

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 1

Introduction

Luke was the third to write a full account of the events that took place in the miraculous days of the Lord's life on earth. Over the centuries, many others have presented gospel records but the early church accepts only Luke's gospel, along with those of Matthew, Mark and John as the truth concerning the Lord's life and ministry. Matthew completed his Gospel in 58 AD, Mark, between 54-59 AD, and John in 96 AD. Luke could have written as early as 61 AD but no later than AD 63. Both Matthew's and John's Gospels are personal eyewitness accounts; Mark's Gospel the record of the Apostle Peter. Luke's Gospel is that of Paul, previously known as Saul of Tarsus. In one sense, Luke acts as a scribe for Paul who is blind; however, in another sense, the Holy Spirit guides Luke to investigate each story and write the entire history in consecutive order.

Luke 1:¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, 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 might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

The Holy Spirit directed Luke to provide a truthful and accurate record as evidence of the life of Christ to a man named Theophilus. Following the Gospel, Luke wrote his Acts of the Apostles to this same man. Who was Theophilus? Little is known about Theophilus except that Luke addresses him as the "most excellent." Luke reveals that Paul uses the same terminology when addressing Felix in Acts 23:26 as well as Festus in Acts 26:35. With this in mind, Theophilus must have been a person of notoriety, rank, or status within the government.

The Timing and Priestly Family

Luke 1:⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ And they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.

With verse 5, Luke begins the wonderful story of the life of the Lord by introducing His extended family. It gives the world the first clue about the time of Jesus' birth by referring to the King of Judea and citing the names of the parents of Jesus' cousin known as "John the Immerser" until the original 1611 King James Bible changes his name to "John the Baptist."

King Herod

In 40 BC, Mark Antony appointed Herod as the tetrarch of Judea. Later, the Roman senate elevated him to the position of king of Judea. He reigned for 37 years and died on April 4th, 4 BC in the city of Jericho.

Great agony and pain, both mental and physical, accompanied His death. According to Scripture, his death occurred shortly after the birth of Jesus.



Picture: 1
Herod the Great
(73 BC - 4 BC)

Zacharias the Priest

This passage also relates the story of the elderly and childless priest named Zacharias who was a descendant of Levi through Aaron's son Eleazar. Eleazar and Ithimar were the only sons of Aaron who bore children. About four hundred years later, when King David established the order of priests to serve in the new temple which David's son, Solomon, would build, only sixteen descendants of Eleazar and eight of Ithimar were living. Therefore, David establishes a 24-week priestly calendar with each of the descendants of Aaron's sons serving one full week in the 24-week cycle. Both Zacharias and Elizabeth his wife were descendants of the tribe of Levi through the lineage of Abijah. As the families of each priestly line grew through the years, the Sanhedrin established a lottery system for each family division to identify who would serve in the temple. All the priestly descendants would learn the rituals and prepare for the privilege of serving in the temple, but the lottery never chooses many who would live their lives hoping to serve in the temple; however, they would serve in the synagogues throughout Israel. With the temple's destruction in 586 BC, the priestly service ended and would not begin again until the Jews return from the Babylonian exile and the rebuilding of the temple was completed in 515 BC. Oddly, in the list of people who returned from the exile, the records do not mention the descendants of Abijah by name.¹ Nevertheless, by the time the temple was ready to operate again, descendants of Abijah were present and ready to serve if chosen.

Concerning Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth, the passage says, "They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord." Incredibly, this statement indicates that both kept the law perfectly. Others joined Zacharias and Elizabeth in this category; the Holy Spirit gave the same high standard of approval to Mary, the mother of Jesus and the Apostle Paul.

Gabriel Announces the Conception of John the Baptist

Luke 1:8 Now it came about, 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.¹² And Zacharias was troubled when he saw *him*, and fear gripped him.¹³ But the angel said to him, " Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been

¹ [Ezra 2:36-39](#); [Neh 7:39-42](#); [Neh 12:1](#)

heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. ¹⁴ "And 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 back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ "And 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."

Zacharias' Doubt and Gabriel's Response

Luke 1:18 And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this *for certain*? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." ¹⁹ And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which shall be fulfilled in their proper time." ²¹ And the people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. ²³ And it came about, when the days of his priestly service were ended, that he went back home.

When did Zacharias serve in the temple? The answer to this question helps to answer many other questions such as:

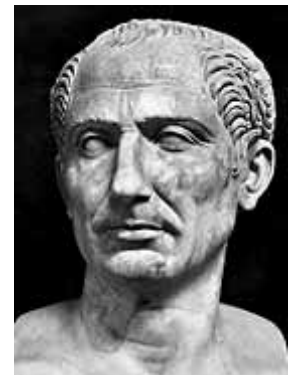
When was John the Baptist born?

When was Jesus born?

When did Jesus die on the cross?

Julius Caesar

Great difficulty abounds when attempting to answer these questions because of all the manipulation of the calendars through the centuries. At the time of Zacharias' service as well as the time of Jesus' death on the cross, the Roman world had been on the 365¼ day Julian calendar since 46 BC. At the same time, the Hebrews still used their own 354 day calendar in place since the days of Moses and before. Julius Caesar moved the Roman Empire from the lunar calendar to the solar calendar to facilitate the celebration of the festivals and holidays of the Roman gods in the same seasons of each year.



Picture: 2
Julius Caesar
(100 BC - 44 BC)

Council of Nicaea & Council of Trent

In 325 AD, the records of the Council of Nicaea reported that the spring equinox occurred on March 21st of that year, but by 1500 AD, it occurred on March 11. The records of the Council of Trent reported the drift of the spring equinox to March 11th by the year 1500 AD. Pope Gregory presented a remedy for the calendar drift to the Council of Trent in 1563 AD and it found approval. In 1582 AD, a papal bull removed ten days from the calendar. In that

year, Thursday, October 4th on the Julian Calendar was followed by Friday, October 15th. Obviously, October 15th would have been a Monday had the calendar not been changed and that is the first of several problems faced in trying to determine the exact day of any event prior to 1582 AD. By 1582 AD, most of the world used the Julian calendar; however, Gregory's change was accepted only in predominately-catholic countries, which did not include Britain and the Americas. It literally took two more centuries for the world to adopt the change and place the majority of the calendars in use in harmony. Another problem in placing an exact date of an event is the manipulation of the days of each month as changed in 45 BC by Julius Caesar as indicated in the chart below.

Number of Days in Each Month

Altered Months in Yellow

Before 45 BC

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
29	28	31	29	31	29	31	29	29	31	29	29

After 45 BC

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
31	28	31	30	31	30	31	31	30	31	30	31

Dionysius Exiguus

To complicate the deciphering of days and dates of the past, in 525 AD, Dionysius Exiguus established the BC/AD system in use today. On the chart above, the year 45 BC is a retro fit year created by Dionysius Exiguus. On the Julian calendar, and until the change by Dionysius Exiguus, 45 BC did not exist. The Roman world knew it as 708 AUC meaning 708 years after the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus. The year 525 AD was actually the year 1278 AUC on the Julian calendar.



Picture: 3
Dionysius Exiguus
(c. 470 AD – 544 AD)

To add to the complication, Dionysius Exiguus set the first day of year, 1 AD, as March 25th on the Julian calendar (the spring equinox) based on his decision that March 25th was the day of the Lord's incarnation in the womb of Mary. Based on his chart, Dionysius sets the Lord's subsequent birth nine months later on December 25th. The church quickly accepts Dionysius' chart and December 25, 1 AD (or year 753 AUC on the Julian calendar) becomes the accepted date of the birth of the Lord.

Dionysius Difficulties

If Dionysius was correct, Jesus' conception occurred eight days before the death of Herod. Dionysius was unaware of the calendar drift over the previous 500 years and the spring equinox occurred in 525 AD on March 20th. Dionysius was not the only one to present an argument for the date of the birth of the Lord in that council meeting. The opposing argument stated that Jesus was born on March 25th, eight days before the death of Herod; however, because of Dionysius' notoriety, this opposing argument was not given great consideration. In reality, the opposing argument was closer to the truth than that of Dionysius. Within a few years, scholars rejected Dionysius' date proving that Herod was alive when Jesus was born and Roman records showed that Herod died in 750 AUC, not 753

AUC. Dionysius was incorrect by three years; however, the BC / AD calendar was never corrected because of its widespread acceptance in such a short time period.

Calendar Challenges

Through all the calendar changes, one stable calendar remained unchanged, the Hebrew Lunar Calendar. Jews had used their calendar throughout the centuries since the Lord ratified it through Moses while the children of Israel were in the first two years of their wilderness experience. The Hebrew Calendar remained unchanged from the time of Moses until about the time of the Counsel of Nicaea. The addition of names for each month rather than simply referring to them by number occurred after the Babylonian exile.

Number of Days in Each Month

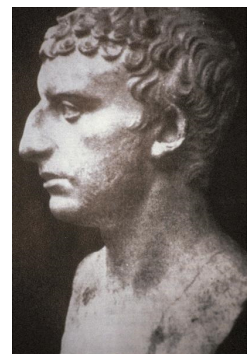
The Hebrew Lunar Calendar

	Religious Calendar						Civil Calendar					
	Starts Nisan 1						Starts Tishri 1					
	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	Eleven	Twelve
Name before 586 BC	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	Eleven	Twelve
Name after 536 BC	Nisan	Iyar	Sivan	Tamuz	Av	Elul	Tishri	Heshuan	Kislev	Teveth	Shevat	Adar
Number of Days	30	29	30	29	30	29	30	29	30	29	30	29
Day Number	1-30	31-59	60-89	90-118	119-148	149-177	178-207	208-236	237-266	267-295	296-325	326-354

The Hebrew calendar month and day names are different from the Julian and Gregorian calendars. Until the return from the Babylonian exile, the months of the Hebrew calendar held number names one through twelve. Only after the return in 536 BC did the Jews use the Babylonian Lunar calendar names. The days of the months remained the same. The days of the week continued as one through seven with the seventh day of each week being the Sabbath. This calendar remained constant from the wilderness experience until it a major changed in 358 AD.

President of the Sanhedrin, Hillel II

In 358 AD, Hillel II, the Jewish priest, president of the Sanhedrin, adjusted the Hebrew calendar in order to keep the festivals in the same seasons as they originally occurred in the days of Moses and the Exodus. Previously, the church had faced the same concern with the celebration of Easter by tying it to the Passover during the council of Nicaea in 325 AD. Hillel made the correction to the Hebrew calendar by adding a 13th month every third year called Adar II. Before the correction, the feasts and festivals rotated through each month of the year drifting 11 days behind the previous each year because the Hebrew calendar was approximately 11 days shorter than the solar seasons. Had Hillel not made the change, the Hebrew calendar could have easily pinpointed the exact Hebrew days according to biblical and historical records, but the change has made the task almost impossible. In the process of making the correction, Hillel added several months of varying days to correct the problem and establish the current calendar in use; however, this change did not occur until three centuries after the life of the Lord.



Flavius Josephus

Other sources give clues to determine the week Zacharias served in the temple. Josephus states that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in Jerusalem on the first day of the week, Sunday, Av 9. Other calendars agree that that occurred on the Gregorian calendar year 586 BC. In the same record, Josephus noted the destruction of the temple by Titus on the same day, date, and month as the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, Sunday, Av 9, 823 AUC or 70 AD. Josephus gives another clue when he states that both destructions while when the division of Jehoiarib served in the temple following the completion of the Sabbath year. What a goldmine of information! What does this mean? Remember, King David established the "course" of priestly service in the temple by assigning each of the 24 descendent families of Levi a specific week to serve. What are the details of the priestly service established by David?

Qumran Cave 4

Although the Bible records David's plan for the priest's service in temple, no details are included. A few years ago, scrolls released from the Qumran Cave 4 included the calendar of priestly service in Jerusalem dating from approximately 46 BC. The following details were included in those scrolls.

1. The priestly year was a seven Hebrew year cycle.
2. The priestly seven year cycle began on Wednesday, Nissan 1, the vernal equinox, during the service of the division of Gamul.
3. The priest from each course served seven days, beginning on the seventh day of each week (the Sabbath).
4. The days were numbered consecutively from 1 to 354.
5. The months were numbered from 1 to 12.
6. Each course of priest served twice in each year, once every 24 weeks.
7. The priestly calendar did not adjust for the seasons.
8. The first year of the seven-year cycle began on Wednesday, Nissan 1, during the course of Gamul's following the Sabbatical year.
9. The last or seventh year, of each priestly year was the Sabbatical year.

Tying the Qumran information to that of Josephus, 586 BC and 70 AD are both years that follow the Sabbatical year, which means that on the Hebrew calendar, Nisan 1 and the spring equinox occurred on Wednesday of 586 BC and 70 AD. Coupling this information with the priestly calendar, reconstruction of the Hebrew calendar can occur to discover the actual weeks that the division of Abijah served in the temple. By adding one more important piece of information, reconstruction of the Julian calendar dates to coincide with those of Abijah service can ensue. In 46 BC, the records of Julius Caesar dated March 25th of 45 BC as the spring equinox. By recreating three calendars, it is possible to find the weeks of Zacharias' service in the temple.

1. The Hebrew calendar must be created with Nisan 1 beginning on Wednesday and Av 9 occurring on Sunday in 70 AD. Based on that calendar, we can trace the Hebrew

**Picture: 4
Flavius Josephus**



**Picture: 5 Qumran
Cave 4**

calendar back to year 45 BC (115 Julian Years / 118.65 Hebrew Years) to find where March 25th, the spring equinox, occurs.

2. Assuming that Dionysius was correct, we can recreate the Julian calendar with March 25, 1 AD occurring on Wednesday, the spring equinox, and construct the calendar back to 45 BC and forward to 70 AD.
3. Then the seven-day/24-division cycle priestly calendar can be created with a start day of Av 9, 70 AD and generated back to at least 8 BC.

Laying the three calendars side by side, what information emerges that helps us to discover when Zaharias served in the temple?

Zacharias' Service in the Temple

With this information, the approximate timing of Zacharias' service in the temple and subsequent conception of John the Baptist emerges! If Jesus was born in March of 4 BC, (750 AUC), He was conceived in June of 5 BC. The conception of John the Baptist occurred six months earlier in January of 5 BC. The first opportunity for Zacharias to serve in the temple prior to January of 5 BC emerges as Saturday through Friday, December 10 – 16, 6 BC.

Calendar of Events

December 10-16, 6 BC	January 5 BC	June 5 BC	March 4 BC	April 4th, 4 BC
Division of Abijah in the Temple	Conception of John the Baptist	Conception of Jesus	Birth of Jesus	Death of Herod



Picture: 7 Deeds of Augustus

Decree of Augustus Caesar

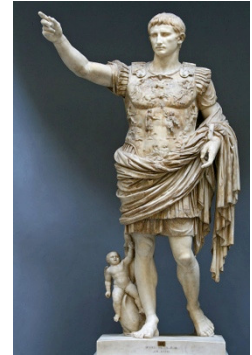
It was after Augustus Caesar had issued a tax decree, in 8 BC or 746 AUC that Gaius Tiberius Caesar, the son of Augustus, published the date of his father's tax decree on two copper columns still viewable today in Rome, entitled "The Deeds of August", after the death of the Augustus in 14 AD or 766 AUC. When the notice of the census arrived in Israel, the Jews it because previously, Jews were exempt from such census and tax. A

group of Jewish representatives traveled to Rome to ask Augustus if they were required to pay the census. This journey, audience with

Caesar, and return to Israel took a considerable length of time. Unlike before, Augustus required the Jews to participate in the register. This census began in 4 BC. Herod the Great, mentally ill by this time, required an oath of allegiance to Caesar upon registration and payment of the tax.

Earlier Service of Abijah in the Temple

If Zacharias did not serve in the temple from December 10th - 16th of 6 BC, the previous opportunity occurred Saturday, June 25th - July 1st of 6 BC. As a matter of clarity, it could have taken six months for Elizabeth to become pregnant with John the Baptist. However, a conception any earlier than January of 5 BC would greatly affect the dating of the birth of the Lord and the beginning of His ministry, about the age of 30, in the fifteenth year Tiberius' reign as indicated in the Luke 3:1 passage.



Picture: 6 Augustus Caesar (23 September 63 BC – 19 August 14 AD)