

The sudden appearance of the angel Gabriel in verse 11 is one of the most dramatic entrances in all of the Bible. Zechariah has never seen an angel before. Neither had his people for centuries. The last message they had received from God by prophecy was that of Malachi. He had told them to expect Elijah before the great and awesome day of the Lord. Then the Lord had fallen silent for 400 years.

Now the silence ends! The last time Gabriel had appeared was to deliver the prophecy of the 70 weeks to Daniel. He had told Daniel that 70 weeks were decreed for his people and city. One purpose of the 70 weeks was to “seal both vision and prophet.” As Zechariah gazes at Gabriel the seal breaks, the prophet John is given to prepare a people, and the prayers for a deliverer will be answered. The only comparable event is the breaking of the seals in Revelation 5-8.

Notes

1:1 We are not told what writings about Jesus that others have undertaken prior to Luke's. They may have included the gospels of Matthew and Mark along with non-inspired but nevertheless useful records.

1:3 Theophilus means *friend of God*. That he is called “most excellent” means he was likely a high official of some sort. He is probably a believer but nothing else is known of him.

1:5 In 1 Chronicles 24 we read of David dividing the priests into 24 divisions, or courses. Each group would serve for one week, twice a year. When they were “off duty” they probably lived in the countryside around Jerusalem (see 1:39). The priests were so numerous that each would have the honor of lighting the incense only once in his entire lifetime.

1:13 The name John derives from the Hebrew name *Jochanan*, which in turn is a short form of *Jochananan*, meaning “Jehovah has been gracious.” The name became popular after the king John Hyrcanus around 100 BC, and was the fifth most common name in Judea.

1:15 The prohibition against drinking wine is part of the Nazirite vow of Numbers 6:1-12. No mention, however, is made of John observing the other parts of the vow.

Questions:

1. What do we know about Luke, the author of this gospel?
2. Read verses 1-4. What are unique features of the gospel of Luke?
3. In what ways do Zechariah and Elizabeth represent the whole nation of Israel?

4. What is Zechariah's prayer as mentioned in verse 13?

5. What, in your words, is John the Baptist's mission as proclaimed here by Gabriel?

6. Why is Zechariah's power of speech taken away?