

5In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. 7But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.

*8Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, 9according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. 11And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. 13But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. 14“You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15“For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. 16“And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. 17“It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN**, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

I'm already having fun studying Dr. Luke's book. Anytime I'm discovering things I've not seen before in God's book, I get excited. That makes my work on your behalf, fun. Rewarding.

And God has been very gracious to me. This book is a bottomless gold mine. I can truly say, after 48 years, anytime I look in here, I discover new and exciting things I'd not thought of before. If I lived to be a thousand, it wouldn't be any different.

So, let me lay some groundwork for you that I hope will make Luke's account more fantastic, because it really is wonderful.

Luke's stated purpose back in vs. 1 is to bring his friend Theophilus, up to date on everything that has been accomplished among a group that Luke simply defines as "us".

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Something has happened to a group called us. And there is a crystal clear point when whatever it is that happened had a beginning. He says; from the beginning, two times. So there is a distinct beginning.

OK, so what happened, and what was the beginning.

What happened is truly earth shattering. God, had seemingly turned His back on His people, Israel, had shut the door on them and had been silent for 400 years.

400 years of silence in Israel. No prophet. No king. And Israel as a people were no longer a sovereign nation. Since the king of

Babylon had come and taken the people captive and carried them to Babylon for 70 years, they had been allowed to come home to their real estate, and they were free to carry on their prescribed worship, had even rebuilt their temple, but they were not sovereign.

First the Persians, then the Greeks, and now the Romans were their governors. And God had gone silent.

Turn with me to Hosea (or just listen as I read) to get an idea of their situation from God's perspective. Hosea explains why God has gone silent.

God gives Israel a picture story through the life of this prophet.

1The word of the LORD which came to Hosea the son of Beeri, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

2When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD." 3So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. 4And the LORD said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5"On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel."

6Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I would ever forgive them. 7"But I will have compassion on the house of Judah

and deliver them by the LORD their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses or horsemen.”

8When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son. 9And the LORD said, “Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not your God.”

*10Yet the number of the sons of Israel
Will be like the sand of the sea,
Which cannot be measured or numbered;
And in the place
Where it is said to them,
“You are not My people,”
It will be said to them,
“You are the sons of the living God.”*

*11And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together,
And they will appoint for themselves one leader,
And they will go up from the land,
For great will be the day of Jezreel.*

God illustrates His complaint against His people. Being married to Israel is like being married to a woman, who you love, who takes everything you give her, and can't run away fast enough to other lovers.

It's a heartbreaking vision. A people who God loves and who He pours out plenty and they don't respond in kind. They run off to other lovers, other gods.

So God brings punishment. Israel, the northern 10 tribes is carried away by the Assyrians and they never come back. And Judah, the southern 2 tribes is also carried away by the Babylonians, but they

come back after 70 years.

But when they come back, the relationship is different. Listen to God describe how it will be for them in Hosea chapter 3.

1 Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes."

Gomer, the harlot, has run away from Hosea and has been sold into slavery by this time. We skipped over chapter 2 of Hosea. Here God tells Hosea to purchase again his unfaithful wife.

2 So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley. 3 Then I said to her, "You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you." 4 For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. 5 Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.

The scenario in vs. 4 is heartbreaking. Hosea buys his own wife, who is a harlot, out of slavery, and brings her back home, but it's different.

He says, you're not going to leave and go whoring again. But . . . you're not going to have me, either. The marriage doesn't re-consumate like before. You stay in your room. I'll stay in mine. That's all you can look forward to. How long? Many days.

Did Hosea's prophecy come true? We have the benefit of 2500

years of 20-20 hindsight.

You can point to a place on the map and find Jerusalem, and the Jews are there, back in their real estate, tenuously, as long as larger balances of power continue to guard her safety.

But her relationship with God has been exactly as God said it would be through Hosea. Many days, an unfaithful wife possessed and kept, but no love relationship. They live in different rooms. They don't speak. But, you'll notice, even though that's the situation, for many days, the husband still loves that wife.

Israel has no relationship with God. It's a dead religion. Yes, there are Jews at the wailing wall, bobbing up and down, genuflecting, carrying out religious exercise, but it's dead. Nothing has changed. They are still in that many days of being kept and cared for, but the relationship is as if it was a dead thing. For now. To this very day.

What is Luke talking about then. Something happened. He writes to Theophilus to bring him up to date about; things accomplished among us

Who is the "us" and what has been accomplished?

Well, first off, the "us" is not exactly the Jews. It isn't the nation Israel. It began there, but 60 years later, 60 years into this, whatever it is that is being accomplished, you have a Greek man, Luke, writing scripture and he is clearly part of this group he calls by the pro-noun, "us".

What happened is that God broke His silence after 400 years. The angel came to Zacharias about 400 years after the prophet Malachi.

This is exciting stuff! But; not so much for the Jews. 60 years into

this, the us is not necessarily the Jews. There are some Jews, and indeed what happened happened amongst Jews, but clearly, the us is bigger than the nation Israel, and in fact, after just 60 years it's become clear that Israel was blinded to what God is doing and has done.

The *us*, the group that was formed, after God broke His long silence, is an elect group of Christians who have been called out of this broken world, not just from Israel, but clearly, God is calling people to belong to Him from every nation on earth.

And Luke himself is the astonishing proof of that phenomenon. A Greek writing scripture?? Oh my! That's different!

Paul spends 3 chapters in the book of Romans, 9 - 11, defining this very phenomenon. Israel has been set aside, temporarily. And God is calling Gentiles from every nation to Himself.

Paul sums up that argument in chapter 11 of Romans; *25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this **mystery**—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;*

*26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,
“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”*

*27 “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”*

28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are

irrevocable.

Paul says; This is a great mystery. A mystery to those writers was something new God was doing that no one saw coming. God sets His nation aside and goes to the gentiles.

God is having a love relationship with the gentiles in order to make his wife of harlotry jealous.

Luke is speaking from a perspective, 60 years into this mystery, he says to his friend Theophilus, I'm going to write down how God brought this incredible thing that He's doing about. And so he does. And it begins in the book of Malachi.

The story of Zacharias and Elizabeth is old Testament. It only makes sense if we understand the last thing Israel ever heard from God, before the long night of blackness and silence began.

Listen to Malachi, chapter 4. These are God's final words to His people before the silence begins; Pay particular attention to vs. 2 where He speaks of the Sun of righteousness. S-u-n. A play on words.

1 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." 2 "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. 3 "You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts.

4 "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes

and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

5 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6 “He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

Those words close out the Old Testament. After those words, silence. Darkness descends on Israel like a curtain. A long night begins, and with 20 - 20 hindsight we could say, but for a small remnant, they are still in that night.

Paul said; *Brethren, I would not have you be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in*

Darkness and blindness are the same thing. God in His infinite wisdom, brought the long awaited sunrise, daylight at the end of the night, but His people were blind to it. All but a remnant, and Zacharias and Elizabeth were among that remnant.

Zacharias quotes Malachi and says at the end of this chapter; 76
*“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE
HIS WAYS;*

*77 To give to His people the knowledge of salvation
By the forgiveness of their sins,*

*78 Because of the tender mercy of our God,
With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,*

*79 TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND
THE SHADOW OF DEATH,*

To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

We'll visit those words again in a few weeks, but I wanted you to see how Zacharias and Elisabeth are in direct sequence to Malachi 4.

Darkness descends on Israel after Malachi's final words, and it is lifted when Gabriel visits Zecharias 400 years later, but only partially.

The Sunrise comes, but Israel, in their judgemental blindness miss it, and the Son shines on the gentiles. A phenomenal thing. A great mystery, now revealed. And 60 years into that mystery, Luke, a gentile, says, Here's how it came about, to Theophilus, also a gentile.

A gentile, writing to another gentile, tells the story of how Israel missed their own Messiah, murdered Him, and He rose from the dead and is calling out a people for God's own possession, from the nations.

John the apostle, who walked with Jesus from day 1 when John the baptist revealed Him at the Jordan river, says this about the nation of Israel in John 12;

35 So Jesus said to them, “For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. 36 “While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.”

Jesus himself uses Malachi's reference to the Sun dawning on

Israel. Malachi's final words. The Sun will rise. Jesus pleads with them to recognize the Light of the world.

After 400 years of silence, darkness, wouldn't you be thrilled that your God is in your midst doing miracles. More miracles than ever before. The seems like it would be hard to miss. Hard to ignore. back to Jn 12.

These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them. 37 But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. 38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" 39 For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 40 "HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM."

Jesus says to the Jews; The Sun is out. Darkness has subsided. Believe, because the window of daylight is ending. And some believed. A remnant stayed in the sunlight. But most of Israel went back into the long terrifying vacuous darkness.

They are there today. Astonishing! No human mind could have dreamed or imagined what God set forth in this book, before it happened, this great mystery that we are a part of.

We have enjoyed the Sonshine for 2000 years while Israel has been set aside in their empty darkness. How wonderful for the nations. How terrible for Israel.

We believe that soon, according to this book, we will be removed from this world and Israel will endure not only darkness, but 7

years of terror. Judgement in which 2/3 of them who are alive in Israel will perish.

But at the end of the tribulation, the 1/3, the remnant will awake from their blindness. and recognize their Saviour, and weep for Him as one weeps for an only Son, and they will all be saved.

Glorious day! No wonder that Paul finishes his description of this mystery in 11 of Romans with an outburst of praise for the God who has designed what no human could have ever designed and is bringing it about before our very eyes. What an exciting time to live!!

Paul says, better than we could ever say; *33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*

That's our introduction to Luke's account of what God has accomplished among . . . us. Pinch yourself. You're in that group. You are part of Luke's pronoun. We are the US.

And God is still accomplishing what he began when He broke the silence, 400 years after Malachi closed the old testament. With this angel that visits Zacharias, the silence is broken and He again speaks to His people Israel, just as from days of old.

An angel appears and breaks the silence. A great miracle. God is going to announce in Israel through miracles and angels and things only God can perform, that the Sunshine is coming. The Son is

about to rise.

Well then. The Spirit has seen fit for us to be out of time, and we will look forward to enjoying the story of Zacharas and Elizabeth, the miraculous visit by an angel, the silence of Zacharias as the angel strikes him dumb, and the miracle of people long past child bearing years who have been hopelessly barren, to bring forth the man who will announce God's chosen Messiah.

Oh Israel! The long terrible silence is about to be over!

The most astonishing miracle of all is that by God's sovereign choice, Israel slept right through the brilliant light, and stayed in darkness, and God has seen fit to shine His light on the nations.

You and me! A plan that only the mind of God could have thought of and brought about.

I hope that the hair on the back of your neck is tingling as you think about the astonishing plan of God and how it is unfolding, and how we fit perfectly into it.

And I'll say it again, 2000 years after Luke; Oh Israel! The long terrible silence is about to be over! We believe it will be soon.

Let's quickly look at the first couple of verses that mark the end of God's silence to Israel. 400 years of terrible silence and darkness, as if God was dead or had abandoned them. It ends with this event!

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea,

This is the Herod who murders anybody, family included, who might be a threat to his reign. When the wise men who travelled

from Persia because they had seen the star of Jesus in the east told him they were looking for a new born king, he murders all the Jewish boys, 2 years old and younger.

there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah

Abijah was one of 24 sons that Aaron's 2 living sons had which was the beginning of the Aaronic priesthood.

So the priesthood in Israel was made up of 24 houses. Zachariah wasn't necessarily a descendant of Abijah, it was more a division of houses to separate the priests in orders.

There would have been 18000 priests when this was written. 1/24th of that would be 750. So those 750 priests would serve 2 weeks as priests in the temple each year. And it was Zechariah's turn to serve.

and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

From the daughters of Aaron. Elizabeth can trace her heritage back to Aaron as well as Zechariah. They are both steeped in the priestly worship of Israel.

6 They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.

Even though Israel in this time frame when Jesus comes is apostate, they had digressed to a works righteousness system which God considered filthy rags, God always has a remnant.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous because they believed that somehow God would forgive their internal sinfulness. They trusted God for deliverance from sin that they understood was still present.

And they were childless. Elizabeth was barren. And not only that, the time for bearing children had come and gone. Advanced in years could mean any time from autumn to winter. They were likely somewhere between 60 and perhaps even 80 years old.

And being childless in Israel was a stigma. The rest of Israel considered your childlessness as a judgement from God. There would have been whispering, all those years, about why God had judged Elizabeth and Zacharias with barrenness.

Like Jobs friends who just know there was secret sin that brought the judgement. And you couldn't tell them otherwise. That was how it was for this Godly couple. Whisper whisper whisper, and finally you're too old for it to ever be any different. Your time has passed.

8 Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. 11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense.

We'll stop just here and pick up the narrative next time. But this angel, this miracle of God showing up in Israel, is the beginning. This is the first evidence of God, doing something in Israel, for 400 years. Pretty exciting stuff.