

Session 2 Harmony of the Gospels

INTRODUCTION

I'm giving you the outline of how we're going to do this. This has probably never occurred to you, but teaching the harmony of the Gospels is a difficult thing. You have to go from one place to the next, and then back. Every time we make a switch, I call that a transition. There are seven different times when we flip over from one passage to the next. I gave you a little outline on how we're going to do it. We're going to go from section one to twenty-six in this teaching tonight. We're covering twenty-six sections of that big, overall teaching. There are 284 total. We're covering twenty-six tonight. I'll give you a summary of the main transitions here.

The first place we're at, I call "transition one." We're in Luke 1. We're going to cover sections one to seven tonight. It's essential that you've prepared with insight; that you've already read Luke 1-4. Not just read it once; I mean two or three times.

We're not going to read every passage; it would take us a long time to do that. But I'll make references. I'll say, "This is the meaning of the prophecy of Simeon." You all know what the prophecy of Simeon is because you've read it two or three times. You've diligently read it with those four passages.

We'll probably take twenty-five or sometimes as many as fifty sections in one session. Because sometimes the sections are very, very small: "He went from here to there." On the other hand, sometimes He's teaching on the parables and there are twenty-eight parables. I don't know how you'll know how much we cover in the next week. I guess I'll have to figure it out a week ahead and tell you.

We're doing twenty-six sections. Here's how we're going to do this. You'll follow this with me. I'll read different sentences here and make statements according to those sentences. You already know your Bibles because you've already read it. You have your Bible on one knee, your notebook, and you're following this. We'll be reading some of this, and then every now and then we'll look at the Bible. We're going back and forth between the two. You'll stop me when you have a relevant question. I want to underline the word *relevant* three times. It's an important question that means something—not just a silly one, because we only have forty-five minutes. I don't want to say that, because everyone will think their question is silly. Erase that. Just be sincere. That's all I'm asking. If you have a question, raise your hand and say, "Wait, wait, I don't get it." We aren't reading all this stuff.

LUKE'S PURPOSE IN WRITING THE GOSPEL THAT BEARS HIS NAME

Transition number one. Our first passage is Luke 1. We're going to cover section ones through seven. Basically, this is about the birth of Jesus. This is about Mary and Elizabeth.

Luke 1:1-4. Luke gives his purpose. His purpose is that many gospels had been written. There were hundreds of gospel accounts. Luke said, "Hey, I want to get the true facts." He goes to Mary and gets all the details from Mary. He says in verse 3 that he investigates carefully everything from beginning to end. He had a number of gospel accounts in his hand when he was doing this. He had several accounts of Jesus' life, some of which aren't even in the Bible. He visited with Mary and asked her about the stories that had been handed down by tradition. He asked her if this is exactly what had happened.

ZACHARIAS AND ELIZABETH WALKED BLAMELESS BEFORE GOD

Verse 5 says that Zacharias was of the division of Abijah. There were twenty-four families in the priesthood. Aaron had twenty-four sons, and those twenty-four sons all became family heads of twenty-four different divisions of priesthods. It says Zacharias was of the division of Abijah. He was one of the family heads. There were twenty-four different divisions in the priesthood.

We go on down to verse 6. It says that they were both righteous in the sight of God. Because of their faith, just like Abraham, righteousness was given to them, just as it was given to you and me. It says, “They walked blameless in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord” (Lk. 1:6, paraphrased). Not only was righteousness given to them by faith, but they were blameless in their conduct. They also fulfilled all the requirements of the Old Testament rituals. That’s what this is talking about.

ZACHARIAS PERFORMS HIS ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME PRIESTLY DUTY

In verse 8, Zacharias is performing his priestly duty. Each of these twenty-four divisions took turns going up to Jerusalem to do one week of priestly duty. They were there approximately twice a year. They had to go to Jerusalem. Each of the twenty-four divisions of priesthood had to go to Jerusalem and minister at the altar for one week.

“According to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense” (Lk. 1:9, NASB). In the note it says they would carry fire from the altar of the burnt offerings to the golden altar of incense in the Holy of Holies. There was probably one time in a man’s life that he got to do that. He only got to minister in Jerusalem twice a year, and there were hundreds of priests in his division. Only once did he have the opportunity to take the fire from the altar, go into the Holy of Holies, and light the fire of incense. He was in the Holy of Holies only once in his entire life.

“DO NOT BE AFRAID, ZACHARIAS, FOR YOUR PETITION HAS BEEN HEARD”

Verse 13. An angel appeared to Zacharias. Gabriel appeared to him. He said this: “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard” (Lk. 1:13, NASB).

Here’s what’s really interesting: they had been praying for years and years and years. Now they’re old people and probably they’re not praying anymore. When you’re eighty years old, you’re not still praying for a child, are you? They’re old people; he comes in there and says, “Your petition has been heard.”

Here’s what’s interesting: their petition had been heard years ago, and it took time for the manifestation to come. Gabriel says, “Hey, you’ve been heard,” but they stopped praying years ago.

“What petition?”

“Remember the son you asked for back in 1926? God heard your prayer, and this is the time of manifestation.”

“Oh, Elizabeth, come here, guess what? Remember that thing we had on the prayer list we gave up on? God heard it.”

Also of interest is that angels are sensitive to human fear. Three times in a row, every time an angel appears, their very first statement is this: “Be not afraid.” I think that’s interesting. That’s always the first thing an angel says.

THE ANGEL PROPHECIES ABOUT THE LIFE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Verse 15. The angel prophesies. He says John will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will drink neither wine nor liquor. “He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb” (Lk. 1:15).

As it says in the notes, all saints are righteous in God’s sight. Elizabeth and Zacharias were righteous in the sight of the Lord. You’re all righteous in God the day you’re born again, and your sins are forgiven by faith. He isn’t talking about being righteous; this is more than righteous. He says John is going to be great in God’s sight. Everyone who’s saved is already righteous as a gift. John will achieve something that all of us want to strive after. I want to be great in God’s sight in the eternal kingdom. How many of you want to be great? Only a few people are going to be great in His sight. We’re all righteous in His sight. There’s the distinction there.

HE WILL MAKE READY A PEOPLE PREPARED FOR THE LORD

Verse 17. This is Gabriel’s insight into John’s ministry in the future. John isn’t even born yet, and Gabriel is prophesying of his ministry thirty years later. He’s to go before Jesus as a forerunner in the spirit and power of Elijah. He will “‘turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk. 1:17).

Gabriel is quoting from Malachi 4:6. Gabriel is quoting the Old Testament prophecy, which is a prophecy of Elijah coming before the great and terrible Day of the Lord. The boldness, the purpose, and the power of Elijah will be with John. He had the same boldness Elijah had, the same purpose that Elijah had, and the same anointing. John wasn’t Elijah, but he was just like him in boldness, power, and purpose. The result of John’s ministry was to restore physical and spiritual parents to their children. When Elijah comes in the last days, he’s coming to restore parents to children and children to parents, both in the natural and in the spiritual setting. The fivefold ministry will be restored to the Church. I think the greatest need in the Church is the restoration of apostolic ministry. The apostles are fathers in the faith. Elijah’s ministry will restore fathers to children, spiritually and physically.

UNITY WILL BE RESTORED WHEN THE FIVEFOLD MINISTRY IS REESTABLISHED

Paragraph A. It’s like this. Paul told the church at Corinth, “You’ve had many teachers, but you only have one father in the Lord. It’s me, your apostle” (1 Cor. 4:15, paraphrased). In the whole church in St. Louis, across the United States and the world, apostolic ministries will have authority over churches. The apostles will all be joined together. The children and fathers in the spirit will be joined. That’s how unity will come about—when the fivefold ministry is reestablished. Also, the relationships between fathers and sons will be restored in the natural.

The result of John’s ministry is to restore physical and spiritual parents to their children. Christlikeness between family members indicates the highest degree of spiritual maturity and spiritual reality. If children and parents have it together in the Lord, that’s the hardest place to demonstrate spirituality. When a man can do that, he has reality to the highest degree. John is going to bring a ministry that will produce reality in people’s hearts. It’s one thing to say something in the church, but it’s another thing for parents to be loving when their children are acting the way children sometimes act. John’s ministry of repentance releases enough power to restore the most

difficult relationships, enabling the individual members of a family to submit to one another. That's what he's talking about.

JESUS AND REPENTANCE WILL SOLVE ALL FAMILY PROBLEMS

Jesus is going to come and He's going to give you power to restore all relationships. If parents and children in this rebellious generation can get it together, you can get it together in anything. This is true power, not merely religion, when families get it together. When families are walking in humility and love, they have the real thing. It's another way of saying that he's going to come and have a powerful ministry. He's going to change men's hearts so much so that people are submissive one to another. That's the highest degree of change you can have: submission in the heart—children to parents, parents to children, churches to apostles, apostles to churches; submitting one to another in the fear of Christ. The hardest thing to get a man to do is to submit his will to other people.

Ephesians 5:21. "Submit to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph. 5:21, paraphrased). When we reach that level of submission, we've reached a spiritual climax in our life. John is taking the most difficult thing that a man can do, and accomplishing that in the hearts of people. Jesus and repentance will solve all family problems. That's John's message. Genuine, changed hearts is the fruit of repentance.

PRIVILEGE ALWAYS BRINGS RESPONSIBILITY TO RESPOND RIGHTLY

Verses 18-20. Zacharias says to the angel, "How am I going to know all this stuff? I'm an old guy" (Lk. 1:18, paraphrased).

The angel says, "Hey, I'm Gabriel, I stand in God's presence; what do you mean, how are you going to know all this" (Lk. 1:19, paraphrased)? He says, "Man, you don't believe; you're in trouble" (ibid, v. 19)!

He couldn't speak. Gabriel said, "I don't understand... you don't question God like that!" Privilege always brings responsibility to respond rightly. When God visits you, when the visitation and the anointing of the Spirit reach this church, we're going to have much more responsibility to respond rightly.

Not only that: privilege brings much greater judgment. If you're a teacher, you will be judged more strictly (Js. 3:1). This was considered unbelief due to the many appearances of angels in the Old Testament. Angels already appeared a number of times. Zacharias was a man of the Old Testament. It wasn't the first time this had happened. Once God reveals His ways, then you're responsible to respond in faith. That's why he went through this. He was a godly man; he knew his Bible. Angels had appeared many times. Gabriel said, "Hey, you have no excuse. You're a priest. You need to know this stuff. You're in trouble."

Zacharias couldn't speak until the baby was born. Privilege always brings responsibility to respond. Let me give you examples in the lives of the apostles. Jesus repeatedly multiplied loaves and fishes. The first time, the apostles didn't know what was going on; they said, "Where are we going to get the bread?"

"I'll make it for you."

The second time, they said, "We're hungry. Oh no! No bread." He made it for them again. The third time there was a storm and they were in the boat: they said, "We have no bread."

He rebuked them with a tremendous rebuke from Isaiah. He's quoting a prophecy against them: "Hearing they don't hear; they have hearts that are rebellious against God" (Mk. 8:17-18, paraphrased). He quoted that prophecy to His own disciples! He says, "I've done it twice, and I don't like this. The first time you didn't know. The second time you were unsure. After God gives a revelation of His intention, He demands response from His people." The third time they got rebuked with a very severe rebuke.

Zacharias was rebuked because he knew angels came and did this stuff and he didn't believe something that had been revealed to him time and time again.

"FOR WITH GOD NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE"

Verse 31. Gabriel tells Mary, "You will name Him JESUS" (Lk. 1:31, paraphrased). *Jesus* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua*. It means, "Jehovah is salvation."

"For with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk. 1:37). That's what Gabriel said. That's interesting. That was Gabriel's confession. Gabriel is a brilliant angel and says, "Nothing is impossible with God." That's how Gabriel sees God. He knew God's power and He knew God's willingness to give it to men. He's describing this to Mary. He's saying, "Mary, God is so willing to give great things to men. I've seen it happen for generations and generations. I've witnessed it. He can and He will do it."

In Genesis 18:14, Jesus made this same statement to Abraham. When Jesus appeared to Abraham, He said, "Abraham, nothing is too difficult" (Gen. 18:14, paraphrased). He was testifying of His own willingness to demonstrate His power towards men.

THE REQUIRED RESPONSE OF ONE PLEASING TO GOD

Verse 38. Mary's response: it's a fantastic response! Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38). It's the required response of one pleasing to God. "If you said it, You'll do it. Period." It insists upon the Word of God being accomplished. God said it and she said, "Fine; that settles it. You'll do it."

God was greatly pleased in that response. Don't settle for less than verse 49. It tells us that Mary had confidence in God's love without fear of consequence. Mary had an absolute revelation of the love of God. She didn't draw back. She didn't fear consequence. Mary had no fear of Joseph finding out. Mary had no fear of consequence. Mark my word. I'll prove that in a minute. Everyone talks about Mary and how she had the crucial decision and she had to count the cost, and this, that, and the other. You don't have to count the cost when you have a revelation of the love of God. Because Mary was confident that God was going to take care of her. She said, "No sweat! You said it, You'll do it." She never tried to explain it to Joseph. She went on, and she's going to give this prophecy in a few minutes talking of how great God was on her behalf.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO COUNT THE COST IF YOU KNOW THAT GOD LOVES YOU

Verse 49. "For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name" (Lk. 1:48-49). She's blessing Him: "Oh God, You have done great and wonderful things."

Joseph hasn't heard yet. Joseph will hear in a couple of months. She's visiting her cousin Elizabeth. Joseph doesn't find out for another two or three months. What I'm getting at is this: Mary wasn't fearful. She left it in

the hands of God. She says, “Father, You’re good enough. Joseph isn’t going to leave me. I won’t be disgraced. It’s the word of the Lord. You love me. You have done great things for me.”

Mary was a woman of tremendously steadfast faith in the Word of God—a woman who had a revelation of God’s love; a woman who knew the Word of God and counted it as done when God said it. Imagine Jesus Christ growing up with a mother who was full of unbelief. God took someone who was undoubtedly one of the most faith-filled women in the entire world and said, “That’s the one who will raise the Messiah.”

Her responses are beautiful. Don’t settle for less than verse 49, the revelation of the love of God. It tells us that Mary had confidence in the love of God without any fear of consequence.

If God tells you to do anything, you don’t say, “Oh no.” You don’t have to count the cost if you know that God loves you. If God tells me to do anything, it’s only going to be increase and blessing. I won’t lose anything by obeying God. On the contrary! God says, “Give all your money away, and sell your house.” Praise God, because you’ll inherit a machine pretty soon.

It’s not like, “Oh no, what is my wife going to say?” She isn’t going to leave me. I think it’s important that we don’t dishonor Mary with unbelief, because she wasn’t unbelieving.

“BLESSED IS SHE WHO BELIEVED THERE WOULD BE A FULFILLMENT”

Verses 41-44. She visits Elizabeth. The anointing of God fell on her, filled with the Spirit of God. Her heart was lifted and began to prophesy right here. She spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Lk. 1:42-45).

I think it’s interesting that when the anointing of the Lord fell on Elizabeth, God gave her the same revelation He gave Peter in Matthew 16 when Peter said, “You are the Christ” (Mt. 16:16).

Before Jesus was even born, she said, “He’s the Lord. He’s God’s Son.” She had the same insight Peter had. The Spirit of God fell on her. Flesh and blood did not reveal it to Peter. Flesh and blood did not reveal it to Elizabeth.

She said, “Blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.” She lived with a deaf husband. She knew it was blessed to believe the angels. Her husband couldn’t talk because he didn’t believe. She said, “You’re blessed. I’ve lived with this guy for nine months who hasn’t said a word.” Maybe she was blessed; I don’t know. Elizabeth saw value in having faith in the Word of God. She brings that point out.

MARY BREAKS FORTH IN SPONTANEOUS PROPHETIC UTTERANCE

Verses 46-55. This is called the *Magnificat*. It’s a fantastic prophecy of Mary’s. It’s like when you’re having a meeting and the Spirit comes on someone and they burst out in prophetic song. When the Lord gives you a prophecy of this magnitude, it just weighs on your hearts. God has given me prophecies sometimes, I remember them a year later word for word. When the Lord puts a prophecy on your heart at a high level, I see how she can

give it word for word. That's how Isaiah could record his prophecies word for word, because they were burned on the tablets of his heart. I'm sure she recorded this right away, made songs and melodies. Then when Luke approached her a few years later, she said, "Hey Luke, I have a copy of it, I wrote it down. Here's the very prophecy I gave when I visited Elizabeth."

This is before Joseph knows anything, by the way. There are three prophecies that are given in relationship to the birth of Jesus. Mary gave one, Zacharias gave one, and Simeon gave one. These prophecies give beautiful insights into the ministry of Jesus Christ. It's just a new twist. If you read those as insights into what the gospel is going to produce, they become very exciting prophecies. It's almost like reading Romans, reading these prophecies. It gives us insight into God's intentions and God's generosity. These three prophecies give us insights into God's intentions and His generosity in the gospel. We need to see God's generosity in the gospel. I love these prophecies. I really encourage you to read over these and pray over them. I read over this a number of times and my heart began to explode with revelation. I read this over and over and over. I began to pray it to God. I memorized portions of it and say it in my devotion to God.

The Spirit fell on Mary and she prophesied this, giving fantastic revelation and insight into Jesus, God's mercies and intentions. Notice all the past tense references to Jesus' birth, to His coming ministry, before it ever happened. She was speaking things that were not as though they were. She says, "God has accomplished salvation" (Lk. 1:46-47, paraphrased). Jesus is only three months old in the womb. She says, "It has happened. Mercy has come."

She spoke these things clearly. You know why? Just because things don't happen in the natural realm immediately, that doesn't mean in the spirit realm they haven't already happened. Mary had one of the clearest revelations of Mark 11:23 that you'll ever find in a person still under the old covenant. She speaks things that aren't as though they were. She speaks about them as she received them before she received them, because she had received them in the spirit. It was years before any of it happened and she talks about it in the past tense. You get a lot of insight in prayer and a lot of insight in the spirit of faith that woman was moving in. There's a lot in here.

"BEHOLD, HENCEFORTH ALL GENERATIONS WILL CALL ME BLESSED"

"For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name" (Lk. 1:48-49). She had a tremendous revelation of God's love and blessing for her. I think that was the key to her success in life. That spells it out right there. I challenge you to make this prophecy your own personal confession to your soul before God.

I've said it many times: "God, You have had regard for me. You've seen me and I'm insignificant." That's what she means by *humble*. "I'm insignificant, but You've had regard for me. All the generations from this time forward will count me blessed because of what You will do for me in this world. I'm blessed by God. The world has yet to see what we will accomplish. The Mighty One has done great things for me. Not just for His name's sake; He did them for me."

He doesn't just do them for His name sake, or just for you. He does them for both reasons. She said, "For me He did it." What insight into the love of God this woman had. I challenge you to speak this own prophecy to your own soul.

“HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS”

Verse 53. I like this. “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty” (Lk. 1:53). She’s talking about Matthew 5:6: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Mt. 5:6).

He sends the rich away empty-handed. Jesus Christ was one of the few men who had enough conviction to look at a rich man and say no to them. Most men, when a rich man comes on the scene, bow and compromises. When you have the prayer life that Jesus had, you have the conviction that He had. He was able to look at men of wealth and say, “Forget it. I turn you away empty-handed. You’re not getting it because your money isn’t buying it from Me. I can’t be bought.”

Mary was prophesying in advance before Jesus ever did it. He would be one who sent rich men away empty-handed. They couldn’t buy Him out. She’s prophesying the conviction that would fill the life of her son. That kind of conviction only comes from a lifestyle of prayer.

Verse 54. He has given help to Israel’s servant in remembrance of His mercy. Israel was a rebellious nation continually, yet still they received mercy. How much mercy? Jesus left His eternal throne and came to a rebellious nation. They had failed and stumbled and slandered God time and time again. They were in apostasy; they were backslidden, soon to crucify Him. He left the eternal throne to come down and visit them with mercy.

Verse 55. God said He would give mercy; therefore mercy has to be established forever and ever. God spoke it and can’t violate Himself. Mary said, “He spoke it and had to do it according to what He said.” What He said, He has bound to accomplish. Page three.

ZACHARIAS SPEAKS THINGS THAT ARE NOT AS THOUGH THEY WERE

Verse 67. The Spirit of God falls on Zacharias, and he’s anointed with the Holy Ghost. He’s minding his own business and the Spirit of God comes on him. He prophesies. He also speaks in the past tense. He learned his lesson; he learned his lesson in faith.

Now he refers to future manifestations of salvation in past tense. He says, “Hey, don’t make me deaf again. Lord, it is done. It’s accomplished. It is finished.” When God says it, it’s done as far as He’s concerned. It’s released in terms of heaven. It may not be accomplished in the natural for a few years, and it wasn’t. As far as Zacharias was concerned, he was speaking things that were not as though they were. I think it’s important to get the spirit of what these men were doing. We can’t miss insights like that in this kind of prophesying. It gives instruction on prayer—instruction on the type of men God was using in those days.

He brings salvation from our enemies (Lk. 1:71)—from spiritual, physical, demonic, and all other enemies. The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor. 15:26). These prophecies are giving the intention of God, the generosity of God. God’s intention is to save us from all our enemies, including death, which is our last enemy.

Verse 74 is fantastic! “Grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life” (Lk. 1:74-75). That was one reason why Jesus was coming: so that men could serve Him without fear any longer. Isn’t that great? I tell you, the ability to walk without fear—that was one of the reasons Jesus came. These prophecies will give you some

insight into Jesus' ministry that you won't get in other prophecies. They were told thirty or thirty-five years before they happened.

Why is this happening? Verse 78: because of His tender mercy.

Transition two. Joseph's side of the story. Luke is Mary's side. Matthew is Joseph's side.

JOSEPH AND HIS FAMILY RETURN TO BETHLEHEM

Transition number three. "It came about in those days that there was a decree sent out from Caesar Augustus that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth" (Lk. 2:1, paraphrased). History tells us this decree went out in 6 B.C. That gives us good dating on the life of Jesus. They wanted to take a census over all the earth so that they could receive taxes. Everyone needed to return to their hometown, where their records were kept.

Verse 4. Joseph went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to the province of Judea, to the city of David, to Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David and that's where his records were kept.

They lived in Nazareth. They came back down to the little, dinky village and planned to live there in the city of David. They knew about the messianic prophecies. They knew that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. They packed their bags and lived there for a number of months until God told them to go to Egypt.

What city was David born in? Bethlehem, right? That's the city of David. It was Hooverville. David, the great king, was born in that village. The great King of all kings was born there as well. He had to be born there. Everyone knew it who knew their Old Testament.

"GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOODWILL TOWARD MEN!"

Verse 13. Fantastic story! I hope you meditate on this stuff. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'" (Lk. 2:13-14).

Imagine these little shepherds out in the field, and thousands of angels screaming, shouting in tongues, "Glory to God!" Multitudes of angels.

This is fantastic, but something more drastic: events occur at Jesus' ordinations—at the announcing of His birth. The angels all appear and start yelling and screaming. Wait until Jesus gets ordained; something greater than that happens. God the Father can't contain Himself. God prophecies so that all men could hear it. Fantastic!

JESUS APPEARS IN THE TEMPLE TO BE CEREMONIALLY CLEANSED

Verse 22. "Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD'), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, 'A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons'" (Lk. 2:22-24).

They went to Jerusalem after the days of purification. After a male son was born, a woman was unclean for forty days. At the end of the forty days, they presented a sacrifice at the temple. Then they were ceremonially cleansed. For complete details, read Leviticus. When it says they were unclean, it means they couldn't partake

in certain aspects of worship until they did certain things. There were different ways to be defiled. They had to do different things before they could partake in the worship services.

Two sacrifices were required when you had your first son. Number one: a lamb was offered as a burnt offering. A pigeon was offered as a sin offering. If the family was financially poor, they were permitted to offer two birds instead of a lamb.

The forty days were up. They came to offer their two offerings, but they offered two little birds. You know why? They were a poor family. That gives you a little insight into where they were coming from.

A CHILD WHO IS APPOINTED FOR THE RISE AND FALL OF MANY IN ISRAEL

Verse 34. Simeon is prophesying and giving insight into His new covenant ministry. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Lk. 2:34-35).

Those who believe in Him would rise to great heights. He was appointed for the rise and fall of many in Israel. Many who believed in Him would rise high. The people who rejected Him would be brought low. Believers would eventually have the right to enter the eternal city. Unbelievers would fall because of rejecting Him. Eventually they were thrown into the prison of the lake of fire.

JESUS CHRIST, A SIGN OF OPPOSITION TO AN UNBELIEVING WORLD

Jesus was to be a sign to be opposed. Many would reject Him and He would cause much opposition. Simeon said, “This Man is going to be opposed. Everywhere He goes, He’s going to be a signpost. People are for Him or against Him. There will be no one in the middle.” What a prophecy over your Son! The Man is forty-eight days old—circumcised on the eighth day and purified on the fortieth.

He says, “Many will rise because of Him. Many will fall because of Him. Many will be opposed. He will cause great opposition.”

In Matthew 10, Jesus said, “I came to bring opposition” (Mt. 10:34, paraphrased).

Simeon tells Mary, “Mary, a sword will pierce your soul” (Lk. 2:35, paraphrased). Pain would come to Mary as Jesus became increasingly independent, and then she would have to witness the rejection and murderous hatred of the people. Little by little, Jesus grew away from her. In the end, the last three times Jesus spoke to her, He called her woman. She was a creature who was to worship Him and be saved by Him like everyone else. He looked at her and she was called *woman*. Not, “Mother, My precious mother.”

“Woman, what am I to do with you?”

“Jesus, remember me, the womb?”

Mary says, “Ahh, that’s my boy; that’s my baby.”

“No, I’m the Son of God. I appreciate borrowing your womb for nine months and your home for a few years. I’m the Son of the living God. I’m much more than your Son.”

That was a piercing thing in Mary’s heart. She would witness all the people she loved, the whole nation of Israel, her whole heritage, rejecting her Son. Simeon looks at her and says, “A sword will pierce your soul because of your Son.”

OUR RECEPTION OR REJECTION IS A REVELATION OF OUR HEARTS BEFORE GOD

The end of His ministry is that one day the thoughts of all men will be revealed. People’s response to receive or reject Him would reveal their hearts, to be for God or against Him.

Luke 10:16. A religious man who rejects Jesus doesn’t really love God deep within his heart. There are many religious people, but Simeon says, “If they receive Him, they truly do love God. If they reject Him, they’re only acting like they love God. Let it be known and revealed that they don’t really love God.” People’s response or rejection of Jesus would be a revelation of their heart before all men. If I go up to a religious man and he rejects Jesus, because of Jesus, I know what is in that man’s heart. He might one day accept Him, but he doesn’t yet.

Simeon said that the end result of His ministry is that many hearts would be revealed, would be openly manifested. He was going into a very, very religious setting. People all looked very holy and pious, but it was going to be made manifest who was holy and who wasn’t when Jesus came into town. Mary would have been blessed without the whole Simeon prophecy. She got it nonetheless.

A WOMAN WHO WAS IN THE TEMPLE EVERY DAY FOR SIXTY YEARS

Verse 37. This is a beautiful woman, Anna. What a woman! She gets married at age fifteen or sixteen. She’s married for seven years. Her husband dies at, say, twenty-four years old. Now she’s eighty-four. The Bible says she spent the last sixty years of her life in the temple night and day, fasting and praying, never leaving, waiting for the Messiah. I thought I had a good devotional life! I tell you, that woman will rank high in the eternal city. I long to meet her. Imagine—sixty years of her life! Night and day, fasting and praying, never stopping.

The thing that encourages me is this: she was a human soul like you and me. She had every passion and desire that we have. God got hold of that woman’s heart even before the inception of the new covenant. This is back in the old covenant. That’s tough!

“THE HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS ARE MET IN THEE TONIGHT”

Transition number four. We go to what? Matthew 2:1. The magi came to visit. Magi were wise men, specializing in astrology, medicine, and natural science. They came from the east.

In verse 4, the chief priests gather. There were twenty-four chief priests because there were twenty-four divisions of priests, all coming from Aaron. Aaron was the number one priest. In verses 5-6, they tell Herod that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem of Judea. I don’t know how many magi there are. There aren’t necessarily three wise men. There are a handful of them.

God said to Bethlehem, “You are by no means least among the leaders of Judah” (Mic. 5:2, Mt. 2:6, paraphrased). What that means is this: Bethlehem was a very small and insignificant village. God said, “O Bethlehem, you’re not as insignificant as you think you are. Granted, you’re not Jerusalem; you’re not Bethel;

you're not Shiloh"—some of the major cities of worship. "You're not a city of great prominence. You're a little village of nothing, but you're not the least. Because out of you is going to come the Shepherd who will rule all My people."

Little Bethlehem is embarrassed because they were so little and no one had ever heard of them. God is speaking to this city, and He says, "You're not the least. Out of you will come the Messiah."

Herod wants to destroy Him. He tells the wise men, "Hey, go and find out where He's at" (Mt. 2:8, paraphrased). It's all fake; he just wants to kill Him.

THE MAGI BRING THEIR GIFTS TO THE YOUNG CHILD JESUS

Verse 11. They came into the house where He was saying, and when they saw the child with Mary and His mother, they fell down and worshiped Him. They presented treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. He's not a baby in a manger anymore. He's been in Bethlehem for a number of months. He's grown up a little. He's still six, eight, or ten months old. He may be a year old; it's hard to know. They're not in a manger; they're in a house.

These men, five or six men or however many there were, offered three gifts. Gold was a gift offered to a king. Frankincense was a gift offered to a priest. It spoke of prayer. Myrrh was an embalming spice used when someone died. The magi were moved by the Holy Spirit to offer these gifts that prophetically spoke of Jesus' ministry as the King of kings, our great High Priest, who was to die as the sacrifice for our sins. That's what they were prophesying and they didn't even know it. Imagine going to a baby shower and giving someone embalming fluid. What's going on?! Think about it. I wouldn't get upset, I would just say, "OK..."

"OUT OF EGYPT DID I CALL MY SON"

Verse 15. Joseph is warned in a dream to leave, and he flees to Egypt. It fulfills the prophecy of Hosea, "Out of Egypt did I call My Son" (Hos. 11:1, paraphrased). Almost every single prophecy had a natural fulfillment in the nation of Israel. Then, normally, it had a spiritual fulfillment in the Church. This is true of almost every single prophecy, right down the line. If you don't know that, you might read some commentary when you start studying the Bible with the aid of books, and you'll think to yourself, "Oh, that's baloney!" But it's true!

Because this verse, "I call out of Egypt My Son," is talking about Abraham's offspring who all went to Egypt, and Moses brought them out. That was the original fulfillment. Moses bringing His son out of Egypt spoke of all the children of Israel as a corporate, single son, which is a foreshadowing of us being the sons of God. Then he applies it personally to Jesus. Many of the prophecies have a big, national application, and then they have a specific application to Jesus, or a specific thing like that. Sometimes they have a third application to the Church in general. Don't ever lock yourself into a prophecy because the Holy Spirit doesn't do it.

"A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING"

Verse 18 is the same thing. Herod had all the babies killed in Bethlehem. "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more" (Mt. 2:18, NASB).

The children were killed. This was a prophecy describing how the Jews would be carried away into Babylonian exile. This was fulfilled in Jeremiah 31. Rachel was a famous Old Testament woman who died giving birth to

Benjamin while she was in Bethlehem. They call it “the city of Rachel,” but everyone knew it was Bethlehem. Rachel would be weeping; Bethlehem would be weeping. Rachel died in childbirth. They would be weeping in relation to children. The children were no more.

They call it *Ramah*. There are a number of cities—and I only tell you this because you’ll run into this a number of times—ten or fifteen cities called *Ramah*. All that meant is a high place, because cities were built on high places. Ramah of Gilead is a well-known example. There are ten or fifteen Ramahs in the Bible. That’s what that’s all about.

That’s it for this session.