

2. Zacharias Was Promised a Son

In our last topic, we saw that we want to provide an example for our children by setting aside time each day for prayer. We saw that the Jews gathered in the courtyard of the temple each morning and each evening at the time of the offering of incense. We also saw in the first part of chapter one of Luke that Zacharias was chosen by lot to offer incense in the temple. Today we will learn about something very special that happened in the life of Zacharias while he was offering incense in the temple.

Luke 1:11-14 says, “Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.’” Here, we see that an angel appeared to Zacharias while he was offering incense in the temple.

Since Luke was a doctor, we see that he was very precise as he wrote about this event. He mentioned that the angel that appeared to Zacharias was standing on the right side of the altar of incense. Zacharias had not expected that to happen and we see that this event immediately stirred up troubled thoughts in his mind. It also caused fear to take possession of him. This was the normal response when people saw an angel of God. In Luke 2:9, we read, “And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.” We will see that Luke often mentions a response of fear when people saw an angel or saw God work in an unusual way. This kind of fear is normal and proper because it shows a reverence for God.

The angel immediately told Zacharias not to be afraid. In fact, the angel said that he had been sent to him to let him know that his prayer had been heard. The answer to that prayer was that Elizabeth would have a son. Here, we see a key when a wife is unable to conceive a child. The first thing that a couple should do is begin to pray to the Lord and ask the Lord to give them a child. We see the response of Hannah and her husband to her prayer for a child in 1 Samuel 1:27-28 where we read, “‘For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord.’ So they worshiped the Lord there.” God answered many similar prayers in Scripture.

Zacharias was also told that they should name their son John. The word “John” means *Jehovah is a gracious giver*. God also told Zacharias that the birth of John would cause him and Elizabeth to experience joy and gladness in their lives. Luke often talks about the joy that the Lord gives. In addition, many others would rejoice in his birth. Isaiah had written in Isaiah 40:3, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” We will see that Isaiah was writing about the ministry of John.

In Luke 1:15-17, the angel went on to tell Zacharias what John would do. Those verses say, “‘For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also

be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, "to 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." John would be great in the sight of the Lord. Here, we see an important lesson for our own lives and for our children. It has eternal value for us to be great in the sight of the Lord rather than to try and become great in the sight of the people of this world.

The angel gave one instruction for John. He was not to drink wine or strong drink. The angel also gave a great personal promise about John. He said that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit from the time that he was conceived in his mother's womb. The angel also described the ministry of John. We see that he would turn many of the people of Israel back to the Lord their God. Malachi 4:5-6 says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." Luke said that John would go before Christ in the spirit and power of Elijah. Elijah will come before the second coming of Christ. John came before the first coming of Christ. However, both come in the same power.

We see that the angel promised Zacharias that John would do the same three things before the first coming of Christ that Elijah would do before the second coming of Christ. That meant that John would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. Second, John would turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. Third, John would make ready a people prepared for the Lord. All three things are a reminder of the fact that Christ changes and transforms lives. The result would be that many people would follow Christ. John 1:36-37 says, "And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." These two, Andrew and John, both later became a part of the Twelve that Christ chose to be apostles.

Luke 1:18-20 says, "And Zacharias said to the angel, 'How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.' And the angel answered and said to him, 'I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.'" Here, we see that Zacharias had doubts about the promise of the angel. In fact, he gave a reason why he thought that it could not happen.

As a result, the angel said certain things so that Zacharias would know that his word was true. First, the angel gave his name. He said that he was the angel Gabriel. Gabriel is mentioned twice in the book of Daniel. Gabriel said that it was his privilege to stand in the presence of God. He said that God had sent him to bring this good news to Zacharias. Second, Gabriel gave Zacharias a sign that his words would come true. That sign was that he would be mute and would not be able to speak until after the birth of John. The angel said that his words would be fulfilled in their own time, which began immediately.

Luke 1:21-25 goes on to say, “And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. And so it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, ‘Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among people.’” The people who came to the temple every day at the time of the offering of incense knew how long the priest was usually in the temple before he came out to bless the people. They were amazed because Zacharias stayed in the temple much longer than was normal.

When Zacharias came out of the temple, the people received a second surprise. Zacharias was not able to talk or give that blessing. Normally, the priest would repeat the blessing given in Numbers 6:24-26 which says, “‘The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.’” That day Zacharias could not give the blessing. Instead, he motioned to the people because he was not able to talk. Then, the people realized that Zacharias must have seen a vision in the temple. As the people returned to their homes or to their work, a few probably wondered what he had seen in the vision.

Zacharias completed his days of service as one of the priests at the temple. Then, he returned to his home in the hills of Judea. Sometime after he returned home his wife, Elizabeth, conceived a child as Gabriel had promised to Zacharias when he appeared to him in the temple. Then, Zacharias and Elizabeth did not tell anyone that she had conceived a child for five months.

However, Elizabeth and Zacharias were filled with joy. Elizabeth said that the Lord had looked upon her and God had shown her His favor. To have no child was a reproach in the Jewish culture. The word “reproach” means *shame*. Here, we see that Elizabeth had felt shame for many years because she had not had a child. Rachel had said the same thing more than eighteen hundred years earlier. Genesis 30:23 says, “And she conceived and bore a son, and said, ‘God has taken away my reproach.’” We see a key with both women. They both recognized that it was God that had taken away their shame.

This is a key thing to help our physical and spiritual children understand. God is the One who is able to take away shame from our lives. Sometimes, people have shame as the result of sin. However, many times people experience shame because of the attitudes of people toward them. This was true among the Jews. Most Jews felt that God was showing His disfavor when He did not give a couple a child. Here, we see that such a conclusion was actually a human judgment. God had His purpose for waiting until Zacharias and Elizabeth were older before He gave them a child. We want to help our children understand that God has a perfect plan for their lives and they do not need to feel shame because of the opinions of people. Instead, they can trust the Lord to accomplish His purpose through their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to be free from shame that is the result of the opinions of people.