practical and reasonable question. Her use of the word “know” is a euphemism for sexual relations (Genesis 4:1; 19:8; Judges 21:12; Matthew 1:25). Obviously, the Lord did not expect Mary to sin in conceiving the promised child. So, how would this take place?

Verse 35

“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 which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

In answer to Mary’s question, Gabriel provided a straightforward answer. His answer was *theological* and *biological*. God Himself would miraculously form

within her what a human male normally supplies during the sexual relationship between a husband and wife. Mary's conception would not be a normal sexual relationship. Hers would be a miraculous supernatural conception involving no man.

The conception of Jesus Christ in this manner is crucial to the gospel. It is crucial to biblical theology, because it protects the nature of Christ as God and man. The promised Savior had to be born of God to be the "Son of God." The promised Savior had to be born of woman to be the "Son of Man." Mary, who is human, and God, who is divine, are brought together by the work of the "Holy Ghost" and one is born of God and woman who is both God and man, the God-man, Christ Jesus!

Note: If you believe Jesus is only a man, a good man, a prophet, or a created angel, if you say anything other than He was the God-Man, you are not a Christian. The Christian faith is built upon the nature of Jesus as the God-Man which is defined from this conception. In order to be the Son of God, Jesus had to be born of God. In order to be the Son of Man, He had to be born of a woman.

Verse 36

"And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren."

While Mary did not ask for any sign of confirmation regarding what she had just heard, Gabriel provided some information to build her confidence and encourage her faith. He told her about her "cousin Elisabeth" and how "she hath also conceived a son in her old age." God has given Zacharias and Elisabeth a miraculous pregnancy as well. "Elisabeth," once "barren," was now "six months" pregnant with John the Baptist.

Two pregnant women, two expectant mothers. "Elisabeth" is old, married for many years, childless and barren. "Mary" is young, having never been married and a virgin. "Elisabeth" is in her 70's. "Mary" in her early teens. Interestingly, they are relatives. They have both been chosen by God to be the human instruments for the birth of two very unusual men: John the Baptist, the greatest prophet who ever lived up until his time, and Jesus Christ, Son of Man, Son of God, the promised Savior of the world.

Verse 37

"For with God nothing shall be impossible."

These words of Gabriel to Mary alluded to the Lord's visit to Abraham and Sarah in their old age, "*Is anything too hard for the LORD*" (Genesis 18:14). Mary knew that story well and she knew her faith and trust must rest on the

sovereignty of God. Basically, Gabriel is saying, “Mary, here is the bottom line. Nothing is impossible with our God!”

Verse 38

“And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.”

Mary's response to all God has said through Gabriel is amazing. Luke is pointing us to this simple faith and humility displayed by Mary because her response is an example of how every believer should respond to the Lord's will.

Her response, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord...” are her words to Gabriel declaring she is the Lord's permanent servant. If this is what the Lord wants, Mary is ready to obey. “Be it unto me according to thy word” are words of submission to the will of God. They are beautiful words of her commitment to the Lord, because submission to the will of God is the mark of a true child of God.

Gabriel's work is complete. His message has been delivered. Mary has heard and obeyed. The promised Savior will soon be on the way!

Conclusion

The promise of the Savior is an old promise. It was first given to Adam in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). That promise was the only Gospel Adam heard. Yet, he believed it and was saved. How do we know he believed it? Because he called his wife “Eve” which means “life” or “life-giver.” God said Adam and Eve would die, and Adam did die physically after 930 years. But long before he died physically, he had died spiritually, in that he was separated from God because of sin. God promised the birth of a Savior through the woman, and Adam believed this promise and was saved. God did not change the physical consequences of sin, but He did give Adam eternal life through the promise of a Savior to come.

Like Adam, everyone born into this world is dead in trespasses and sin (1 Corinthians 15:22a; Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13). Like Adam, everyone born into this world has the promise of a Savior if they will repent of unbelief and believe (John 1:12; Romans 10:12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:22b).

Without every question answered or every detail explained, Mary placed her faith in the ability of Almighty God to provide a Savior. Faith and trust are still essential to salvation. Have you believed?

Amen.