

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Luke 1:26-45

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, December 1, 2013
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The ***International Bible Lesson*** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, December 1, 2013**, is from **Luke 1:26-40**. The commentary below includes the additional verses, **Luke 1:41-45**, which can be included in the lesson for December 1 or December 8, 2013, if time permits. I highly recommend the study of **Luke 1:41-45. Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the *International Bible Lesson Commentary* website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught and in *The Oklahoman* newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Luke 1:26-40

(Luke 1:26) In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

During the sixth month after Elizabeth had conceived John the Baptist, the angel Gabriel, who had appeared to Zechariah in the temple and had foretold the conception and birth of John the Baptist, was sent by God to visit the virgin Mary, who would soon become the mother of Jesus the Messiah. Whereas John's parents were of the tribe of Levi and lived in Judea, Mary and Joseph were of the tribe of Judah and they lived north of Judea in land formerly occupied by the northern kingdom, called the Kingdom of Israel. Since Elizabeth and Mary were related, Mary may also have had some Levite priests in her ancestry. Joseph, who would become Jesus' legal father, was of the house of David of the tribe of Judah.

(Luke 1:27) to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Some Bible teachers state that the virgin Mary was probably only 12 or 13 years old when the angel Gabriel appeared to her; however, just because some rabbis say a girl at that time could be engaged or betrothed to be married at the age of 12 and married at the age of 13 is no indication that Mary was that young. Mary was probably younger than 20 years old, but the Bible does not indicate her age. In

my opinion, God would have chosen an older girl to bear the infant Jesus for her sake as well as for the sake of her Son. Mary would travel great distances for that historical period of time, and she would face hardships both before and after Jesus' birth. An older girl could probably deal with these hardships easier than a very young girl. Mary would probably travel 90 to 100 miles (a 3 or 4 day journey at least) to visit Elizabeth before John's birth and then travel back to Nazareth. She would travel about that same distance again when she traveled to Bethlehem with Joseph (a 3 or 4 day journey at least) immediately before the birth of Jesus. After Jesus' birth, she would travel to Egypt to save Him from the murderous King Herod. If Mary were a mother older than 13 years old, she would be stronger emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually and better able to do all of these things. One can ask themselves, "What age of a girl would God most likely choose in this unique situation; especially since God knew beforehand what Mary would face in the future after she conceived Jesus?" The name "Mary" means "exalted one." The name "Joseph" means "May he (God) add (sons)." Though tradition seems to teach that Joseph was a much older man than Mary, the Bible does not tell us his age either; so he may have been close to Mary's age. Since the Bible simply does not tell us the ages of Joseph and Mary, all guesses are merely speculative. Joseph was of the house of David, and the Bible foretold that the Messiah would be of the house of David. Joseph would legally adopt Jesus, the Son of God. Later, God would legally adopt all who would believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and receive Him as their Lord and Savior. Jesus declared that He was the root of (or the foundation of or the beginning of or the life-giving means of sustaining) the House of David as well as a descendant of the House of David, saying "I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star" (Revelation 22:16).

(Luke 1:28) And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

The angel Gabriel did not appear to Mary in a way that would frighten her. We are not told that he appeared to her in a dream. He may have simply knocked on the door of her home and greeted her. His words encouraged her with a standard formal greeting, plus the revelation that his visit was to bring her a blessing from God and not the judgment of God, for God was with her and favored her. For the Lord to be with you is an indication that the Lord will help you. Mary may have wondered what God wanted and why she would especially need God's help.

(Luke 1:29) But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Mary's first response to the angel was perplexity or confusion. She had no idea what the angel might want or what message God had sent the angel to bring her. The title "angel" means "messenger." As far as we know, nothing in her previous experience had prepared her to expect a meeting with an angel. She had a brief moment to wonder why God favored her and an angel had appeared to her.

(Luke 1:30) The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

Perhaps the initial appearance of the angel did not frighten Mary, but perplexity could lead to fear. The angel came to give her a message, and he did not want her to be frightened by his message or by him. He had not come to give her bad news, but good news that she had found favor with God; God intended to bless her and give her the opportunity to serve Him. To comfort and encourage her, the angel mentioned twice that she was favored. God had His own reasons for “favoring” Mary above all other women, but surely He had prepared her mentally, physically, morally, and spiritually in advance to be the mother of His Son; just as He had prepared Moses in advance to save His people from bondage in Egypt. Jesus would save His people from their sins, so I believe God gave His Son the best mother possible to nurture and train Him in God’s law, love, and mercy. The parents of John the Baptist were “righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord” (Luke 1:6). We have good reasons to believe that these spiritual traits and righteous way of life would also characterize the mother that God had prepared to be the mother of His only begotten Son, Jesus.

(Luke 1:31) And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

Mary had found favor with God because God had chosen and prepared her to be the mother of Jesus before she was born, as the psalmist so eloquently declared about himself and all of God’s chosen ones: “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb” (Psalm 139:13). The Bible does not say that Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit before she was born (as the Bible teaches about John the Baptist), but God could so arrange events and people in Mary’s life to prepare her to serve as the mother of the Son of God. Mary had the moral, spiritual, mental, and physical qualities that would make her a perfect mother for the Son of God. The angel told her to name her son “Jesus,” which means “Yahweh (or God) Saves.”

(Luke 1:32) He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.

In the temple, the angel Gabriel told Zechariah some things about John’s future ministry; after John’s birth, the Holy Spirit filled Zechariah and directed him to give his newborn son the title “the prophet of the Most High” (Luke 1:76). The angel Gabriel told Mary some things about Jesus, and why Jesus would be called “the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32). Jesus was great; so great in fact that His enemies crucified Him and left Him in a tomb; however, after His resurrection from the dead, His church has spread around the world. Unlike John the Baptist, who was the foretold prophet of God, Jesus would be called “the Son of the Most High,” because God would be His Father and His followers would see this fact in

His life, love, ministry, prayers, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Having the “throne of his ancestor David” meant Jesus would be the long expected and prophesied Messiah whose reign would never end.

(Luke 1:33) He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Mary did not know or understand all that the angel meant when he declared these facts about Jesus’ future, about the Son she would bear. The “house of Jacob” included all of the 12 tribes of Israel, not just the tribe of Judah, even though the northern kingdom, which was called the Kingdom of Israel, had been destroyed in 722 BC. Perhaps the angel used the term “house of Jacob” so no one would mistake his meaning and try to distinguish the Kingdom of Judah from the destroyed Kingdom of Israel (Jacob’s name had been changed by God from Jacob to Israel). Because Jesus would live forever after His death and resurrection and sit at the right hand of God the Father, His kingdom would never end.

(Luke 1:34) Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”

Though Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph, she was not married yet and she had never done anything toward the conception of a child. Therefore, she wanted to know what she was to do in order to conceive her child, Jesus the Messiah. The angel would tell her that the only thing she needed to do was receive this blessed gift of God. She was not to seek an earthly husband to be the physical father of Jesus. She, of course, married Joseph, who became the legal father of Jesus and who would help care for and raise Him in a godly home.

(Luke 1:35) The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

The angel told her what would happen, but he did not give her (nor do the gospel writers give) much specific information or details about how she would receive the blessed gift of a baby, who would be the Son of God. Any supernatural medical explanation would have been beyond her comprehension and the comprehension of those she might tell (including us today). The power of the Most High God through the blessed Holy Spirit would conceive within her the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah. The conception of the true Son of God was totally unlike the myths of the Greek gods in classical or modern fiction. God the Father totally respected Mary as a person and as a woman, and He performed a miracle so Jesus would be holy and the only begotten Son of God (see John 3:16).

(Luke 1:36) And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

The angel then gave Mary information that she could use to help her during this time of dramatic change in her life. She would visit Elizabeth, who in her old age would give Mary much wise advice and confirm for her what the angel had told her. The Bible often requires two witnesses to confirm a legal fact, and filled with the Holy Spirit Elizabeth would serve as a second witness for Mary that the angel's appearance was real and Mary's child was the Son of God. Elizabeth would also serve as a second witness for Joseph and Mary when Mary told Joseph about the angel's appearance to Zechariah and to her and the miraculous birth of John; thus confirming for Joseph that his own angelic dream about Jesus and His mother Mary was an authentic revelation from God.

(Luke 1:37) For nothing will be impossible with God.”

In the context of Luke 1:36, it was not impossible for God to give supernaturally the boy Isaac to Sarah and the boy Samuel to Hannah through natural human means in their old age; therefore, it was not impossible for God to use natural means to supernaturally give the boy John to Elizabeth in her old age. It would not be impossible for God to give Mary a Son who did not have a physical human father, and God would do so in a way unlike the conception of human beings and unlike the supposed conception of some of the fictional Egyptian and Greek gods or idols. For example, in Moses' day some believed wrongly that the son of Pharaoh was considered a god because he was conceived the son of a god, the Pharaoh. In Jesus' conception, the Holy Spirit would “overshadow” Mary. “Overshadow” is the term the angel used when he told Mary how she would conceive the Son of God, and “overshadow” is a term similar to the word used in the Bible when God descended over the tabernacle after Moses set it up.

(Luke 1:38) Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Mary humbly submitted to the will of God, but she may have lived in faithfulness to God daily for many years before she met the angel – by committing each new day to God using the very words that she spoke to the angel, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord.” With these humble words, she has become an example for all who would truly follow her Son as their Lord and Savior. Today, disciples of Jesus can say to God each morning with respect to the day ahead, “Let it be with me according to the Bible” or “Let it be with me according to your word” or “Tell me what to do and I will do it, because I am your willing servant.”

(Luke 1:39) In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country,

Immediately after the angel spoke to her, Mary set out to visit Elizabeth and Zechariah. The Bible does not tell us the birthplace of John the Baptist beyond the fact that he was born in a Judean town in hill country, which may have been near Jerusalem where Zechariah served as a priest or it may have been close to

the wilderness where John began his ministry. Though Jesus was raised in Nazareth, He too would be born in a Judean town, Bethlehem, the city of David.

(Luke 1:40) where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

Elizabeth would have been more than six months pregnant by the time Mary reached her. It seems that Mary probably stayed with Elizabeth until after the birth of John the Baptist, and perhaps a little longer to help her and the new baby boy. Her stay with Elizabeth for three months would have been both a spiritual and practical help to both of them, and Mary could learn from experience more about how to care for a newborn baby. She would also hear the prophecy of Zechariah about John and Jesus, when God opened Zechariah's mouth and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. She would have many things to tell Joseph when she returned to her home.

Luke 1:41-45

(Luke 1:41) When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit

John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb: "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:15). John made his first prophecy before he was born when he leaped in his mother's womb, for the Holy Spirit within him confirmed by his leap that Mary was the mother of the Messiah. The Holy Spirit through Elizabeth revealed what his leap meant. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit when she heard Mary's greeting, so she too prophesied regarding the Messiah that Mary carried within her.

(Luke 1:42) and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Through Elizabeth, the Holy Spirit blessed the Messiah and His mother. Through Elizabeth, the Holy Spirit reaffirmed to Mary that God had fulfilled His promise to her; yes, she was pregnant with the Son of God. God would empower her to fulfill the tasks ahead. God was with her wherever she went. God would fulfill His covenant promise through her Son, Who she now carried in her womb, and He would bless many as a good fruit can bless many. Mary was blessed to bear the Messiah that so many women had hoped to bear in fulfillment of prophecy.

(Luke 1:43) And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?

Jesus did not "earn" His title of Messiah by His works or by defeating His enemies or the enemies of Israel. Jesus was the Messiah, the King of the Jews, before the moment of His conception and birth, as the wise men would later

testify (Matthew 2:1-12). Even in Mary's womb, Jesus was the Lord of Elizabeth, and through the Holy Spirit she acknowledged this fact. Jesus was the Lord over all before He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb. He was the Word made flesh, Who came and dwelt among us: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1 and 1:14). Jesus is the incarnate God and Elizabeth praised Jesus as her Lord even before He was born as a physical baby, Jesus. We acknowledge this truth when we sing the hymn *Silent Night* and proclaim: "Jesus, Lord at thy birth."

(Luke 1:44) For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.

The Holy Spirit explained through Elizabeth why she had greeted Mary with such extravagant praise. The child within her, John the Baptist, had leaped with joy. She also knew that the words she spoke had been given to her by God as a way of explanation and revelation. She had not deducted them from merely seeing her relative (who probably would not have shown physically at that time that she was pregnant). These events and words were further testimony to help Mary and Joseph; words that also help all those reading the Bible to understand the nature and origin of Jesus.

(Luke 1:45) And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Unlike her husband, Zechariah, Elizabeth confirmed that Mary had believed the angel Gabriel from the first without asking for a sign. Elizabeth probably went on to explain what she meant by her comment. The angel told Zechariah, "But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur" (Luke 1:20). Mary would also be present after John was born; therefore, she would hear Zechariah speak for the first time after the angel Gabriel had spoken to him (Luke 1:62-64). Luke might have learned this information directly from Mary or from one of the documents he consulted when he wrote his gospel. Elizabeth confirmed that the angel Gabriel had spoken to Mary the words that the Lord wanted spoken. Mary had believed that the Lord's words would be fulfilled by the Lord. Then, through the Holy Spirit, the Lord became incarnate in Mary's womb and she would give birth to Jesus the Messiah after she and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. If you were God the Father, what type of girl or woman would you want to choose to be the mother of Your only begotten Son?

2. What does the angel say to Mary so she will not be afraid?
3. What does the angel say about Mary's Son that makes Him special and what are some of the ways Jesus is different from John the Baptist?
4. How is Mary's reply to the angel a good example for all who claim to be Christians?
5. How would many churches be different today if every church member had the attitude of Mary each day?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.
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