

The God Who Had Not Forgotten — His Word Fulfilled in Its Season

Series: Luke: An Orderly Account - Dr. Randy White

I. A Faithful Remnant In The Days Of Herod (vv. 5-7)

Herod Held The Throne, But God Held The Future

- Luke places the account **“in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea.”** Herod possessed Rome’s title and power, but he was not Israel’s promised Davidic king.
- Against that imposing political background, Luke introduces **“a certain priest named Zacharias.”** God begins moving His prophetic program forward through an otherwise obscure servant.
- Zacharias belonged to **“the course of Abia,”** the eighth of the twenty-four priestly divisions established in David’s day (1 Chron. 24:1-10).
- Elisabeth was also descended from Aaron. The Gospel therefore opens inside Israel’s Temple, priesthood, covenant history, and lawful order—not in the church or the present dispensation.
- Their names suit the moment: **Zacharias** recalls that the LORD remembers, and **Elisabeth** that God is faithful to His oath. Israel’s circumstances had changed, but God’s covenant memory had not.

They Were Righteous, Yet They Were Barren

- Luke’s verdict must be allowed to stand: **“they were both righteous before God.”** This was God’s evaluation, not merely their reputation among men.
- Their righteousness was expressed by **“walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.”** Obedience under the law was real and commendable, not impossible or inherently hypocritical (Ps. 119:1-3; Phil. 3:6).
- The Mosaic order remained valid: Zacharias’s priesthood, Temple service, incense, commandments, and ordinances were all still operative. Grace existed, but the present dispensation of the grace of God had not begun (Gal. 4:4).
- **“Blameless”** does not mean sinlessly perfect; Zacharias will be corrected for unbelief in verse 20. It means no valid charge of covenant disobedience characterized their walk.
- Verse 6 must govern verse 7. Their childlessness was not punishment for hidden wickedness. They were righteous before God and yet carried a painful reproach among men.
- Elisabeth was barren, and both were **“well stricken in years.”** God allows the account to reach the end of human possibility before revealing that His appointed season has arrived.

II. An Appointed Servant At An Appointed Place (vv. 8-12)

Ordinary Faithfulness Brought Zacharias To The Altar

- Zacharias did not enter the sanctuary on private impulse. He served **“in the order of his course,”** at the time assigned to his priestly division.
- His lot was to burn incense in the sanctuary. The lot assigned the duty, but its disposing was of the LORD (Prov. 16:33).
- He entered the holy place, not the holy of holies. The incense altar stood before the veil, while **“the whole multitude of the people were praying without.”**
- Priest, course, lot, incense, altar, and hour all converge. What looked like ordinary religious order was the providential arrangement of the God who had not forgotten.
- Extraordinary revelation did not make ordinary faithfulness unimportant. Zacharias was present for the announcement because he was faithfully performing the duty assigned to him.

Heaven Broke The Silence Beside The Altar

- **“An angel of the Lord”** appeared on the right side of the altar of incense. Zacharias did not summon the messenger or produce the encounter through religious emotion.
- The angel will identify himself as Gabriel, the messenger previously named in Daniel’s prophecies concerning Israel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21-23).
- Revelation resumes in Israel’s Temple and within Israel’s prophetic framework. God had not abandoned the covenants, the nation, or the promises of the prophets.
- Zacharias was troubled, and **“fear fell upon him.”** Biblical encounters with heavenly messengers are sober and unsettling rather than sentimental.
- The people could not see what was happening within, but they would soon witness its public consequence. Luke joins private revelation to observable historical effects.

III. A Promised Prophet To Prepare Israel (vv. 13-17)

The Answer Was Greater Than The Private Request

- Gabriel told Zacharias, **“thy prayer is heard.”** The immediate reference is naturally prayer concerning a son, although Luke does not give its wording or tell us when Zacharias last prayed it.
- The answer to a private sorrow would serve God’s public purpose. This child would not merely complete an elderly couple’s home; he would prepare Israel for the Lord.
- God assigned the name **John**, meaning **the LORD is gracious**. His identity and mission originated with God rather than family custom or parental ambition.
- His birth would bring Zacharias **“joy and gladness,”** and many would rejoice because renewed prophetic activity had begun in Israel.
- John would be **“great in the sight of the Lord.”** His greatness would not rest upon position, wealth, or popularity, but upon God’s evaluation and calling.

John Would Make Ready A People For The Lord

- John’s abstinence from wine and strong drink marked his consecration, though the passage does not explicitly call him a Nazirite.
- He would be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb. This is in keeping with the Old Testament work of the Spirit, empowering particular people for specific tasks, not what would later come at Pentecost.
- His assigned field was explicit: **“many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.”** John’s ministry belongs to Israel’s prophetic and kingdom program.
- He would go before the Lord **“in the spirit and power of Elias.”** John was not Elijah reincarnated; he would minister with Elijah-like prophetic character and power.
- Gabriel draws upon Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6. John’s work would turn the disobedient toward righteous wisdom and **“make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”**
- The center of the announcement is not ultimately John but the coming Lord. The promised son is great because he prepares Israel for One infinitely greater.

IV. A Questioned Word Fulfilled In Its Season (vv. 18-25)

Human Impossibility Did Not Weaken Divine Authority

- Zacharias asked, **“Whereby shall I know this?”** He sought an additional ground for certainty because he was old and Elisabeth was advanced in years.
- The problem was not that Zacharias noticed the impossibility. The problem was that he treated human impossibility as weightier than God’s revealed word.
- Gabriel answered by identifying his authority: **“I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee.”** The credibility of the message rested upon the God who commissioned it.
- Zacharias received both a sign and discipline. He would be unable to speak **“because thou believest not my words.”**
- His unbelief did not cancel the promise. Gabriel declared that his words **“shall be fulfilled in their season.”** God’s performance rested upon His faithfulness, not Zacharias’s flawless faith.

Silence Gave Way To Visible Fulfillment

- The people waited outside and recognized that Zacharias’s delay and speechlessness meant he had seen a vision. They did not see Gabriel, but they witnessed the resulting sign.
- Zacharias remained unable to speak, yet he completed **“the days of his ministration.”** Neither extraordinary revelation nor corrective discipline excused him from ordinary responsibility.
- After he returned home, Elisabeth conceived. The promise moved from angelic announcement to bodily and historically verifiable fulfillment.
- Elisabeth hid herself for five months, though Luke does not tell us why. God’s work advanced privately before it became public testimony.
- Elisabeth interpreted the event as the Lord’s personal mercy: **“he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.”** The reproach came from human judgment; God’s verdict had already declared her righteous.
- Her conception was only the beginning of fulfillment. The God who had not forgotten would perform every word in its appointed season and send the prophet who would prepare Israel for the Lord.
- Luke will return to this family later in the chapter, recording John’s birth, naming, and Zacharias’s prophecy. After Luke 1, neither parent appears again, and John next enters the narrative nearly thirty years later as the prophet preparing Israel for the Lord (Luke 3:1–18).