

“The Birth Of John The Baptist”

Luke 1:5-25; 57-66

Message by Michael J. Barnard

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Teaching Aim: To find comfort in the fact that even a spiritual giant like Zacharias could fall victim to doubt when the obstacle he faced seemed too big for him. To realize God’s discipline is for the purpose of building us up; not tearing us down. To come to the understanding that God is always faithful to keep His Word. To recognize the Lord will reward our obedience in His time, sometimes in ways that we never imagined!

DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD’S WORD (*BIBLE STUDY*)

Part I: Zacharias reaches the pinnacle of his priestly career and receives a message from the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:5-17)

1. King Herod reigned from 37 B.C. - 4 A.D. What can we learn about the birth of John the Baptist, and more importantly about the birth of Jesus, from this dating (**vs. 5**)? (**See Matt. 2:1-3**) What does the name “Zacharias” (or “Zechariah” as in the NIV & NLT) mean? (See Commentaries) How many times in his lifetime would a priest be allowed to minister in “*the Holy Place*” of the temple? Was it by chance or the sovereign will of God that Zacharias was on duty in the temple at this moment?

2. Does **verse 6** imply that Zacharias and Elizabeth were sinless (**vs. 6**)? (**See 1 John 1:8-10**) What can we learn about this couple from **verse 6**? Do you believe Zacharias and Elizabeth fall into the category of spiritual giants? Why or why not? How can we live our lives in a way pleasing to God today?

3. Since priests were only allowed to serve in the temple until they were 50 years old, what can we learn about Zacharias and Elizabeth (**vs. 7**)? Why was it especially important for people living during biblical days to have children?

4. On this special day Zacharias was performing a once in a lifetime service in the temple (**vv. 8-9**). What does the “*burning incense*” in the temple symbolize? What were the people outside the temple doing as Zacharias served inside (**vs. 10**)? On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your prayer life? What are some steps you can take to pray more effectively?

5. What sudden event took place in **verse 11**? According to **verse 12**, how did Zacharias respond to the angel? Why is it a fearful thing to be in the presence of the holy? (See **Luke 1:30,65; 2:9-10; 5:10,26; 7:16; 8:25,37,50; 9:34,45; 23:40**)

6. What comforting words did the angel Gabriel share with Zacharias (**vs. 13**)? What do you think Zacharias was praying for while in “*the Holy Place*” of the Temple? What is the meaning of the name “*John*?” (See Commentaries) How would the baby John become a demonstration of God’s grace for all generations?

7. What can we learn about John the Baptist from **verses 14-16**? NOTE: John is the only person in the New Testament who is said to be “*filled with the Holy Spirit, even from birth.*” When does the baptism of the Holy Spirit take place? (See **1 Cor. 12:12-13**) Is there a difference between “*the baptism of the Holy Spirit*” and “*being filled with the Holy Spirit*”? If so, what is it? (See **Eph. 5:15-21**)

8. According to **verse 17**, what would the role of John the Baptist be and how did it relate to the prophet Elijah? (See **2 Kin. 1:7-8; Matt. 3:4; Mark 1:6-8**)

Part II: Zacharias’ doubt and the consequence for his unbelief (Luke 1:18-25)

1. Zacharias’ response to Gabriel (and ultimately to God) in **verse 18** causes him much difficulty in the months to come. How did Zacharias respond when he heard the words of Gabriel? Have you ever struggled believing God and His Word? If so, how?

2. How was the response of young Mary different from that of the older Zacharias? (See **Luke 1:34-38**) Did Mary doubt God’s ability, or was she simply claiming innocence in regard to any sexual immorality (**vs. 34**)? What was Mary’s response once Gabriel explained how God would accomplish this miracle? (See **verse 38**) Should Mary’s faith be an example for each of us today? If so, how?

3. What is meant by the saying, “*glad tidings?*” What good news did Gabriel bring to Zacharias (**vs. 19**)? How does Gabriel’s message relate to the Christmas story? (See **Isa. 40:3-5**) How did God respond to the unbelief of Zacharias (**vs. 20**)? What have been some of the biggest doubts that you’ve struggled with?

4. Many scholars believe the priests performed their temple duties with bells on their robes. Why? (**See Ex. 39:22-26**) According to **verse 21**, what was troubling the Jewish people as they waited and prayed outside the temple?

5. Once his temple duty was complete, the priest was expected to come out from “*the Holy Place*” and share “*the Hebrew benediction*” with the people (**vs. 22**). What is the Hebrew benediction? (**See Numbers 6:24-26**) How did Zacharias respond to the Jewish people once he came out from the temple? Why?

6. Once “*the Division of Abijah’s*” week of service was over, Zacharias and the other priests returned to their homes (**vs. 23**). What miraculous event took place in the life of Zacharias and Elizabeth once they returned home (**vs. 24**)? Why was this miraculous? What unusual action did Elizabeth take once she had conceived? (**vv. 24-25**)? Why?

Part III: The birth and naming of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57-66)

1. Why were the neighbors and friends of Zacharias and Elizabeth celebrating in **verses 57-58**? What special event did Jewish boys undergo on the eighth day following birth (**vs. 59**)? (**See Gen. 17:9-12; Luke 2:21**) According to **Gen. 17:9-13**, what was the significance of this event? What other event also took place on the day of circumcision? Who did everyone want the baby to be named after (**vs. 59**)?

2. How did Elizabeth respond to the request from family and friends (**vs. 60**)? Under normal circumstances, who should have made the announcement of the baby's name? Why was this not the case here? (See **Luke 1:20**) How could Elizabeth have known what Zacharias wanted since he was deaf and mute? (See **vs. 63**) Did Elizabeth find immediate support on her choice of a name or did family and friends challenge her (**vs. 61-63**)? What are some ways that believers are pressured to conform to our culture today? Who or what should we be conforming to?

3. According to **verses 62 & 63**, how did Zacharias respond to this dispute? What miraculous event took place the moment Zacharias wrote "*John*" in obedience to God's command (**vs. 64**)? How has God blessed you in the past when you've obeyed Him; even if others disagreed?

4. Zacharias was supposed to offer "*the Hebrew Benediction*" (or blessing) to the people when he had come out of the temple nine months earlier; he was unable to. According to **verse 64**, how did Zacharias respond the moment (by God's grace) his mouth was opened? (Also see "*The Benedictus*" **vv. 67-80**)

5. What was the reaction of family and friends once they witnessed these events (**vs. 65**)? What happened throughout the hill country of Judea? What lesson can we learn in our own lives from the story of Zacharias? Is there an area in your life that you are not believing God in? If so, what is it? How can you turn around your current situation for the glory of God?

6. How did the people of Judea respond to the miraculous birth of John the Baptist (**vs. 66**)? What can we learn about the life of John the Baptist from **verse 66**? What special mission did God have for John the Baptist? (See **Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3; Luke 1:39-44**) How perfect is God's timing? Will you, like John, go forth boldly being a witness for Jesus Christ?

MINER'S CORNER ~ *Manna to live by!*

- John the Baptist was the greatest prophet under the Old Covenant. (See **Matt. 11:11**)
- The mission of John the Baptist was to prepare the way of the Lord.
- Even a spiritual giant like Zacharias found himself at times doubting God.
- God disciplines those He loves for the express purpose of building believers up and helping them to become more like Jesus.
- God doesn't always answer our prayers in the way we want or when we want Him to; sometimes His plan is much better than we ever imagined.
- God rewards our obedience; especially when it is done out of a heart of love for Him.
- God keeps His promises, but He does so in His own sovereign timing.