

Luke 1:5-25 – The Certainty of Hope

I. The Long Awaited Promise (5-20)

A. The Circumstances of Zechariah and Elizabeth (5-7)

1. The Identity of the Couple (5)

- a. Zechariah was a temple priest (5a)
 - i. From the Division of Abijah
 - ii. The temple priests were divided into 24 divisions – each took turns ministering at the appointed time

b. Elizabeth was descendent of Aaron (5b)

- i. She also comes from the line of priests

2. They Were Righteous Before God (6)

- a. This doesn't mean they were sinless
- b. They were walking after the commandments of God
- c. They were keeping the feasts and sacrifices in faith

3. They Were Old and Childless (7)

- a. Elizabeth is barren which would place a shameful stigma upon her
- b. Many would see her barrenness at her age as a punishment from God but the text affirms her righteousness

4. NOTE: The description of the barren righteous couple shows that something is very wrong in the land. Deut. 7:14 says that if Israel obeys, none will be childless, yet this obedient couple remains barren.

- a. They are symptomatic of Israel as a whole – she is barren – Just as Abram and Sarai were barren and Rachael and Jacob were barren – but God brought forth his promises through them.
- b. God had sent no prophet or word to the people for over 400 years at this time
- c. From the time of the last prophet, Malachi, Israel has descended into pure ritualism and compromise with the worldly culture – this will become evident in Jesus' ministry and rebukes of the Jewish leaders

B. The Vision of Zechariah (8-17)

1. Zechariah Ministers In The Temple (8-10)

a. Zechariah is Chosen to Burn Incense (8-9)

- i. The tasks of the regular priests in the temple were chosen by lot
- ii. Being chosen to burn the incense at the altar before the veil is a once in a lifetime opportunity – some never were chosen
- iii. The priest would carry burning coals from the great altar to the Holy place on the incense altar.

He placed incense on the coals and then bowed in prayer, as the people prayed outside the Temple.

- b. The People pray Outside the Sanctuary (10)
- 2. Zechariah Sees an Angel in The Temple (11-12)
 - a. An Angel Appears to Zechariah (11)
 - i. A messenger of God appears for the first time in 400 years
 - ii. This takes Zechariah completely by surprise
 - b. Zechariah is Terribly Afraid (12)
 - i. Everyone in Scripture who sees angelic being is terrified at the sight
 - ii. Zechariah cannot help but be afraid – man can clearly see his own sin in the presence of the glory of God.
- 3. Zechariah is Given a Prophecy of His Son (13-17)
 - a. The Angel Foretells the Birth of John (13)
 - i. The Angel Calms John's Fear
 - ii. The Angel Declares Zechariah's Prayers have been heard
 - Zechariah is now old – I wonder when he started praying for a child?
 - I wonder if he had given up hope of ever having a child now that he is old
 - The priest offering prayers and incense would also pray for the redemption of Israel and the fulfillment of God's promises to the nation
 - iii. The Angel Foretells the Birth of Zechariah's Son
 - Zechariah is told he will indeed have a son
 - Zechariah's son will be intimately involved in God's purpose to redeem Israel
 - iv. The Angel Instructs Zechariah to Name Him John
 - God gives Him specific instructions of his son's name
 - John means God is graceful (or merciful)
- b. The Angel Foretells the Ministry of John (14-17)
 - i. He will Be an Instrument For God (14-15)
 - His Birth Will Bring Rejoicing (14)
 - Of course Zechariah and his wife will rejoice at his birth
 - He will be fulfillment of promise of God to the people and they will also rejoice
 - He will Be Great Before God (15a)

- He will be mighty in the word
 - He will be strong in faith and used of God
- He Will Be Set Apart For God From Birth (15b)
 - No wine – is an OT picture of the Nazarite vow which people took when they were specially dedicating themselves to God (See Numbers 6)
 - Filled With the Spirit From Birth – means that God has set him apart for special service and dedication before his birth
- ii. He will Prepare The People For the Lord (16-17)
 - He will bring Israel back to God (16)
 - Israel has strayed from faith in God
 - John will come preaching repentance to turn them back to God
 - This is the beginning of the gospel - repentance
 - He will fulfill the promise of God (17a)
 - The Angel quotes Malachi 4:5-6 – “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”
 - John is declared to be the fulfillment of the final promise of the Old Testament
 - The time is finally arrived – God’s promise will be fulfilled
 - He will prepare people for the Lord (17b)
 - Repentance is the necessary preparation for trusting in Christ
 - One cannot be present without the other – man will never rejoice in forgiveness until he realizes he needs that forgiveness
 - He is readying the people to receive the Messiah

4. Zechariah Disbelieves The Prophecy (18-20)
 - a. Zechariah Doubts the Message (18)
 - i. Zechariah Asks For Proof
 - He asks how can he possibly believe what the angel is saying
 - Standing face to face with an angel reflecting glory of God – Zechariah still doubts the message
 - Remember Zechariah has already said to be righteous and faithful – no doubt he believes in God and believes in the promises of God – but it is different when applying those promises to our own obstacles
 - ii. Zechariah Knows He is too old
 - Interesting that as a priest, he would well know the stories of Abraham and Jacob
 - He would know the miraculous power of God in the OT stories
 - As a priest, he has no doubt been praying for the redemption of Israel
 - Yet his obstacle of faith is that he and his wife are too old to bear children.
 - b. Zechariah's Doubt is Answered (19)
 - i. The Angel Identifies Himself
 - Seems like a strange answer – “I am Gabriel”
 - The last time Gabriel is mentioned is when he is sent to tell Daniel that the captivity of Israel will come to an end and God will send his messiah (Dan. 9)
 - By identifying himself as Gabriel, he is showing that the fulfillment of Daniel's promise is being fulfilled
 - The age of the Messiah is about to dawn
 - ii. The Angel Asserts His Authority
 - He has been sent by God to bring this message to Zechariah
 - The promise is from God Himself
 - c. Zechariah is Given His Sign (20)
 - i. Because of his unbelief, Zechariah will be struck dumb until the fulfillment of the promise
 - ii. Notice that the promise is sure and fixed (shall be fulfilled in their season)

II. The Beginning of Fulfillment (21-25)

A. Those Outside Knew Something Happened (21)

- B. Zechariah Was Unable To Speak To Them (22)
 - 1. Zechariah is given the greatest message in 400 years and now he can't tell anyone
 - a. The fulfillment of the Elijah promise is here
 - b. The Messiah is coming at long last
 - c. The promises to Israel are now coming to pass
 - 2. Zechariah no doubt tried to inform them by signing but the message remains veiled in its entirety
- C. Elizabeth Conceive a Child (23-25)
 - 1. Zechariah went Home After His Duty (23)
 - 2. Elizabeth Becomes Pregnant (24)
 - 3. Elizabeth Rejoices in the Lord's Favor (25)
 - a. It is unclear if even Elizabeth is aware of the full scope of what her pregnancy means
 - b. She rejoices because God has shown favor to her