

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

A Message of Hope and Fulfillment For Those Longing For God

Prayers & Promises

Luke 1: 5-25

Introduction: We have noted that the Gospel of Luke is a volume about hope and fulfillment for those who are longing for God. Luke persistently ties his carefully researched story into that of the promises of God in the Old Testament. In the opening verses he also demonstrates how personal longing and desire among the righteous is often tied into God's answer for the nation; how Divine providence is woven into the fabric of our personal lives. There is much to learn from the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth.

I. The Messenger of God Breaks the Silence and Opens the Dialogue

- A. First words in 400 years: "Do not be afraid"
- B. John comes in the spirit of Elijah to call the nation to repentance
- C. John comes to prepare the way of the Lord
- D. This announcement marks the end of long years of waiting and yearning and heralds the dawn of a new age when the Kingdom of God is again seen upon the earth.

II. Insight from this Event: Personal Application & the Character of God

- A. The problem of pain and the withholding of the blessings of God in times of spiritual decline.
 1. Deuteronomy 7:14 (6-15)—God has promised blessing and fruitfulness to His people, but it was a contingent promise AND it was national in scope
 2. The barrenness of Elizabeth was a problem of national proportion, not personal unrighteousness
 3. The godly suffer when judgment reigns upon a nation or the church
- B. God's Remembrance and Timing in Prayer
 1. Revelation 5:8 & 8:3-4—Our prayers are never forgotten
 2. God answers them in the time of greatest blessing, or withholds the answer if it will cause us harm
 3. Curiously, Zacharias was chided for his unbelief. Why?
 - a. He was a teacher of Israel and should have known
 - b. He had the stories of Abraham and Hannah
 4. Spiritual maturity consists, in part, of coming to know the ways & character of God; understanding His faithfulness
- C. The faithful will have a role in the great plan of God
 1. Zacharias and Elizabeth did not know what a significant role they would have in the unfolding of God's plan of redemption
 2. His promises to us are that our lives will not be without significance. He has created works for us in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world that we should walk in them...every one of those works play a role in His eternal plan of redemption

Conc: do you have the "big picture"? Are you willing to be a Kingdom oriented follower of Jesus Christ? God has special plans for those who will follow Him and love His purposes.

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. ⁸ Now it happened *that* while he was performing his priestly service before God in the *appointed* order of his division, ⁹ according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. ¹¹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² Zacharias was troubled when he saw *the angel*, and fear gripped him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. ¹⁴ "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. ¹⁶ "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ "It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Luke 1: 5-17 (NASB)

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