

AMAZING GOD

Zechariah learned first-hand the profound truths that God always answers prayer, and astutely arranges His perfect plans. In Luke 1:12-25, as the old childless priest served in the temple, the angel Gabriel had announced amazing things. He spoke of a miraculous son who would fulfill prophecies of Malachi, the last words God had spoken through His prophet some 400 years before. But Zechariah couldn't believe it.

1- GOD AMAZES FOR HIS PURPOSES *in His perfect plan.* In Exodus 34, God had said, "*behold I will do marvels such as have not been created in all the earth or any nation, for it is an awesome thing that I will do.*" God had told Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a son who would be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb. No other person in the New Testament had such a promise made about them. And that this son would "*turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and make ready for the Lord a people prepared*" for the promised Christ. These were spectacular pronouncements!

The weight of the angel Gabriel's words was too much for Zechariah. He couldn't believe it. In Luke 1:18 he says, "*how shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.*" He couldn't see past his earthly situation, even when the eternal God was answering his prayers! Zechariah lived his life as a priest, believing God's Old Testament promises for His people, but when God personalizes them for Zechariah and Elizabeth, he stumbles in his faith. Aren't we also like this?

2- GOD ASTOUNDS THROUGH HIS PLAN *in His perfect time.* Zechariah, you think God doesn't know how old you are? Every hair is numbered! And you ask Him how you are to understand this? God can do all things! The angel answered, "*I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.*" Gabriel means "mighty one of God." He had appeared about 500 years before, in Daniel 8:16, announcing good news about the Christ, similar to his words here to Zechariah. Now he says, God Himself sent me Gabriel, to you Zechariah, and you don't believe it?

God even knew how Zechariah would respond. JC Ryle notes, "the provoking sin of unbelief is practical denial of God's almighty power, to doubt whether God can do a thing, when he has plainly promised it shall be done." So Gabriel says to Zechariah, "*you will be unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.*" How fitting, that the priest who met God's words of good news with a heart of unbelief, would have his mouth stopped until the promised child was born. A dramatic and appropriate way to underscore these amazing promises, which shall surely come to pass! Because God is merciful and gracious.

3- GOD ASSISTS HIS PEOPLE IN EVERY SITUATION *with His perfect grace.* The people outside the temple were waiting for Zechariah, wondering about the delay. When he came out they knew he had seen a vision from God. He was unable to speak, and some scholars say he was also deaf, and could communicate only with signs and writing. How would you like to explain what had happened, in unbelief?

God kept His word. Elizabeth conceived and for five months kept herself hidden, saying "*thus the Lord has done for me in the days when He looked on me to take away my reproach among the people.*" Not only for Zechariah and Elizabeth, but for all people. The name Elizabeth means "*by God is satisfaction (or an oath)*" and Zechariah means "*The Lord remembers.*" John means "*the Lord is gracious.*" How appropriate are these names for the auspicious announcement of God's gracious promises!

4- GOD ACCOMPLISHES HIS PURPOSES *in His perfect way.* Four hundred years before, God had promised through Malachi, and now repeated through Gabriel "*the awesome thing that I will do.*" Even the location of this prophecy, in the temple restored by Herod, adds an element of divine oversight. RK Hughes notes how the first-century historian Josephus described the temple: "a building that wanted nothing that could astound either mind or eye. All that was not overlaid with gold was of purest white. So this shimmering grandeur housed the heartbeat of Jewish piety, and some who had attached themselves to the temple were anxiously awaiting the sunrise." Another Old Testament echo!

Malachi 4:2, "*for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.*" Hughes says, "this speaks of the coming of the Christ, the Lord Jesus. And so this eclipses every other promise, every other prayer, so that no matter what trial you endure, even involving a child, God has arranged for His Son to address every need of your heart. Not for time alone on earth, but for all eternity!"

JC Ryle notes, "the grace of God exempts no one from trouble. A hand of perfect wisdom is measuring out all our portion. If afflictions drive us nearer to Christ, the Bible and prayer, they are positive blessings. And we will know so in heaven." That's an old quote, but an echo of the newness of God's promises for every one who believes. Know today that God answers prayer, that He always keeps His promises, that He amazes His people for His own purposes, and that He assists His people in every situation. YOU can trust Him today. As you wait upon Him, for His perfect time and perfect answer to your prayers and for the promises you await. As you trust and obey, He transforms your life by His truth and grace in Christ! By the power of the promised Holy Spirit within each believer. May all this be true for you! ☐