

## *Open Heart, Open Bible*

Genesis and Luke's Gospel

Linking Theme: Covenant

*Bible passage for weekly readings (week 11):*

*Luke ch.'s 1 – 6*

### The Seed of the Woman

On the occasion of Abraham's offering of Isaac on Mount Moriah (Gen.22), the Lord gave His oath to the patriarch that He would bless him and make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore, and that through his offspring all nations on earth would be blessed. Luke's gospel, being the only one of the four written by a Gentile, gives us a unique emphasis on Jesus as the Saviour of the world. Through His earthly ministry, and crucially through His death and resurrection (that "perfect, once-for-all" sacrifice for the sin of the whole world), the One who was of Abraham's seed has fulfilled the divine covenant of promise. Of equal importance is the fact that Jesus was of the seed of Eve (the mother of all living - Gen.3 v.20), and we see the "enmity" between our Lord and Satan throughout the course of His humanity (Gen.3 v.15). All nations on earth are blessed because of the gospel, and the church of Jesus has God's mandate to minister that blessing, extending His kingdom until He returns. Luke's account in particular gives us wonderful insights into the way that Jesus prepared His disciples to become the apostles of the early church. His other Book, the Acts of the Apostles, describes how this happened after our Lord's ascension.

Ch. 1 opens with a situation very like that which Abraham and Sarah faced - Elizabeth (Zechariah's wife) "was barren, and they were both well along in years" (v.7). Again we see that nothing is impossible with God, and when Mary visits Elizabeth, her blessing over her younger relative stirs our emotions. Mary's song of praise is one of the best known in all the scriptures, ending with an acknowledgment of God's mercy and faithfulness towards Israel, fulfilling His word to Abraham through the Babe she is about to carry.

Zechariah's song is equally significant regarding God's covenant faithfulness, as he prophesies that the child to be born is a fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant, "**the oath He swore to our father Abraham**" (v.73). This covenant, if entered into, would break all fear in the hearts of God's historic people as they serve Him in holiness, guiding them in the way of peace, and also "**shine on those living in darkness**" (the Gentile nations).

Luke 2 gives us the fullest account we have of the birth of Jesus, together with the account of His presentation at the Temple. Here, He is seen by Simeon, who instantly recognises Him as the **“salvation”** of God, and who prophesies yet again that the Child would be both a **“light to the Gentiles”** and **“the glory of His people Israel”**. Simeon also prophesies directly to Mary (v.’s 34,35). Anna, too, recognises Jesus’ divinity and destiny, and we are told that **“she spoke about the Child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem”**. These were people who were living with spiritual desire and hunger, as we must be (Luke 18 vs.7,8).

Ch.3 fast-forwards us by some thirty years to the beginning of John the Baptist’s ministry, and shows us how his God-given role was a fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy, clearly preparing the way for Jesus. The genealogy which concludes the chapter links directly with the lines of descent we were given in Genesis ch.’s 5 and 11, and which we looked at in detail. The scene is almost set for Jesus to appear in public.

Before this can happen, it is essential in the plan and purpose of God that His Son establishes his ministry credential. He must stamp His authority over the prince of darkness, the **“ancient serpent”**, the devil himself (Revelation 12 v.9). Adam and Eve had been confronted by him and been deceived without any resistance worth speaking of. If Jesus were to know His authority over satan in the public arena, He must win that position in personal conflict beforehand. Jesus won the battle by using the written word of God. Thus, the word is later described by Paul as being the **“sword of the Spirit”** (Ephesians 6 v.17), which is the very reason that believers must know it well – to fend off the attacks of the enemy when they come. He is allergic to truth!

Returning to Galilee, Jesus does so **“in the power of the Spirit”** (v.14), and He says as much in quoting from Isaiah when He speaks in the synagogue. Although initial reactions are favourable, it’s not long before He antagonises His Jewish listeners. But His spiritual authority is obvious – evil spirits obey Him, and diseases disappear at His touch. These are the outward signs of the good news He is anointed to preach.

The account of Peter obeying the Lord and going out to the deep water yet again to let down the nets, much against his own better judgment, is a good example of Proverbs 3 v.5 in action – **“lean not to your own understanding”**. When the Lord moves powerfully in our experience, it tends to emphasise the shallowness with which we often live, the result being a profound conviction of sin, as Peter knew here. This didn’t stop him from leaving all to follow the Master, any more than it did James, John and, later, Matthew (Levi). They can see reality in Jesus that has to be worth pursuing. He has come especially for those who realise their need – those who know their sin, which can only be dealt with by repentance (5 v.32).

New wine needs new wineskins, and human nature instinctively prefers that which it knows, and has already acquired a taste for – “the old is better” (v.39). To go on with Him, we have to embrace the new, time and again!

After the tensions between Jesus and the religious leaders regarding Sabbath day observance, and the practise of it, we are then given Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount, called in this Gospel the Sermon on the Plain, because of the wording of v.17 – He “stood on a level place”. Read the blessings and woes. All those things which can give us a sense of wellbeing in this life are listed as woes by our Lord. Riches, full stomachs, laughter, popularity, are denounced as being woeful. He tells us to be kind to people who are either ungrateful or wicked. In that way, we will store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. We will not therefore judge others, our time will be fully accounted for in seeking to bless them! Such a lifestyle exposes hypocrisy. As we put His teaching into practice, we are putting firm foundations under our lives, foundations which earthly upheavals can do nothing to dislodge (46-49).

**Food for thought / discussion / prayer.**

1) I felt that Luke’s Gospel was an ideal companion to our reading in Genesis because of the prophetic songs in ch.’s 1 and 2, and the genealogy which goes straight back to Adam. Luke wrote his Gospel as a Gentile, for Gentiles. Matthew’s is the Jewish Gospel. Luke’s family tree (ch.3) includes Noah, and therefore includes God’s covenant with Noah, which was fully inclusive in its scope. “God so loved the world...” (John 3 v.16). Luke tells us later of the evangelistic training of the disciples, and the need for mission. Can we make it a matter of prayer that, as we read this Gospel, our heart for mission is enlarged as a result?

2) We see in the Book of Genesis both Abraham and Jacob being tested in various ways such that they could function in spiritual maturity as the fathers of the family which became the nation. In the same way Jesus could not fulfil his destiny without being tested. This is what the Temptations are all about. Testing brings us to spiritual maturity if we respond aright within it (James 4 v.7). Do you feel you are being tested at the moment? Are you submitting to God in it?

3) Jesus teaches his disciples (and us!) of basic Kingdom values in Luke 6 vs. 20 – 42. Let’s do a cross-check while we’re here. Are our values in tune with His, or are we still at odds with some of this stuff, living as we do in a very materialistic world? Are we, like Lot, encamped next door to Sodom, and have we become powerless to change it because we’ve bought into it? The only thing we can do is be honest before God and each other, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of compromise, and then let Him lead us out of them. Let go, and let God!

**Next week’s passage:** Luke 7 – 12

