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Herod the Great Luke 1:5

Luke 1:5, *There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.*

We are going to look at two characters from this verse and following.

1. Herod the Great
2. Zacharias

Luke in his first chapter writes 80 verses.

Luke 1:78, *Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;*

"The Dayspring from on high has visited us."

That is a reference to the Jewish Messiah, which refer to the birth of Christ.

We can conclude that the account of chapter 1 covers the final hours of darkness before that sunrise arrives, before Messiah comes.

For Israel had been long and dark, not only for Israel but for the world, waiting for the Saviour.

History of Israel started with calling of Abraham.

History of exile 400 years in Egypt.

Wanderings forty years in the wilderness.

Conquest of the land of Canaan.

Occupation of the land of Canaan.

Captivity, the northern kingdom in 722 B.C.

Captivity of the southern kingdom in 586 B.C.

Northern kingdom never returned.

Southern kingdom returning seventy years later.

Israel coming back out of captivity and trying to rebuild.

Oppressed as Greeks invaded and controlled the land

Romans came and further oppressed them.

The long night of Israel's history of blessing and cursing mixed.

The long night of Israel's history of faithfulness and apostasy.

What sustained those who really looked toward God through all those long, long years of darkness was the hope that the sunrise would break.

The last book of the Old Testament prophet was Malachi.

Malachi promised in the last chapter of the last Old Testament book that the sun of righteousness would arise with healing in its beams.

Malachi 4:1-2, *“For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the Lord of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves.*

The darkness is not permanent, but it is usually true that the darkness is the deepest just before the dawn.

For 400 years since Malachi prophesied that “The sun of righteousness will rise,” God never spoke.

There was no prophet in Israel.

There was no prophet in Judah.

There was no revelation from God.

Therefore, it was the darkest time of all.

For 400 years heaven was silent.

Prayers went up but it seemed as though they hit brass and bounced back.

Israel sunk deeper and deeper into depression, oppressed by the Greeks whose ruler Antiochus Epiphanes (**216-164 B.C.**) actually had the absolute desolation to step into the sacred Holy of Holies. He entered the holy place of the temple, and desecrate those places, and sacrificing a pig on the altar.

It was that time when the Gentile Greeks came in and brought their pagan gods and their pagan theology and mingled it in that sacred land with the people of Israel.

They were followed by the Romans (**around 146B.C.**) also with all their idolatries. This made the depression all the greater. The Jewish people cried out to God, God didn't speak, and no prophet appeared.

Where was the sun of righteousness?

No one dreamed it would be 400 years from the prophecy to its fulfilment.

Malachi 4:3, *You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this," Says the Lord of hosts.*

Where was the day of which Malachi also prophesied?

Where was the day when righteousness triumphed over evil?

The prophet said it will come.

The light will break.

The dawn will come.

The sun will rise.

He was referring to the Messiah, the Christ, the Saviour of Israel, and the world.

Malachi, that last prophet, also said that that Saviour, that Deliverer, that sun of righteousness that will rise, that One who will bring righteousness to prevail over evil will in fact be the Lord Himself.

Malachi 3:1, *“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the Lord of hosts.*

So, the Lord of hosts says the Lord is coming. We know then that the One who comes, the Messiah, will in fact be God Himself.

This is how the Old Testament ends.

It ends with the promise of light, the promise of the sun of righteousness, the sunrise on high, the light of the world, Messiah, the Lord Saviour will come and shatter the deepening darkness.

400 years have gone by since Malachi's words were uttered in about 430 B.C.

No prophet appeared, no word from God at all, and no light.

Israel not only sunk deeper into depression because of oppressing nations occupying her land but sank deeper into sin and apostasy until by the time the gospel of Luke begins.

Judaism was existing in the land of Israel was apostate. It had abandoned the true message of the Old Testament for a false one. Engaging itself in works-righteousness, self-righteousness, and all those things which God hates.

Israel had suffered then from sin and apostasy as well as the oppression of foreign nations desecrating its holy ground.

Where was the light?

Where was the sun?

Where was the dawn of redemption?

Where was the hope of every Jewish heart?

Another critical element of the predictions that Malachi made we should remember.

Before the sun of righteousness is coming, before the sun rises, before the Messiah, Lord Saviour comes there will come a prophet to announce His arrival, a herald, an announcer.

He is often called a forerunner.

Malachi 3:1, *“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will come*

to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the Lord of hosts.

Isaiah spoke of the messenger of the arrival of Messiah.

Isaiah said he will be a voice in the wilderness, crying out to clear the way for the Lord, make smooth a highway for my God.

Isaiah 40:3-5, *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; ⁵The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

Both Isaiah and Malachi prophesied before the sun arises before the Messiah comes will come a prophet pointing toward Him.

When the Messiah's forerunner arrives, the silence of heaven will be broken with the voice of God and the darkness of earth will be shattered with the light of the Saviour and Redeemer.

Then the world will know when the Messiah arrives.

How will they know?

Because he will be preceded by His forerunner.

Before the sun of righteousness, before the sun rising from on high will come this prophet, this forerunner, and he will announce the arrival of the Messiah.

The silence then will be broken when the forerunner arrives. Then the Messiah will come and the saga of salvation.

V 5, There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

This connects the Old Testament with the New Testament. The Old Testament and the New Testament do not propose two different religions.

There is not the religion of Judaism and the religion of Christianity.

Rather, the Old and the New Testament are one revelation from God with continuity telling the story of redemption, of only one religion, one faith and that is faith in the true and living God which involves His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is one complete revelation from God. Either the Old or the New is incomplete without the other.

Luke begins the story of salvation with John the Baptist because that links John the Baptist as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies and that shows the accuracy of Scripture's prophecies.

The Old Testament makes predictions which the New Testament fulfils.

Beginning the story with John the Baptist also is important because John the Baptist's birth was the first point at which God spoke.

"In the days of Herod, king of Judea."

History has given us an immense amount of information regarding Herod the Great.

Herod was known as Herod I in terms of the fact that he was the first of a long list of Herod's who ruled in one way or another in the land of Palestine. But he commonly called himself Herod the Great, Herod the Great, king of Judea.

Herod the Great was the first of several Herod's mentioned in the New Testament. One of the things that a New Testament student must do is sort out all the Herod's, and this is where it all begins.

Antipater, father of Herod was appointed to be procurator, or to be governor of Judea under the Roman occupation. When Julius Caesar defeated Pompey, Antipater rescued Caesar in Alexandria, and was made chief minister of Judea, as Judah became known to the Romans,

What the Romans did in the development of the great Roman Empire was they just took over all kinds of nations and when they established their control militarily of those nations they then placed someone in power there who was a representative of the Roman government so they would have control. Antipater was selected to do that in the land of Judea under the Roman occupation. He was the Roman-appointed governor in that land.

Antipater then managed to have his son, Herod, appointed prefect of Galilee. The northern part of Palestine is an area of Galilee and he managed to get his son the position of ruling and representing the Roman government in Galilee.

Now in that office Herod was quite successful. Herod was a smart guy. He planned his strategy very well to achieve his goals.

One of the problems that the Romans had to deal with in the land of Palestine was terrorism!
Nothing new under the sun.

Terrorism in the Middle East did not just start in this century. There were all kinds of Jewish terrorists. There were some of them known as the sicarii, because that was the term for “little sword.” They were dagger carriers who went around in the crowds and when they found a Roman soldier or Roman citizen, they would assassinate them.

There were terrorist activities going on in Galilee as well. Herod was very successful in bringing those guerrilla bands of terrorists to accounting, to imprisonment, and really did away with them. He was very successful in that, so he garnered lot of goodwill from the Romans toward him.

The Parthians (**39-38 B.C**), another group of people, came into that area, invaded Palestine rather formidably while Herod was in that northern area, so he fled to Rome. He was in Rome. The Romans liked him because of what he was able to do.

The Romans wanted him to go back and they wanted him to fight the Parthians and get them back out of the land of Palestine, so they gave him an army. He was declared by Octavian and Antony, with the concurrence of the Roman Senate, to be king of the Jews. That happened in Rome and they gave him an army and sent him back.

Herod invaded Palestine the next year and after years of fighting, drove out the Parthians and established himself as the king of the Jews throughout Palestine. The year was 37 B.C.

Now Herod had a problem. He was not Jewish. Worse than that, he was an Edomite.

Edom had been cursed by God. He was an Edomite, often called an Idumaeen. He worried about that.

Herod was very concerned about his reputation, so he married a Jewish girl by the name of **Mariamne**. She was not just any Jewish girl but she was an heiress to the Jewish Hasmonaean house, a very, very well-established and noble family.

Herod did it in order to make himself more acceptable to the Jews that he now ruled.

He was a clever man.

He was a very capable warrior.

History tells us he was an immensely gifted orator, and he was a diplomat.

For example, of severe economic hardship he had a surplus from taxation. He took the surplus and gave it back to the people. (Reminding the time of Covid 19 is not?)

There was in 25 B.C. a great famine in the land of Palestine and Herod, being the diplomat that he was, melted down some of the most beautiful objects in his palace to buy food for the poor, and thus in some way endeared himself to the people.

He built theatres and he built racetracks and he built other athletic and entertainment structures in the land of Palestine, the ruins of which you can even see today.

He revived Samaria, which had kind of fallen into a waste place. He built the most beautiful port city of Caesarea which you can see elements of his buildings there. He named it in honour of his benefactor, Caesar Augustus, which was the title of Octavian.

He embellished the cities of Beirut, and Damascus, and Tyre and Sidon and even the city of Rhodes.

Herod even contributed to the rebuilding of the great city of Athens, very successful as a leader and a ruler. He built the remarkable and frankly almost impregnable fortress of Masada.

Masada down in the desert, down by the Dead Sea, elevated high up on a mountain top, Masada where in A.D. 73 nearly a thousand Jewish defenders committed suicide rather than be captured by the Roman general, Flavius Silva, who had besieged Masada. It was the summer home of Herod, actually.

Herod is known for his colossal building projects throughout Judea, including his renovation of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and the expansion of the Temple Mount towards its north, the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, the construction

of the port at Caesarea Maritima, the fortress at Masada, and Herodium.

Those are his achievements, but personally he was cruel and merciless and vicious beyond description.

He was incredibly jealous, completely suspicious of everybody and afraid that someone was going to take his position and power. He feared every potential threat and every threat that was just manufactured in his own mind.

For example, he had the high priest, the Jewish high priest Aristobulus, drowned. That was bad enough, but it was his wife's brother, which made it worse.

His wife was not happy about that. By the way, he attended the funeral of the brother-in-law he had drowned and wept in a pretence of affection, and then, to silence his wife about what had happened, he killed her.

Then knowing, that mothers-in-law can be a problem, he killed her mother.

Fearing that his sons might tell the truth about him, he killed two of them.

Five days before his death, which is about a year after Jesus was born, he had a third son executed.

One of the greatest evidences of his blood-thirstiness and his insane cruelty was having the most distinguished citizens of Jerusalem all rounded up and imprisoned just before his death. He knew he was dying.

He got all these nobles and put them all in prison. He knew that no one would mourn his death because everyone knew him as a slaughtering, massacring, serial killer.

He knew no one would mourn his death so he ordered that at the moment of his death all of those nobles who were in prison be instantly executed so at least there would be mourning in Jerusalem when he died, even if it wasn't for him.

That barbaric act, along with all the others, really pales in the light of the most horrifying thing that he ever did.

When he heard that a king had been born in Bethlehem, in order to kill that king, he slaughtered all the male Jewish children in Bethlehem and its surroundings from two years old.

In the hope of killing someone who might someday be a threat to his throne. How paranoid he must have been at his age to fear a child under the age of two.

Matthew 2:1-4, *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²saying, "Where is He who has been*

born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

Matthew 2:16, *Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.*

That is Herod.

