

The Gospel According to

SAINT MATTHEW

SAINT MARK

SAINT LUKE

SAINT JOHN

<p>NOTHING RECORDED</p>	<p>NOTHING RECORDED</p>	<p>CHAPTER 1, VERSES 59-66</p> <p>1:59 - And it came to pass¹, that on the eighth day² they³ came to circumcise⁴ the child⁵; and they³ called⁶ him Zacharias⁷, after the name⁸ of his father⁹.</p> <p>1:60 - And his mother answered¹⁰ and said, Not so¹¹; but he shall be called⁶ John¹².</p> <p>1:61 - And they³ said unto her, There is none¹³ of thy kindred¹⁴ that is called by this name⁸.</p> <p>1:62 - And they³ made signs¹⁵ to his father⁹, how he would have him called⁶.</p> <p>1:63 - And he asked for a writing table¹⁶, and wrote¹⁷, saying, His name is John¹². And they marvelled¹⁸ all.</p> <p>1:64 - And his mouth¹⁹ was opened²⁰ immediately²¹, and his tongue²² loosed²³, and he spake²⁴, and praised²⁵ God²⁶.</p> <p>1:65 - And fear²⁷ came on all that dwelt²⁸ round about them³; and all these sayings were noised²⁹ abroad³⁰ throughout all the hill country³¹ of Judaea³².</p> <p>1:66 - And all they³ that heard³³ them laid them up in their hearts³⁴, saying, What manner³⁵ of child⁵ shall this be³⁶! And the hand³⁷ of the Lord³⁸ was with him³⁹.</p>	<p>NOTHING RECORDED</p>
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CHRONOLOGY: APPROXIMATELY OCTOBER 19, 5BCE*

* The established year for this chapter is based on the year of Jesus' birth, which is highly debated. Below is a list of possible years for Jesus' birth. The chronology of Jesus' life in this book is based on the author's belief that Jesus was born in 4BCE. The most likely years for Jesus' birth are 1BCE, 4BCE and 5BCE. The other years are problematic.

- Year theories: 1 BCE - Supported by the Apostle James E. Talmage & Secular Biblical Scholars Pearson and Hug & the creator of Gregorian Calendar: Dionysius Exiguus.
- 2 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholar Scalinger.
- 2/3 BCE - Supported by early Christian writers and historians Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Africanus, Hippolytus of Rome, Hippolytus of Thebes, Origen, Eusebius and Epiphanius.
- 3 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Baronius and Paulus.
- 4 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Bengel, Wieseler & Greswell. **Supported by this Author.**
- 5 BCE - Supported by the Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, the Apostle J. Rueben Clark, and Secular Biblical Scholars Usher and Petavius.
- 6 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Strong, Luvin and Clark.
- 7 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Ideler and Sanclemente.

LOCATION: JUDAEA (HEBRON, BETHLEHEM, EIN KAREM OR NEAR VICINITY OF JERUSALEM)

COMMENTARY: Eight days after the birth of a Jewish son, the father was commanded to have his son circumcised. This was a symbol of the covenant that the children of Israel made with their God. They promised to be morally clean, and pure before God. Zacharias honored this obligation and brought his son to be circumcised. It was during this ceremony that the child was given a name. Zacharias was deaf and dumb, so the people gathered named his child after him. After all, the child was the only child of age stricken parents who waited their whole life for a child. It seems appropriate to name him Zacharias. Elisabeth protested, but she was a female in a patriarchal society. It was at this point that Zacharias' moth was opened. His name was to be John as the Angel had directed.

FOOTNOTES:

1- **And it came to pass** - The Hebrew expression rendered "and it came to pass" in English is found throughout the Bible and is even more prominent in the Book of Mormon. In fact, the Book of Mormon uses the term nearly 1,400 times. The Old Testament uses the term nearly 400 time, while the New Testament uses the term almost 90 times. So much that Mark Twain said, "If he (Joseph Smith) had left that (And it came to pass) out, his Bible (The Book of Mormon) would have been only a pamphlet." (Roughing It, Mark Twain, Chapter 16). All criticism aside, the term is absolutely part of the Semitic languages. Hence, it is a necessary part of the Hebrew language, where it comprises only four

letters linked together "wyhy" or "וַיְהִי", meaning "and it happened." English translators most often translate the word as "and it came to pass". In modern English, it would translate as "it happened". The letters representing w and y are the smallest in the Hebrew alphabet.

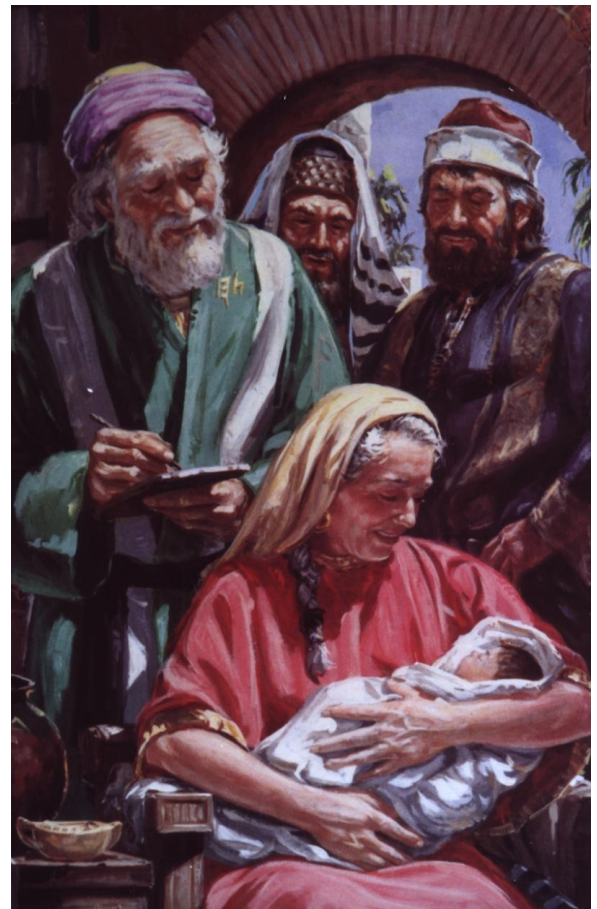
The Greek equivalent of the Hebrew phrase is "γίνομαι" or "ginomai", which means to become, to arise, to be made or to come to pass. It is a common phrase in many languages throughout the Middle Eastern cultures of old.

- 2- **eighth day** - The number eight has symbolic meaning. The number 8 is the number of perfection, and infinity. In mathematics the symbol of the infinity is represented by a 8 laid down. Eight is also the number that represents the final resurrection. Because of its association with the law of circumcision, the number eight also symbolized the covenant made with God. **"According to the injunction given to Abraham (Genesis 17:12; Genesis 21:4), taken up and formalized in the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 12:3), the newborn boy was to be circumcised on the eighth day. Even the sanctity of the Sabbath yielded to the regulation of circumcision on the eighth day according to John 7:22-23 and the rabbis of a later date "they may perform on the Sabbath all things that are needful for circumcision' (m. Sabbat 18:3; 19:1-4)"** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Anchor-Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 380). In addition, the number eight has another gospel related symbolic meaning. The number eight symbolizes exaltation, **"...the natural order of Creation involves cycles of seven, such as the seven days of the week and the seven years of the Shemittah agricultural cycle. The number eight, on the other hand, represents the concept that one can rise above the limitations of nature. By commanding Israel to circumcise its male children on the eighth day, God taught that the Jew's ability to remove the barriers to his spiritual ascent transcends the natural order of life. Nevertheless, God gives Man the ability to do it - and since he can, he must"** (The Chumash, the stone edition, The Torah, Haftaros and five Megillos with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings, page 75).



The eighth day was so significant in relation to circumcision that if it fell on a Sabbath, the Sabbath took second fiddle. Few things took precedence over the sacred Sabbath. The Mishnah, the oral law, records;

- "19:5 A. An infant is circumcised on the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth days [after birth],
 B. never earlier, never later.
 C. How so?
 D. Under Normal circumstances, it is on the eighth day;
 E. [if] he is born at twilight, he is circumcised on the ninth day
 F. [If he was born] at twilight on the eve of the Sabbath he is circumcised on the tenth day [the following Sunday]
 G. In the case of a festival which falls after the Sabbath, he will be circumcised on the eleventh day [Monday]
 H. In the case of two festival days of the New Year, he will be circumcised on the twelfth day [Tuesday].
 I. An infant who is sick - they do not circumcise him until he gets well."
 (The Mishnah, A New Translation, Chapter 19, Jacob Neusner, page 203)



Some of the plain and precious truths of the Bible are missing in association with the eighth day of John's life. The Bible said that he was circumcised, but modern revelation teaches that much more happened that day. The Doctrine and Covenants says, **"Which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments, which the Lord in his wrath caused to continue with the house of Aaron among the children of Israel until John, whom God raised up, being filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. For he was baptized while he was yet in his childhood, and was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old unto this power, to overthrow the kingdom of the Jews, and to make straight the way of the Lord before the face of his people, to prepare them for the coming of the Lord, in whose hand is given all power."** (Doctrine & Covenants 84:27-28).

So, what angel ordained John? How did this happen? Who witnessed? Bruce R. McConkie said, **"Naming of children and circumcision of male members of the house of Israel took place on this day (eighth day). In the case of John, he 'was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old' - not to the Aaronic Priesthood, for such would come later, after his baptism and other preparation, but - 'unto this power, to overthrow the kingdom of the Jews, and to make straight the way of the Lord before the face of his people, to prepare them for the coming of the Lord, in whose hand is given all power,' (Doctrine & Covenants 84:28). That, is at this solemn eighth day ceremony, and angel presumably Gabriel, gave the Lord's Elias the divine commission to serve as the greatest forerunner of all the ages."** (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie, page 89). We speculate that Gabriel was the angel, probably because Noah is an Elias, with a special call to prepare Mary, Joseph, and Zacharias for the coming of the Savior. The details of this ordinance is still unrevealed to us. We also have no record of the witnesses to it. We would assume that Zacharias and Elisabeth were present; however, that is just more speculation.

- 3- **they** - The "they" referred to in this verse makes reference to "neighbors" and "cousins" that came for John's birth as stated in Luke 1:58. See footnote # 3 in Chapter 6.
- 4- **circumcise** - The Jewish circumcision ritual is referred to as a **"brit milah"**. The Hebrew **"brit milah"** or "מִילָה בְרִית" means **"covenant of circumcision"**. The Jews were commanded of the Lord to perform the ordinance upon each male child born to parents who had entered into the covenant of Abraham. According to Biblical Law, the religious male circumcision ceremony was to be performed on the eighth day of a male infant's life by a **"mohel"**. The **"brit milah"** is followed by a celebratory meal (seudat mitzvah). This celebration was not only a rejoicing in the birth of a son, but a celebrating of the covenant it symbolized. Before we discuss the symbolism of this act, we should probably define the act itself.

Males are born with a piece of skin covering the end of their genitals, called a foreskin. The act of circumcision removes the foreskin. In modern societies, it is often done for hygiene reasons. Individuals who retain their foreskin often struggle with infections and other issues related to keeping the area under the foreskin clean. In ancient societies, circumcision was often performed in religious rites. **"While not often thought of today as a sacrificial act, circumcision, as practiced by the Hebrews, was just as much a sacrifice as the slaughtering of a sheep on the altar. The removal of the male foreskin was a mark of the covenant with Yahweh and evidenced a physical distinction from the uncircumcised men of the cities of Canaan. The practice, also common among the Egyptians, was instituted in Genesis 17:9-14 and required that every male at least eight days old (and thus viable) undergo this painful procedure."** (Manners and Customs of the Bible, Victor H. Matthews, page 27).

Speaking of the Law of Circumcision, one Jewish work records, "There are two parties to the covenant of circumcision, and their respective obligations must be defined clearly. God's are listed in Genesis 17 verses 4-8, and those of Abraham and his descendants are enumerated in verses 9-14" (The Chumash, the stone edition, The Torah, Haftaros and five Megillos with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings, page 73). The Old Testament outlines the Abrahamic Covenant and the Law of Circumcision as follows;

Introduction Genesis 17:1-3

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying," (Genesis 17:1-3)

God's Covenant with Us Genesis 17:4-8

"As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." (Genesis 17:4-8)

Man's Covenant with God Genesis 17:9-14

"And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant." (Genesis 17:9-14)

Most of the Lord's covenants, require that partakers offer of themselves a sacrifice. An appropriate and accepted sacrifice is required for the Lord's promised blessings. "Circumcision, like sacrifice and fasting, functions within the biblical narrative as a means of purifying the people. It continues to function as a distinctive sign of the covenant, differentiating the Israelites from the uncircumcised Philistines". (Manners and Customs of the Bible, Victor H. Matthews, page 84). It is clear that our sacrifices are not for Him, but rather for us. We purify ourselves of greed, selfishness, and sin as we make the sacrifices associated with God's covenants. Circumcision was no different. "This act, a parallel to the act of placing the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the doorpost before the Passover in Exodus 12:22, signaled the renewal of the covenant pact. It marked the beginning of a new contractual arrangement with Yahweh that was again repeated when the Israelite males circumcised prior to the conquest of Canaan." (Manners and Customs of the Bible, Victor H. Matthews, page 28). Commenting on Exodus 17:1, The Chumash records "Walk before Me. i.e. serve Me, by observing the mitzvah of circumcision, and as a result of this, you will become perfect." (The Chumash, the stone edition, The Torah, Haftaros and five Megillos with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings, page 73).

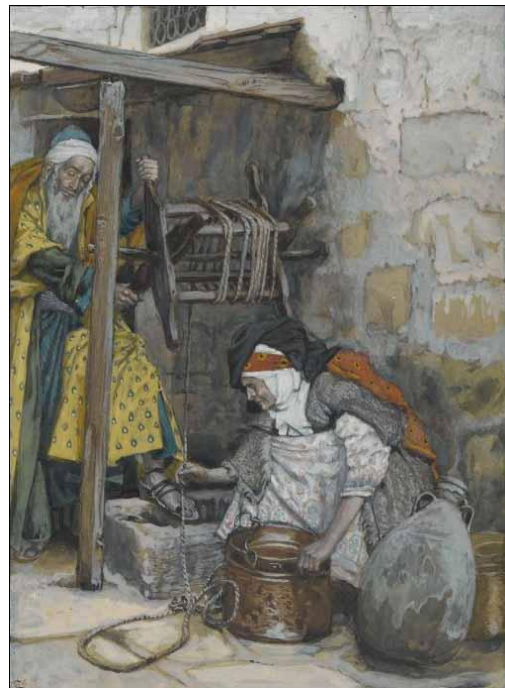
There is an important note that must be made in reference to circumcision and the culture at the time of Zacharias and John. The Jews had tremendous pressure to Hellenize. This pressure had been present for decades prior to John's birth. Hellenization (or Hellenisation) is the historical spread of ancient Greek culture and, to a lesser extent, the Greek language, over foreign peoples conquered by Greece or brought into its sphere of influence. The land of the Jews was right in the middle of this movement. The Greeks represented progress, intelligence, wisdom, advancement, and the future. There were many Jews who embraced Hellenization. Many Jews followed the Greek clothing styles and fads, and even proposed adopting Greek philosophy and religious changes. There was a movement, though we are not sure of the size, to stop circumcision and other Jewish rites. The Greeks were not circumcised and felt it was a brutal practice. "Antiochus then began an anti-Jewish campaign designed, according to 1 Maccabees 1:41-42, to make all of the people of the Seleucid realm 'one people' and have them renounce their old traditions and religion. His anger may have been increased by continued pressure on his kingdom by the Romans. However, the stipulations of his decree all suggest that his plan was to completely Hellenize the Jews. Their shrines and altars were to be defiled and swine were to be sacrificed in the Temple. Other ritual acts, like circumcision, were no longer to be performed (1 Maccabees 1:45-48)" (Manners and Customs of the Bible, Victor H. Matthews, page 198).

The evolution of Hellenism among the Jews was at times more than a fade. It is recorded that "...during the reign of Antiochus IV (165 BCE), circumcision was prohibited by royal decree, but Jews observed the rite even at the risk of death. Some one hundred years later, political conditions had changed drastically and many upper-class Jews desirous of assimilation to the dominant Greco-Roman way of life began to neglect berit milah." (The Torah with commentaries, W. Gunther Plaut & Bernard J. Bamberger, page 118). This would indicate that by John's birth there were many who were abandoning the covenant of circumcision. This might give some insight into the righteousness of Zacharias and Elisabeth. They followed the Lord's commands, even when fads said otherwise. This does not mean that they were alone in this decision. There were also many Jews that insisted on maintaining the old ways. Nearly a hundred years after the Saviors death, circumcision and Hellenization became a huge factor in the Jews down fall. One bible commentator, while speaking of this time said, "Instead of quieting the Jews, however, this attempt to extinguish the traditional religious and political heritage of Jerusalem sparked the Second Jewish Revolt in 132 CE. Sources for this revolt and its primary causes are fragmentary, but they all seem to indicate that Jerusalem and Jewish traditions, including circumcision, were still rallying points for rebellion." (Manners and Customs of the Bible, Victor H. Matthews, page 219).

The symbolism of circumcision is beyond just a sign of the covenant. Commenting on Exodus 17:10, The Chumash records, "Here circumcision is called the covenant, but in the next verse it is called the sign of the covenant, implying that the actual covenant is something else. R' Hirsch sees in this a fundamental Jewish



principle. A commandment consists of two parts: the physical act and its underlying moral or spiritual teaching - and neither is complete without the other....Hence, the physical act is the covenant, but it is also a sign of the covenant's deeper meaning." (The Chumash, the stone edition, The Torah, Haftaras and five Megillos with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings, page 75). So, what is the deeper meaning? Like most symbols, the lesson lies in the understanding and application of the symbols. "The symbolic significance of this commandment is indicated by the name of the flesh that is removed in performance of the commandment - עֲרִיָּה (orlah), commonly translated as foreskin, but more accurately, as it is used in Scripture, a barrier standing in the way of a beneficial result. Thus, for example, the sinful habits that predispose a person not to change his life-style are called the orlah of the heart (Leviticus 26:41; Jeremiah 9:25; Ezekiel 44:7). Thus, although this concept is beyond human understanding, circumcision is a means to help the Jew ennoble himself and return to the spiritual state of Adam before his sin. As the sages teach, Adam was born circumcised, but after his sin his foreskin was extended and covered the organ (Sanhedrin 38b), as a symbol that he had created a barrier between himself and holiness. By removing the superfluous skin covering the organ of continuity, circumcision teaches that man must eliminate the natural barriers blocking his advancement. But circumcision's capacity to accomplish this is not a logical outcome of the physical act; to the contrary, it is metaphysical. This aspect of circumcision is symbolized by the commandment that it be done on the eighth day of a boy's life." (The Chumash, the stone edition, The Torah, Haftaras and five Megillos with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings, pages 74-75). It was a symbol of change, repentance, and conversion. Hence, those who wanted to "convert to Judaism" were required to "be circumcised". (Manners and Customs of the Bible, Victor H. Matthews, page 201).



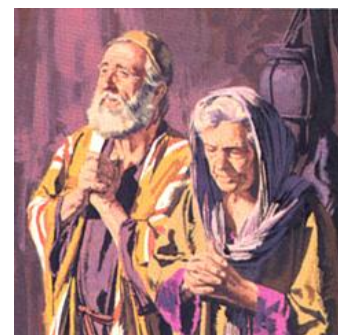
- 5 - **Child** - The word "child" used in this verse is translated from the Greek word "παιδίον" or "paidion". A "paidion" is a young boy or girl. It is a little child or infant. It is not an unborn child or an adolescent, though it can be used to describe someone who is child like. "Whereas in the foregoing visitation scene Luke had used 'brepchos' of the child in the womb (Luke 1:41, 44), here the word for 'child' is 'paidion', as Luke 1:56,76,80. Brepchos is used in Luke 2:12,16 of Jesus." (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Anchor-Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 380). See also footnote #10 in Chapter 4.

"Israelite children were expected to be respectful and obedient to their parents (Exodus 20:12). They were to answer the call and orders of their elders (1 Samuel 3:5). A disobedient child was considered a disgrace to the family and the community." (Manners and Customs of the Bible, Victor H. Matthews, page 74). The Lord was serious about this concept. So much so that there are specific commandments dictating the behavior of children. Leviticus teaches, "For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death..." (Leviticus 20:9). Similarly, Exodus teaches, "And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death." (Exodus 21:15). Children are commanded to "Honour thy father and thy mother..." (Exodus 20:12).

Life as a child in ancient Judea would not have been easy. "Children had to grow up fast in the hill country villages. As soon as they were able to take directions (Isaiah 7:15), they were out to work in the home or the fields. As they grew older some were sent to guard the herds (1 Samuel 16:11) or were apprenticed to craftsmen in the village." (Manners and Customs of the Bible, Victor H. Matthews, page 74). Children were also expected to follow the commandments and rituals of the Israel. This started from birth, and children born to parents of the covenant were given to the Lord through the ritual of circumcision. " 'By circumcision,' Edersheim says, 'the child had, as it were, laid upon it the yoke of the Law, with all of duty and privilege which this implied... It was, so tradition has it, as if the father had acted sacrificially as High-Priest, offering his child to God in gratitude and love; and it symbolized this deeper moral truth, that man must by his own act complete what God had first instituted...' " (The Mortal Messiah, Collector's Addition, Bruce R. McConkie, Volume 1, page 217).

- 6 - **called** - The word "called" is translated from the word "καλέω" or "kaleō". It means "to call". It can also mean "to give a name", or "to greet one by name". "Such a custom of naming children at circumcision is not otherwise attested among Palestinian Jews until several centuries later. Some commentators have consequently thought that the references to such a practice might be imported here from Greek practice, since in ancient Greece it was common to name the child on the seventh or tenth day after birth. Among Palestinian Jews it had been the practice to name the child at birth." (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Anchor-Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 380).

- 7 - **Zacharias** - Zacharias was the aged father of John. See also footnote # 8 in Chapter 5 and footnote # 6 in Chapter 2. The child born to Zacharias and Elisabeth was already being called after his father. "Luke's words here must be understood, not so much as a proposal made by the neighbors and relatives, as a supposition; people were referring to the child already as 'little Zechariah'. Yet even such a supposition is strange, for though the naming of a child after the Jewish father is attested, it was not very common. The more usual practice seems to have been ponymy, of the naming of a child after his grandfather." (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Anchor-Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 380). Though it was not a common practice to call a son after his father, it should be remembered that this child was a child to barren parents who had waited their whole life for a child. After they were past the age of bearing children, this child was the result of a miracle announced by an angel.

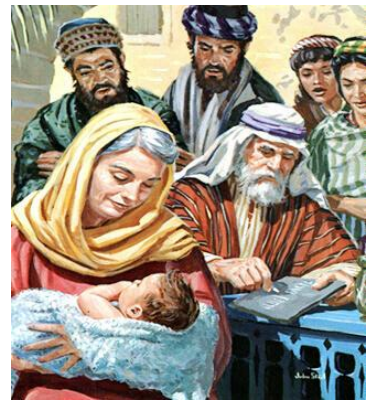


- 8 - **name** - The word "name" is translated from the Greek word "ὄνομα" or "onoma". It means a proper name, or a name by which a person is reckoned. "Naming a child at circumcision or in the synagogue can, therefore, be an important counteragent to the community's lack of tradition and the individual's sense of rootlessness. The giving of a Hebrew name, which may honor a member of the family or simply be a recognition of the child's membership in the covenant, can add a religious element to the important process of name giving, which is primarily a matter of taste." (The Torah with commentaries, W. Gunther Plaut & Bernard J. Bamberger, page 119). Another source states, "It was customary among the Jews to give games to children at the time of their circumcision. The rabbins say that this was because God changed the names of Abram and Sarai at the same time that he instituted circumcision. It was very rarely that the son received the name of the father; there was doubtless some special reason in this case why the friends wished the babe to be called Zacharias. The custom of naming the child at the time of circumcision is also illustrated in the case of Jesus. Other nations, as well as the Jews, gave names to their children on special days. Godwyn says: 'The Romans gave names to their male children on the ninth day, to the female on the eighth. The Athenians gave names on the tenth. Others on the seventh...' " (Manner and Customs of the Bible, James M. Freeman, page 403-404).

There is something else happening here that is not necessarily obvious. Zacharias and Elisabeth's child was being called "Zacharias". It was the name given to him of man. The infant, called Zacharias, was presented for circumcision. Circumcision was a covenant between man and God. At the time of the covenant, Zacharias reveals that John was to receive a 'new name', one given from heaven. There is a pattern established in the Old Testament whereas mortal men covenant with God and consequently receive a "new name". "Abram's name is changed to Abraham, and Sarai's to Sarah. Similar changes occur several times in the Bible: For instance, Jacob's name is changed to Israel, Hoshea's to Joshua, Mattaniah's to Zedekiah. In each case, the change of name symbolizes a change in the personality or the status of the bearer." (The Torah with commentaries, W. Gunther Plaut & Bernard J. Bamberger, page 119). The new name is an interesting concept. Probably over simplified, but here is one way to look at it.

When a child goes through an adoption process, lots of contractual agreements are made and signed. Once the contracts are properly executed, and approved by an authorized judge, the child legally becomes the child of adoptive parents. A new birth certificate is drawn up, and a new name is given. This is done so that the child bears the name of his new family, to which he now "belongs". As we covenant with God, we become His. We "belong" to Him. The "new name" represents this "adoption". Interestingly, we often hear the words, we are adopted into the house of Israel. **"Related to this was the widespread Jewish custom of giving a desperately sick person a new name. It was believed that the heavenly decree of death was issued against the person as he was, his name being an integral part of his personality. With a new name he was therefore thought to have a better chance of recovery"** (The Torah with commentaries, W. Gunther Plaut & Bernard J. Bamberger, page 119). Let's look at that symbolism. The concept that a "new name" could help us overcome death. Well, unless we partake of the covenants of the Gospel, we cannot overcome spiritual death. These covenants qualify us to be called after a "new name". We become Jesus' children, and we belong to Him. Jesus, in this respect, becomes our Father. We, then, are called after His name.

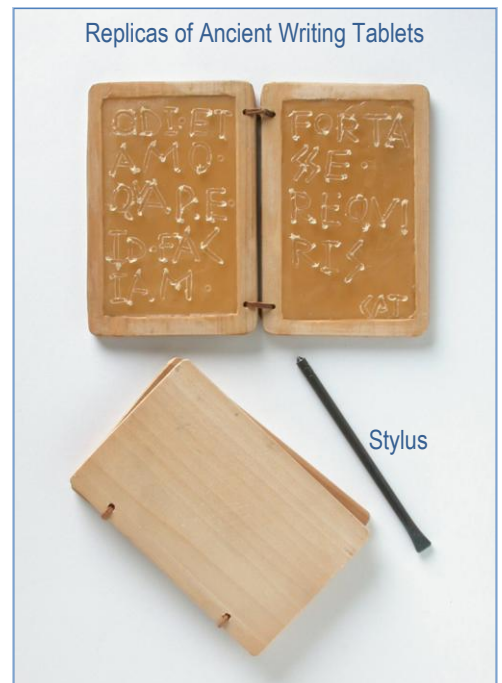
- 9 - **father** - The word "father" in Greek is "πατήρ" or "patēr". The Greek word can also mean any male ancestor or relative. See also footnote # 66 in Chapter 5. In this case, it is safe to assume that the word is translated correctly and Zacharias is the literal father of Elisabeth's unborn child.
- 10 - **answered** - The word "answered" is derived from the Greek word "ἀποκρίνομαι" or "apokrinomai". It means "to give an answer to a question posed", or "to begin to speak". Elisabeth was not denied the ability to speak, like her husband. As her relatives and neighbors announced the name for the newborn child, Elisabeth spoke up. It was not typical for a woman to act as the spokesman for the family, but Zacharias was currently deaf and mute.
- 11 - **not so** - The answer Elisabeth gave was clear and without question. "Not so", in other words, that will not be his name. Elisabeth surely knew from Zacharias what the angel had proclaimed his name to be. Zacharias might not have been able to speak, but communication was clearly present between him and his wife. There was no question in her mind that the child should be named as the angel had directed.
- 12 - **John** - The Greek form of the name "John" is "Ἰωάννης" or "Iōānēs". It literally means "Jehovah is a gracious giver". It is Hebrew in origin. The Hebrew name for John is "יְחִיָּהוּ" or "Yowchanan". The Hebrew name means literally, "Jehovah has graced". See also footnote # 25 in Chapter 2.



Forms of the name **John**- Arabic - "يوحنا" or "Yahyā" or "Yūḥanna"
 Aramaic - "Yohanoun"
 Hebrew - "Jochanan" ("son of Zacharias" or "ben Sacharja")

- 13 - **none** - The word "none" is translated from the Greek word "οὐδείς" or "oudeis". It means no one or nothing. The implication here is that no one in the family line has the name John. **"However, John/Yehohanan was a name in use among priestly-family members in the postexilic period"** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Anchor-Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 381). The proper implication here is that there were no grandparents or near relatives with the name. They were probably puzzled since the name Zacharias would honor the father, who then reveals that the name should be changed to some appearingly random name. Why would Zacharias not want this honor? Well, the reason is obvious to us. The angel had spoken.
- 14 - **kindred** - The term "kindred" is from the Greek word "συγγενεία" or "synggeneia" which means "a kinship", "relationship", "kindred", or "family". See also footnote # 43 in Chapter 3. When a child is born, the female relatives and close friends (neighbors) would often assist the mother to be with her delivery. Similarly, family and neighbors would gather for a newborn's circumcision and the celebration that would follow.
- 15 - **signs** - The word "signs" is translated from the Greek word "ἐννεύω" or "enneuō". It means to "nod" or "to express or signify by a sign or a nod". **"Literally 'nodded'. Zechariah is here understood to be both deaf and dumb."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Anchor-Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 381). One of the earliest written records of a sign language is from the fifth century BCE, in Plato's Cratylus, where Socrates says: **"If we hadn't a voice or a tongue, and wanted to express things to one another, wouldn't we try to make signs by moving our hands, head, and the rest of our body, just as dumb people do at present?"** The recorded history of sign language in Western societies starts in the 17th century, as a visual language or method of communication. Sign language is composed of a system of conventional gestures, mimic, hand signs and finger spelling, plus the use of hand positions to represent the letters of the alphabet. There is no evidence of any organized form of sign language at the time of Zacharias.

- 16 - **writing table** - The phrase "writing table" is translated from a single Greek word, "πινακίδιον" or "pinakidion". It is mostly translated correctly, as it is a "small tablet", or a "writing tablet". Anciently, people wrote on wax tablets. A wax tablet is a tablet made of wood and covered with a layer of wax, often linked loosely to a cover tablet, as a "double-leaved" diptych. It was used as a reusable and portable writing surface in Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages. Writing on the wax surface was performed with a pointed instrument called a stylus. Writing by engraving in wax required the application of much more pressure and traction than would be necessary with ink on parchment or papyrus, and the scribe had to lift the stylus in order to change the direction of the stroke. Therefore the stylus could not be applied with the same degree of dexterity as a pen. A straight-edged, spatula-like implement (often placed on the opposite end of the stylus tip) would be used in a razor-like fashion to serve as an eraser. The entire tablet could be erased for reuse by warming it to about 50°C or 122°F and smoothing the softened wax surface. The modern expression of "a clean slate" equates to the Latin expression "tabula rasa".



Archeological Remains of Ancient Roman Writing Tablets

The Greeks probably started using the folding pair of wax tablets, along with the leather scroll in the mid-8th century BCE. It is believed that the word for the writing-tablet in Greek was originally deltos (δέλτος), from the letter delta (Δ) based on ancient Greek and Roman authors and scripts, due to the shape of tablet. An alternative theory holds that it has retained its Semitic designation, "daltu", which originally signified "door" but was being used for writing tablets in Ugarit in the 13th century BCE. In Hebrew the term evolved into "daleth". In the first millennium BCE writing tablets were in use in Mesopotamia as well as Syria and Palestine. Writing tablets of ivory were found in the ruins of Sargon's palace in Nimrod.

"Writing-tablets were in use among various ancient nations. They are referred to in Isaiah 30:8, and in Habakkuk 2:2, and metaphorically in Proverbs

3:3; Jeremiah 17:1, and 2nd Corinthians 3:3. They are yet to be seen in modern Greece. Among the Romans they were made of Ivory or of citron-wood, but generally of beach, fir, or some other common wood. They were covered with a thin coating of wax, in which letters were formed by a stylus, an instrument corresponding to the modern pen. It was made of gold, silver, brass, iron, copper, ivory, or bone. One end was pointed for writing, while the other end was smooth, flat, and circular, for erasing, and for smoothing the waxed surface so that it might be used again for writing. The outside part of the tablet, which was held in the hand, was not coated with wax, and around the edge of the inside there was a thin, narrow ledge, so that when two tablets came together the waxed surfaces would not touch each other and become marred. A book was often made of several of these tablets combined, sometimes as many as five or six being fastened together at the backs by means of wires, which served as hinges. Tablets were used for almost every species of writing, where the document was not of great length. Letters, or even wills, were written upon them. For the purpose of sealing these, and other documents which might require it, holes were made in the outer edge, through which a triple thread was passed and fastened with a seal." (Manner and Customs of the Bible, James M. Freeman, page 404-405).

17 - wrote - The word "wrote", as derived from the Greek word "γράφω" or "graphō", refers to writing letters on a tablet, parchment, paper, or other materials. Zacharias used a common form of writing, that being a wooden slate filled with wax where a stylus was used to etch the wax with letters. Stylus' were nothing more than a pointed stick about the size of a pencil. They were made of various materials. Some were made from bone, metal, precious metals, wood, or ivory.

Most of the Jews at the time of John and Jesus spoke Aramaic. Aramaic (Classical Syriac: ܐܪܡܝܐ Aramaya) is a family of languages or dialects, belonging to the Semitic family. It is suspected that most of our Old Testament prophets and characters spoke Aramaic. More specifically, it is a part of the Northwest Semitic subfamily, which also includes Canaanite languages such as Hebrew and Phoenician. The Aramaic script was widely adopted for other languages and is ancestral to both the Arabic and modern Hebrew alphabets; however, Aramaic is not Hebrew. But Hebrew may be considered Aramaic in origin. The modern box Hebrew alphabet and language was based on the Aramaic and Paleo Hebrew languages, with major influences from the Babylonian language while the Jews were in exile. Aramaic and Hebrew are related, but they are their own distinct and separate languages. To make a long story short, Zacharias probably wrote and spoke Aramaic in his day to day dealings. It would have been his primary language.

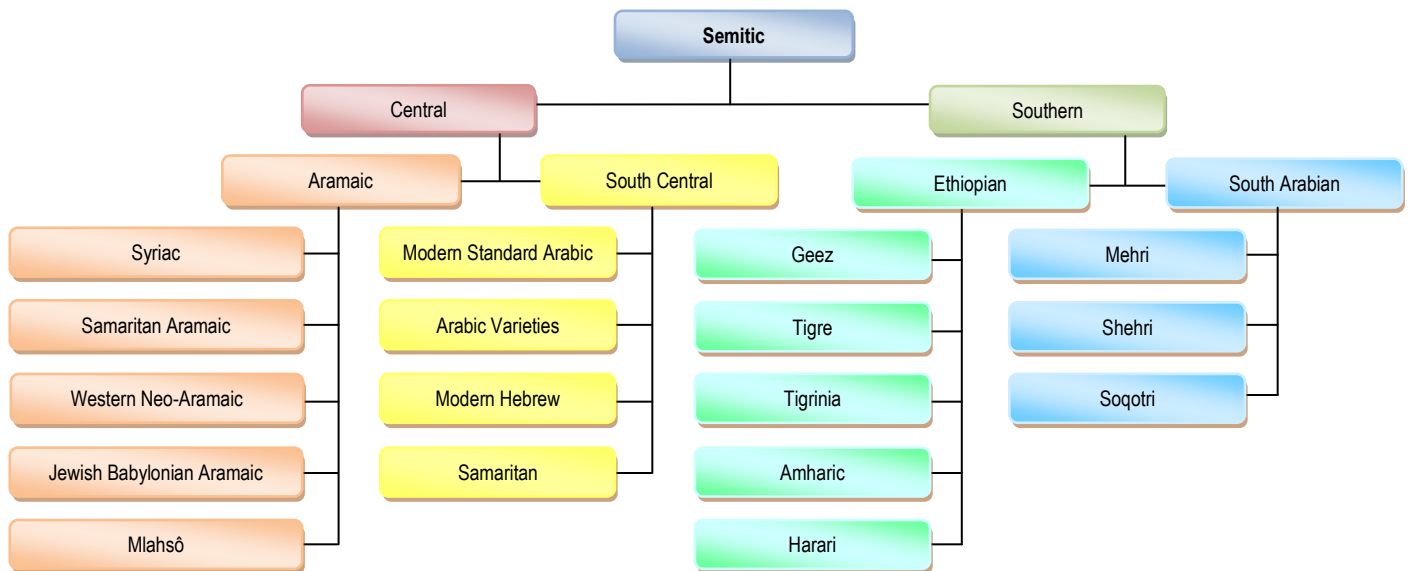
It is generally believed that in the 1st century AD, Jews in Judaea primarily spoke Aramaic with a decreasing number using Hebrew as a native language. Many learned Hebrew as a liturgical language. Additionally, Koine Greek was an international language of the Roman administration and trade, and was widely understood by those in the urban spheres of influence. Latin was spoken in the Roman army but had almost no impact on the linguistic landscape.

In addition to the formal, literary dialects of Aramaic based on Hasmonaean and Babylonian influences, there were a number of Aramaic dialects. Seven dialects of Western Aramaic were spoken in the vicinity of Judaea in Jesus' time. They were probably distinctive yet mutually intelligible. Old Judaeian was the prominent dialect of Jerusalem and Judaea. The region of Engedi had the South-east Judaeian dialect. Samaria had its distinctive Samaritan Aramaic, where the consonants "he", "heth" and "ayin" all became pronounced as "aleph". Galilean Aramaic, the dialect of Jesus' home region, is only known from a few place names, the influences on Galilean Targumic, some rabbinic literature and a few private letters. It seems to have a number of distinctive features: diphthongs are never simplified into monophthongs. East of the Jordan, the various dialects of East Jordanian were spoken. In the region of Damascus and the Anti-Lebanon mountains, Damascene Aramaic was spoken (deduced mostly from Modern Western Aramaic). Finally, as far north as Aleppo, the western dialect of Orontes Aramaic was spoken.

The regional languages influenced one another, especially Hebrew and Aramaic. Hebrew words entered Jewish Aramaic (mostly technical religious words but also everyday words like 'ēš "wood"). Vice versa, Aramaic words entered Hebrew (not only Aramaic words like māmōn "wealth" but Aramaic ways of using words like making Hebrew rā'ūi, "seen" mean "worthy" in the sense of "seemly", which is a loan translation of Aramaic ḥāzê meaning "seen" and "worthy").



The Semitic Language Family



"Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:" (Isaiah 29:13). Here the Lord uses the word mouth to represent the fact that people often say one thing, but mean something else. It is used to illustrate hypocrisy.

- 20 - **opened** - The word "opened" is derived from the Greek word "ἀνοίγω" or "anoigō". It means "to open". There are no apparent figurative meanings for this word.
- 21 - **immediately**- The term "immediately" is translated from the Greek word "παρὰχρόνιον" or "parachrōma". The meaning of the Greek word is "immediately", "forthwith", or "instantly".
- 22 - **tongue** - The word "tongue" is translated from the Greek word "γλῶσσα" or "glōssa". The word means "a tongue" as in a member of the body. It can also mean "a language" or a "distinct dialect" that differs from other nations or people. The tongue symbolizes **"The voice of deity; manifestation of a powerful voice; preaching..."** (An illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, J.C. Cooper, page 174). Similarly, it is God that blesses us with the ability to speak. The Old Testament teaches, **"And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?"** (Exodus 4:11). Once Zacharias declared, via his writing tablet, what his son's name should be, the Lord gave him back the ability to speak. He opened his mouth and praised God. When we clearly see the Lord's hand in our lives, that is the response that should be invoked. Isaiah taught, **"Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."** (Isaiah 35:6).
- 23 - **loosed** - The word "loosed" is not present in the Greek version of the New Testament. The translators added the word for reasons unknown. **"Literally, 'his mouth was opened, and his tongue'. No verb is expressed with the mention of 'his tongue', and that of the first phrase is to be extended to it. In English we have had to supply a verb."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Anchor-Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 381). See also footnote # 43 in Chapter 2.
- 24 - **spake** - The term "spake" is translated from the Greek word "λάλέω" or "laleō". It means "to utter a voice or emit a sound". It means to talk, to utter, or to speak. This is significant since Zacharias was made dumb, and his friends and neighbors knew it.
- 25 - **praised** - The word "praised" comes from the Greek word "εὐλογέω" or "eulogēō". The Greek word means "to praise, or celebrate with praise". It can also mean to invoke blessings, to consecrate something to God, or to cause to prosper and make happy. The prophets have set this pattern throughout the Scriptures. The Psalmist recorded, **"I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works."** (Psalms 9:1). After Judah was born, his mother **"... said, Now will I praise the Lord: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing."** (Genesis 29:35). After defeating Saul, King David wrote, **"Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name."** (2nd Samuel 22:50). Noah offered sacrifice after the flood. Sacrifice is a form of praise. In the latter days, the Lord taught, **"And again, he that trembleth under my power shall be made strong, and shall bring forth fruits of praise and wisdom, according to the revelations and truths which I have given you."** (Doctrine & Covenants 52:17). Zacharias followed this same pattern. Immediately after God blessed him with speech and hearing, he praised God.

Many fail to understand the importance of praising God. The Lord declared, **"And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments."** (Doctrine & Covenants 59:21). By offering thanks, and praising God for that which He has seen fit to bless us with, we acknowledge and confess His hand in all things.

- 26 - **God** - The term "God" used in this verse is a Greek form of the word "God" that is more generic than other forms of the Greek word. It is probably more appropriately translated as "Deity". The Greek word is "θεός" or "theos".
- 27 - **fear** - The term "fear" is translated from the Greek word "φόβος" or "phobos". It is the origin of the English word "phobia". It is fear, dread or terror. It can also be used to mean "reverence for one's husband". The fear of the Lord uses the later definition in relation to God. Fear of the Lord is reverence for Him. The usage in this verse, is actually terror or fear as we understand it. See also footnote # 26 in chapter 4.
- 28 - **all that dwelt round about** - The phrase "all that dwelt round about" is actually translated from one Greek word, "περιοικέω" or "perioikeō". It means "to dwell round about, to be one's neighbor".
- 29 - **noised** - The word "noise", might be translated as "the gossip" or "the talk". It is derived from the Greek word "διαλαλέω" or "dialalēō". It means "to converse together", or "to talk with". It is evident that the news was spread to the circles that Zacharias and Elisabeth considered friends, neighbors and acquaintances. It was **"The talk of the entire hill country"** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Anchor-Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 382).
- 30 - **abroad** - The word "abroad" has been added by translators of the English Bible and has no direct translation from the Greek. One might argue that the word is implied, however, that is just speculation. The word "abroad" means "away from one's own country", "in general circulation", "everywhere" or "over a wide area". There is no support from the Greek that this miraculous event was circulated "abroad". Even so, we do know that it was talked about throughout the hill country of Judea. To what extent is unknown.
- 31 - **hill country** - The term "hill country" is derived from the single Greek word "ὄρεινός" or "oreinos", which means "mountainous" or "hilly". It can also mean "the mountain district of the hill country". The Codex Sinaiticus translates the phrase "hill country" as "mountainous country" (The Codex Sinaiticus, H.T. Anderson New Testament, Luke 1:65, page 107). See also footnote # 3 of Chapter 5.



32 - **Judaea** - The word "Judaea" is translated from the Greek word "Ιουδαία" or "Ioudaia". It literally means "he shall be praised". In a narrow sense of the word, it refers to the southern portion of Palestine lying on this side of the River Jordan and the Dead Sea. It is South of Samaria and Galilee, West of Peraea, and North of Idumaea. In a broader sense of the word, it refers to all of Palestine. See also footnote # 5 of Chapter 5 and footnote # 4 of chapter 2.



33 - **heard** - The term "heard" is translated from the Greek word "ἀκούω" or "akouō", meaning to be endowed with the faculty of hearing, not deaf. The changing of John's name and the restoring of Zaccharias' speech and hearing was a miracle. Those that heard it treasured the story. It is obvious that it built testimonies, and strengthened faith.

34 - **hearts** - The word "hearts" is translated from the Greek word "καρδιά" or "kardia". It means the heart, as in an organ of the body. It also has a figurative usage, denoting the center of all physical and spiritual life. It symbolizes our desires and our will. **"In Jewish tradition, the heart is similarly seen as the center of the inner life, which includes both feeling and thought...it was the heart alone that was considered responsible for the intellect. As the Psalmist says: 'Teach us to number our days, so that we may obtain a heart of wisdom.' Someone 'wise of heart' was skillful; one who 'had no heart' was a simpleton. A 'whole' or 'perfect' heart signified an undivided spirit; a broken heart,.... a defeated one. According to the Talmud, the heart contained all human desires, both good and bad."** (The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, page 75). The Lord wants us to bind our hearts to Him and His ways. He wants our hearts to be good and righteous. A scripture that has come to represent the Phylacteries worn by the Jews states, **"Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes."** (Deuteronomy 11:18). Our hearts should dictate the actions of our hands and eyes. We learn that as we bind the Lord in our Hearts, we are given understanding. And with that understanding, we are blessed. **"Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?"** (1st Kings 3:9). The book of proverbs teaches, **"Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:"** (Proverbs 3:3).

35 - **manner** - The word "manner" is derived from the Greek word "ἄρα" or "ara". It is word that does not translate as "manner". Rather, it means therefore, so then, or wherefore.

36 - **be** - The word "be" is derived from the Greek word "ἔσομαι" or "esomai". It is a verb and is translated in various ways. The King James version of the New Testament translates the Greek word as follows "shall be" (151 times), "will be" (9 times), "be" (6 times), "shall have" (6 times), "shall come to pass" (4 times), not translated (1 time), and in other forms (7 times).

37 - **hand** - The word "hand" is translated from a Greek word that does not readily translate as "hand". It is translated from the Greek word "χείρ" or "cheir" meaning "by the help or agency of any one" or "by means of anyone". Figuratively, it is used to symbolize God's might, activity and power. Since the "hand" carries similar symbolic meaning, it would appear that the translators choose to use the symbolic word "hand" in place of the direct definition. **"In Judaism, the hand symbolizes divine might and protection....Just as God's hand redeems, bestows blessings, and protects, so too the human hand enacts power in the world. In the Bible, hands are used to take oaths, ordain judges, make alliances, ask for blessing, and acknowledge submission. From rabbinic times, rabbis have been ordained by 'semikhah', the laying on of hands."** (The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, page 71).

38 - **Lord** - The word "Lord" is translated from a Greek word often used in reference to the Messiah. The Greek word is "κύριος" or "kyrios". It means master, Lord, or he to which possesses something. It is the owner or in the case of government it is a Prince, King, or Emperor. It can also be used to refer to God. **"An Old Testament anthropomorphism (see 1 Chronicles 28:19; 4:10) expresses the powerful divine protection and direction which guaranteed to John. Yet it will not spare him imprisonment and death at the hand of Herod Antipas. In the New Testament this expression is exclusively Lucan, but it may also have the nuance of divine punishment. There is little doubt that kyrios here refers to Yahweh."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Anchor-Yale Bible, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 382).

39 - **him** - The term "him" could be translated from the Greek as "him", "her", "they", or "their". The Greek word is "αὐτός" or "autos".

