

December 7, 2014

# L1

## Selected Scripture

*Luke 1:5-22, 57-80*

## Focal Statement

Obeying God is always a challenge for human beings. God honors and rewards those who are faithful in believing and obeying His directives.

*Lessons from the Bible for December*

# Zechariah: The Challenge to Believe

## INTRODUCTION

Zechariah was well versed in the history of the Israelites and had a vast knowledge of the things pertaining to the God of his forefathers. He also had an intimate relationship with God. Zechariah had knowledge, through his training as a priest, of the accounts of Sarai (Sarah), Rebekah, Rachel, Manoah's wife (Samson's mother), Hannah, and the Shunammite woman. These women, some up in age, were previously

barren, but became exhibits as to how God would and did that which was impossible for man to perform. What is so "not out of character" was Zechariah's response to the whole encounter with the angel Gabriel. Zechariah was not in the prime of his life when the angel appeared to him, and his wife had up to that point been unable to conceive and bear children. The thought of an angel appearing to him at that time of his life with the news of a child being born to him and his wife was unbelievable, to say the least. No doubt, he had probably prayed to God for such a blessing, but had given up on the idea of being a father and of his wife being a mother. However, unlike Zechariah, we must not give up on God—for in due season, God will bless us.

## THE LESSON STUDY

We will focus on the following emphases:

1. Zechariah: a righteous priest (Luke 1:5-7).
2. The angel of the Lord gives a revelation to Zechariah (Luke 1:8-17).
3. Zechariah's response and God's actions (Luke 1:18-22).
4. Zechariah's speech returned (Luke 1:57-80).

## **Zechariah: A Righteous Priest** (*Luke 1:5-7*)

It is interesting that Zechariah was introduced in the context of Herod's reign as king of Judea. Herod, of course, was appointed by Rome. The people

of Israel, like many people today, had turned their backs on the One who could save and redeem them from their oppressors. The cry of Zechariah (called Zacharias in the *King James Version*) to God for the redemption of his people still echoes through time today. Zechariah was not being selfish in asking God for a personal favor; what he was asking for was what troubled the children of Israel the most, because they had lost their relationship with God. Zechariah knew that redemption was necessary for the Israelites to be reconnected with God. While separated from God, the people could not flourish and neither were they able to receive the promises of God that were made to their forefathers. They could not be a great nation when they were the slaves of the oppressors. Zechariah also understood that the Israelites would take on the same lifestyle and demeanor as their oppressors. Redemption from an oppressor who had no knowledge or power was the cry of Zechariah. It was in the days of Herod king of Judea that Zechariah served as the assigned priest of the course of Abia. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were recognized as righteous before God, and they walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. This suggests to us that one can be righteous, yet afflicted by personal tragedy.

### **The Angel of the Lord Gives a Revelation to Zechariah** (*Luke 1:8-17*)

God has various ways to communicate with His people. God can use His words as recorded in 2 Timothy 3:16; through His audible voice as in Acts 9:4-5; as the Holy Spirit as in Acts 11:12; and through angels as in Luke 1:8—to list just a few. Zechariah was in the Temple executing his duties when the angel appeared to him with a personal message concerning his prayers. Zechariah was performing his ritual duties as a priest, because it was his week to light the candles and incense. While performing these duties, the angel informed him that he would father a child and his wife Elizabeth would become the mother of a very special child; this child would be the forerunner for the Messiah. Zechariah and Elizabeth had been unable to conceive a child, and they both were getting older. The calling on Zechariah's life was to be a temple priest, but then God would redirect his life to be not just a father, but the father of a child who would change the place of worship and the direction of the chosen people of God. This was an honorable calling on Zechariah's life.

### **Zechariah's Response and God's Actions** (*Luke 1:18-22*)

We as the chosen children of God often fail to realize how we can be used by God to perform His will on Earth. We are often disbelievers rather than true believers. We associate this mentality as being unworthy and unheard by

God. Zechariah had probably prayed in the Temple for years, requesting that the ridicule of the people would cease and that he and Elizabeth would have a child. This would have ended a lot of human torture and taunting because of their childlessness. To be barren or childless was considered a sign that one was cursed by God and for years, Zechariah and Elizabeth were probably the topic of such discussion among the people of Israel. So when the angel Gabriel told Zechariah, who was elderly by this time, that he was to be a father, Zechariah could not believe his ears. His and his wife's ages were factors. Being barren for so many years guaranteed that they had no hope of being parents, and then to be told that they could and would not just have a child, but a male child, seemed unbelievable. The circumstance and conditions of Zechariah's life caused him not to believe the messenger from God. Zechariah asked Gabriel, "How was this to be?" and as a result of his disbelief, he was caused to be speechless for a considerable amount of time—the time of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

### **Zechariah's Speech Returned** (*Luke 1:57-80*)

God's plan for Zechariah was greater than just having a male child; the child he and his wife would have would be the forerunner for the Messiah. God planned a double assurance of the message to Zechariah and his family. First, Elizabeth would give birth to a son, and second, Zechariah would regain his voice. Zechariah was not to speak until the child (John) was born. During the pregnancy of Elizabeth, Zechariah could only communicate through writing and signs. This form of communication was and could be timely and confusing to the people who knew Zechariah when he could speak. The day that Elizabeth gave birth to their son, those who were in attendance were rejoicing at the marvelous birth. When Zechariah was asked the name of the child, after Elizabeth had told them the child's name was to be John, Zechariah wrote the name on a tablet and finally was able to speak for the first time. He dedicated his son and named him John. These two miracles were to accentuate the message given to Zechariah by the angel—that John was not just any child but represented the first stage of the redemption of the children of God. Zechariah remained faithful, even though he was doubtful at first that he could be chosen by God for such a task as fathering a son who would lead the way for the Messiah.

## **CONCLUSION**

**Brother to Brother:** "I was never faithless, but I was doubtful. As we go through life and experience circumstances, we are reminded and encouraged to

remain faithful. My life was that of not just a “temple going” man but a leader in the Temple; yet, I still had to face the challenges of being faithful, patient, obedient, and always believing. My life demonstrated how God can speak to us and use us in His plans for the redemption of humankind. We must remain faithful and always believing that God will provide, perform, and speak to us and use us to do His bidding for the redemption of humankind. We are not without our discouraging and disheartening encounters in life, but we have to be patient, faithful, and always believing in God’s Word.”

Your brother—Zechariah

### DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Is redemption still relevant in the world today?
2. How can we better prepare ourselves to be used by God?
3. What can we do to prepare our children and others of the community to be faithful during negative encounters?
4. What is the standard of our belief?

### PERIOD OF ACTIVITY

(Fellowship Time)

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Our Father, as we come to You in our weakest hour, we beseech You, Lord, to help our unbelief and give us the strength to believe unconditionally. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*



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