## 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
  - I. 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. <sup>8</sup> Now it happened *that* while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, 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. <sup>11</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup>Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> "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. <sup>16</sup> "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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### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What is the significance of the first words of the angel?
- Explain Proverbs 16:33 in the light of this historical account. How does it relate to Acts 1:26
- When prayer does not seem to be heard, what is going on?
- What is the difference between being self-oriented and Kingdom-oriented in our expectations from God?
- How has this passage strengthened your confidence in the faithfulness of God?
- How do you feel about suffering when the sin lies with others around you? Explain your response.
- 7.) Should you expect great things from God even in times of spiritual poverty and indifference in the church?

NOTES	18 Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this <i>for certain</i> ? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years."  19 The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."  21 The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 But
	when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision
	in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. <sup>23</sup> When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home. <sup>24</sup> After these
	days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, <sup>25</sup> "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days
	when He looked <i>with favor</i> upon <i>me</i> , to take away my disgrace among men."  Luke 1: 18-25 (NASB)
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