

Jesus, A Light for Revelation to the Gentiles

Luke 2:21-39

Key Verse: 2:32

by Kevin Albright

"...a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

In this passage we will learn about the baby Jesus. We will consider why Jesus was born under God's law. We will also hear the testimonies of two witnesses who have much to say about Jesus, especially the testimony of a man called Simeon. May God help each of us to know and to love Jesus Christ more through this message.

I. Jesus was born and grew up under the Law (21-24, 39)

In this passage, Luke mentions or alludes to the Law of Moses or the Law of the Lord six times. Though Jesus is the Son of God, he was not exempt from obeying God's Law. We see clearly two ways in which baby Jesus was put in submission to the Law of God.

First, baby Jesus was circumcised. Look at verse 21. When Jesus was just eight days old, he had to be circumcised. This was in accordance with God's law for all Jewish baby boys. Genesis 17:12 says, "For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised..." Obviously, Jesus was Jewish and his parents were observant Jews. At the time of circumcision, Jewish babies were also named. Joseph and Mary were obedient to God's specific words given to them. Mary and Joseph were each independently commanded by an angel of God to name the baby Jesus, and they obeyed (1:31; Mt 1:21). Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, Joshua, and it means, "the LORD saves." The angel had said about Mary's child, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The LORD God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." (1:32-33) In Matthew 1:21 an angel told Joseph in a dream to give Mary's baby the name Jesus saying, "because he will save his people from their sins." Even before Jesus was born, God announced that Jesus would save us from our sins. For this, Jesus was born, lived and died. Apostle Peter later declared about the name of Jesus, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Ac 4:12) Jesus is the name above every name. One day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (Php 2:11)

Second, baby Jesus was consecrated to the LORD. According to the Law of Moses, Mary had to wait another 33 days to be purified after giving birth to a boy. After this time of purification, Joseph and Mary took baby Jesus, who was now just over 40 days old, from Bethlehem to Jerusalem (5 or 6 miles) to present him to the Lord at the temple. The Law of the Lord stated in Exodus 13, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord." (Ex 13:2,12) Firstborn sons were to be dedicated to God to serve God throughout their lives. Though he is the Son of God, Jesus was consecrated to God, like a normal firstborn son. Have you dedicated your children to God? Have you dedicated yourself to God? Paul urged all Christians in Romans 12:1, "offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship."

Then why did Jesus have to submit to all these laws, even though he is the sinless Son of God? (After all, Chicago police don't obey the traffic laws!) According to Galatians 4:4, Jesus was born "under law, to redeem those under law." Hebrews 2:17 says that Jesus had to be made like us in every way, in order that he might become a "merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." This verse presents two reasons why Jesus had to submit to God's Law.

First, to become a merciful and faithful high priest. Because Jesus became like us, he really understands us--the temptations we face, our weaknesses and our struggles. He knows "our world," so he can help us in our time of need. When we come to Jesus, he does not despise us (ew!) or drive us away (get away from me!). As a merciful high priest, Jesus helps us. And as a faithful high priest, Jesus does not give up on us, but helps us again, and again, and again.

Second, to make atonement for the sins of the people. Here, atonement means that God and man are made "at one," or brought back together. Sin breaks man's relationship with God. According to God's law, a perfect sacrifice had to be made to bring sinners back to God. Jesus became the perfect sacrifice by perfectly keeping God's law. Finally, Jesus offered himself to atone for our sins. So through Jesus, we sinners can be at one with God. Sometimes we feel that Jesus is too holy and I am too sinful. Other times, we think our problems are too personal or trivial or embarrassing and we keep them to ourselves. But Jesus is merciful and faithful to all who come to him in faith. We can all come to Jesus, just as we are.

Joseph and Mary did one more thing at the temple in Jerusalem. They offered a sacrifice required by them: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." According to

Leviticus 12, this was the atonement sacrifice for the mother, Mary. More specifically, it was the sacrifice for one who could not afford a lamb. This indicates that Joseph and Mary were not wealthy, but rather poor. We saw this already when newborn Jesus was placed in a manger. Parents want their children to have all necessary things, even many unnecessary things, like ice cream and new toys and anything they ask for. But God sent his Son into the world to suffer and grow up in humble circumstances in an ordinary family.

II. More testimonies about Jesus (25-39)

Luke introduces "a man in Jerusalem called Simeon." Luke gives Simeon no title or occupation. He was simply "a man in Jerusalem...who was righteous and devout." What does it mean that he was "righteous"? St. Paul taught in Romans 3 that "there is no one righteous, not even one." Is this a contradiction in the Bible? No, if we properly define what Luke and what Paul meant by "righteous." Paul was referring to a man without sin. In that regard, there is no one righteous, except Jesus Christ. Simeon was righteous by having a right relationship with God through faith. He was not a perfect man. But he strove to please God, to follow God's commands, and to love God. And he offered God's required sacrifices for his sins. Simeon was also devout. This means he devoted his life and heart to God. Simeon worshiped God faithfully and sincerely.

Luke says something more about Simeon: "he was waiting for the consolation of Israel." The noun consolation means "comfort." What does it mean that Simeon was waiting for the comfort of Israel? Simply speaking, it means he was waiting for the Messiah, whom God promised would come. Isaiah prophesied much about the comfort of Israel through the promised Messiah. Handel's musical masterpiece "Messiah" begins with Isaiah 40:1-2: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins." Isaiah prophesied the coming of the Christ, the Messiah, as the One who would bring consolation to Israel. This is what Simeon believed and what he was eagerly waiting for.

Please ask yourself: what am I waiting for? Some are eagerly waiting for their wedding day (like Jacob and Pauline, Viola and Dan...), or for their graduation day, or for the day they get a new job. Some are eagerly waiting for the birth of a first child (like Peter and Esther Kim any day now). These are precious things to wait for. But Simeon's hope was much more marvelous and glorious. His holy hope was for the consolation of Israel, the coming of the Messiah. So it pleased God to give

Simeon the privilege of seeing the Christ. Psalm 37:4 promises, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart."

Luke tells us three things about the Holy Spirit's ministry in Simeon's life. (1) The Holy Spirit was upon him. (2) The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would not die before seeing the Lord's Christ. (3) The Holy Spirit moved and guided him to find the baby Jesus in the temple courts. How can we be moved, guided and influenced by the Holy Spirit? According to Luke, we must be righteous and devout and have a pure and holy hope. More simply and generally speaking, we must believe in and have hope in Jesus Christ.

Simeon was at the right place at the right time by God's guidance--at the temple when the baby Jesus was brought there. Simeon took baby Jesus in his arms and praised God. Earlier in Luke's gospel, Mary and Zechariah had also burst into songs of praise about what God was doing and who Jesus is. Simeon also uttered a hymn of praise with inspired insight into what God was doing and who Jesus is. Look at his prayer and praise in verses 29-32: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." Simeon prayed, "Sovereign Lord..." He was in awe of God's sovereign control of people and events. Simeon confessed that he was ready to die in peace. He could die peacefully because he had hope in God. Likewise, those who have seen the light of Christ and have hope in God can also die in peace. With his own eyes, Simeon saw God's salvation--the Savior, Jesus Christ. God prepared this salvation from the beginning of time and foretold it through the prophets. Let's think more deeply about two things which Simeon said about Jesus.

First, Jesus is the light. In his praise, Simeon calls Jesus "a light" who does two things: he brings revelation to the Gentiles, and he brings glory to God's people Israel. Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles. This was very meaningful and important for Luke, a Gentile believer in Jesus. Historically, the Jews despised the Gentiles as those without God and without hope (Eph 2:12). But Jesus is a light for the Gentiles too. The Jews were God's treasured possession. But this does not mean that God does not love or care about anyone else. God loves all people. God loved the Ninevites of Jonah's time, so he sent Jonah to them, though Jonah was a reluctant prophet to them. God loves all people.

Jesus is also a light for glory to Israel. In the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), from time to time God showed his glory to his people in the tabernacle

or in the temple. But God's glory departed from them because of their sins and they were conquered by their enemies, such as Assyria and Babylon. Jesus came to bring glory back to Israel. The Apostle John declared in his gospel, "We have seen God's glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (Jn 1:14) Isaiah 49:6 prophesied of this salvation and light for all nations through the Messiah: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

Jesus Christ is the light for all people. Jesus declared in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." Without Jesus, all people are in darkness--the darkness of sin and death, the darkness of no real meaning, hope or direction in life. Only Jesus dispels the darkness of sin and death, and gives true meaning and direction to our lives. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus proved that he is the true light by his sinless life, atoning death, and triumphant resurrection. So many people can testify how Jesus brought them out of darkness into his wonderful light. Before knowing Jesus, I was under the shadow of death with no meaningful direction in life. My goal was to make money and live a family-centered life, which were selfish desires for which I was not confident to die for. Jesus saved me and keeps saving me from my petty and selfish goals in order to live for his greater purpose and glory. My life has meaning and direction in Jesus Christ. Can you testify how Jesus brought you out of darkness into his light? What was the darkness that Jesus brought you out of?

Second, Jesus is the cause of peoples' falling and rising. Joseph and Mary marveled at Simeon's hymn of praise. Simeon blessed them and said more to Mary his mother--prophetic words of rejection and pain. Look at verses 34-35. "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Jesus would cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. Those who oppose and reject Jesus will fall and be judged by God, like the stubborn, unrepentant leaders of his time. Those who believe and obey Jesus will rise to salvation, blessing, and a godly legacy, like the faithful disciples of Jesus. There were many enemies of Jesus who spoke against him. Today as well, there are enemies of Jesus who mock, despise and reject his name, either directly or by their own agendas. Recently I

learned of two local college professors who are serving their own ungodly agendas. One professor encourages students to explore their sexuality and applauds students who experiment in sexual relations. Another professor passed out an article which claimed homosexual marriages were once sanctioned by the Christian faith. I heard of both of these professors from two Bible students. These two Bible students do not have high degrees in education like their ungodly professors. But, in the sight of God, they are wiser than their professors, and they are rising, while their professors are falling.

Jesus causes the falling and rising of all people. The Bible says, "The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (1Pe 2:6) But to those who remain stubborn and unrepentant and reject him, he is "a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." (1Pe 2:8) May God have mercy on us all to repent and trust in him and be sanctified by God. May God lead those two wicked professors and all who are in darkness to the light of Jesus. May God protect their students from their poisonous teachings and reveal to them how foolish they are, and may God draw them to himself through the gospel message and ministry. I know a person in Christ, and I'm sure you know many as well, who once was falling in his sins and failures. But through trusting in Jesus, his life is now rising in Christ. All people either fall in their sins or rise with faith and hope in Jesus.

Simeon said, "...so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed." When the gospel is preached, people's hearts are revealed and they are convicted of their sins. Some respond in anger and rebellion. Others respond in repentance and faith. Whatever the response, the gospel must be preached. For how can they hear and believe without someone preaching to them? All growing Christians must participate in the sharing of the gospel, faithfully and intentionally. May God help us to do so.

Finally, Simeon said that a sword would pierce Mary's soul too. Jesus' life would be one of suffering and rejection and finally undeserved torture and death. Jesus' death on the cross would be like a sword piercing Mary's soul. No parent wants to see their child suffer. But Jesus' suffering was necessary, to give salvation and light to the world.

Luke also introduces a prophetess named Anna. Her husband died after only 7 years of marriage. She did not remarry even though she could have. Rather, she dedicated the rest of her life to God, staying at the temple night and day, fasting and praying. She also gave thanks to God and spoke about the child Jesus to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. In today's Bible

passage, God used Simeon and Anna to testify to wondrous truths about Jesus. God also blessed them with the special privilege of seeing the Christ with their own eyes for their lives of devotion and faith. Jesus lived under God's law to become our faithful and merciful high priest and to make atonement for our sins. May we all accept Jesus as our light and salvation and have his peace and joy. May we all rise with Jesus and proclaim his name and glory to people who are living in darkness and who are without hope.