

Case Study
TWO

Zacharias & Elisabeth



BARREN

Barren

And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. Luke 1:7



pulse point

Answers to prayer
may take time.



Analysis

Zacharias and Elisabeth were childless during a time when barrenness was considered a *reproach*. The stigma of barrenness exists to this day, even though it is a medical condition and not a character flaw. We have access to fertility specialists, drugs, surgeries, and other interventions, but infertility still keeps couples from their dream of becoming parents. Some couples have been praying to the Lord for a child for years. It is difficult to comprehend why a woman who doesn't want children can easily conceive, while a woman who is praying to become a mother remains childless.

Zacharias

Zacharias was a priest with a heritage traceable to the Levitical line of Abia. He had the duty of burning the incense in the temple of the Lord. It was during his duties as a priest that Zacharias had an amazing encounter with an angel of the Lord:

And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. Luke 1:11–12

Elisabeth

Elisabeth was from the lineage of Aaron, married to Zacharias the priest. Both Elisabeth and her husband Zacharias had an excellent reputation. The Scripture describes them in this way:

And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Luke 1:6

Observations

1. God heard the for a child.

But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. Luke 1:13–14

The appearance of the angel frightened Zacharias, but the angel reassured him with two words: “Fear not.” Zacharias prayed, and God heard his prayer. This is a very encouraging passage of Scripture, reminding us of God’s power to hear and answer prayer.

Zacharias didn't stop praying, even though he was a very aged man and his request was uncommon. The prayer request for a child at such a late stage in life was faith in action. He had a brief moment where he questioned the angel of the Lord, but eventually God heard and answered his prayer for a child.

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2. The “old age” of the parents didn’t God’s power.

“And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. Luke 1:36

The angel of the Lord mentioned the “old age” of Elisabeth when speaking to Mary, using this evidence to prove to Mary that God could do anything. Both Zacharias and Elisabeth were in their later years, but this was actually beneficial. God was able to magnify His limitless power by taking two people at this stage of life and making them parents of a newborn.

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3. Zacharias exhibited a costly lack of

And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. Luke 1:18–20

Notice the difference between Zacharias questioning the angel and Mary's earlier question. Zacharias asked, "Whereby shall I know this?" Mary asked, "How shall this be...?" Mary was asking "how" this miracle would take place, since she was a virgin. Zacharias was charged with unbelief, because his "whereby" question was evidence of his doubt. (Luke 1:20).



define

The word *reproach* means “shame or disgrace.”



4. Elisabeth recognized that _____ had given her a child.

And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men. Luke 1:24–25

The excitement of realizing that she was pregnant may have been mingled with a bit of concern, because Elisabeth “hid herself five months.” This is similar to what women do when they’ve experienced several miscarriages, waiting until the pregnancy seems secure before sharing their news with others. Elisabeth was experiencing an answer to prayer that also ended her “reproach among men.”

5. The answer to prayer served God’s _____.

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. Luke 1:76–79

Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; as it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Luke 3:2–4

John was born to be a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His brief life on Earth was devoted to serving the Lord. He had the enormous task of giving “light to them that sit in darkness,” serving as a guide and ambassador for Christ. The timing of John’s birth, late in the lives of his godly parents, was according to God’s will.

God wasn’t disregarding the prayers of Zacharias and Elisabeth in making them wait for a child. The Lord knew that the timing of John’s life on Earth needed to overlap the Savior’s time. It was a perfectly orchestrated plan, and it happened precisely according to God’s timing.

Relevance

1. Answers to prayer come in God's

But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O LORD, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation. Psalm 69:13

Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily. Psalm 102:2

Notice some key lessons within these verses:

- The “acceptable time” to answer prayer is entirely up to God.
- We can ask God to answer us “speedily,” but God defines the timeline.

There may be times when we struggle to be patient while waiting for answers to prayer, but impatience will not speed up the process. We can't rush God, and our prayer requests are not marching orders. Prayer is expressing the needs and desires of our hearts to a loving God Who knows what we truly need.

2. God has power.

Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee. Jeremiah 32:17

There is never a time when God cannot answer prayer. We may be tempted to think that we've finally come up with a "stumper" with our particular situation, but God has unlimited power. God also has the power to decide how He will answer our prayers. This same God came to Earth in human form, died, and rose from the dead. How could we possibly come up with anything too hard for Him to do?

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3. Turn into a prayer request.

Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. Mark 9:23–24

Jesus knows that we have personal wrestling matches with our doubts. Mark 9:23 says, “If thou canst believe.” The condition on seeing amazing answers to prayer is “if we can believe.” It is after the action of believing that “all things are possible.” Belief is being confident that something is true. Unbelief is the opposite plus more: it is a weakness of our faith.

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4. Magnify the Lord when He prayer.

“My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. Psalm 34:2–3

When a person does something notable, we praise him for the achievement. When God does something incredible, are we as quick to give Him the glory? Often, we give people credit for things that happened because God enabled them. It is not wrong to honor people, but it is negligent to give God any less glory.

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5. God has a for His answers to prayer.

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. Ecclesiastes 3:1

And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Luke 11:2

God's will for the birth of John the Baptist was to pave the way for Christ, providing "knowledge of salvation" and "light to them that sit in darkness" (Luke 1:77, 79). Just as God had a purpose for John's birth, He has a purpose for our existence as well. God answers prayer according to His will or purpose for our life. We may forget this when we're praying, because our agenda gets in the way.

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Copy That

Copy these verses, and then carefully consider the principles from this passage:

The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Psalms 34:17–18

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Apply

- **Proverb-a-Day readings:** If you feel ready to expand to more reading, add one daily chapter from Psalms.
- **John 11:1–45:** Study this passage to prepare for the case study of Martha and Mary.



pause

"God answers prayer with 'yes,' 'no,' or 'wait.' Of the three, 'wait' is often the hardest."

—Francie Taylor





Study Notes

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