

PROMISES KEPT

Have you ever experienced an incredible promise kept? That's what unfolds in Luke 1:57-80 as God's plan for The Christ comes to fruition. He keeps His astounding promises, on behalf of all mankind.

1- **NEW BIRTH.** Luke recounts the story in verses 57-61: *"Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, 'No; he shall be called John.' And they said to her, 'None of your relatives is called by this name.'" In Genesis 17:12-14 (and 21:4), we read how God instructed Abraham that circumcision of the male was part of His covenant with His people, a sign to show they are set apart for God's purposes, as part of the family of God (see also Leviticus 12:3).*

The New Testament counterpart is water baptism, a sign for both male and female believers, who have been circumcised in their hearts by the Holy Spirit in the new birth, the removal of the heart of stone, hardened against God's character and commands, being replaced with a regenerated heart of flesh, that now beats according to God's word and ways, a new creation by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

In this passage we learn of the custom of naming the male child at the rite of circumcision. God had done an amazing thing for Zechariah and Elizabeth, fulfilling His own words regarding the son borne in their old age. Yet the relatives and neighbors think they know better than God. How like us! To think "we know" instead of listening to God, hearkening to Him and obeying what HE says. If you are born again from above by the Holy Spirit, your new birth life is to be marked by obedience. Trusting what God wrote in His Word, believing it, obeying what God says, and stepping out in faith to do it.

2- **NEW NAME.** Ever been ignored? You're right there but they talk as if you are not. People with disabilities often experience this rude though unintended discourtesy. It almost happened to Zechariah. *"And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.'" And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, 'What then will this child be?' For the hand of the Lord was with him."*

Not only was the announcement of his birth miraculous, God confirmed His heavenly plans when John was named and set apart for God's holy purposes. For nine long months, Zechariah had been unable to speak. No doubt he was repentant at his unbelief when he responded to the words of the angel, which should have been so welcome to him after a lifetime of childlessness. His unbelief left him wordless.

Such a contrast to the response of the virgin Mary, for whom a message about a child (out of wedlock) was not welcome to a betrothed teen, yet she humbly believed and received the good news of God's Word, that she was to bear the Son of God, the Savior of the world. And for Zechariah and Elizabeth, they believed what God said about their son, the messenger of Messiah. Their neighbors feared the Lord, the proper response of awe and reverence. Likewise, your new birth means a new you! Your obedience to God's Word will be a witness to your neighbors, as you speak His Word of truth and grace.

3- **RAISED UP.** Zechariah spent nine long months being laid low, in a state of muteness, unable to speak because of his unbelief at God's words (verses 18-22). But his tongue is now loosed, at the naming of his promised son John, in obedience to God's words. Zechariah's first words praise God Himself. *"And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old!'"*

Zechariah's prophesying is called the "Benedictus" after the Latin of the first word of his praise, which is the second of three hymns in Luke 1-2. He blesses God for fulfilling His promise of the Christ, the son of David, who was soon to be born. His rightful joy at the birth of his own son is overshadowed by the Son that his son would serve, the Christ - just as John the Baptist's own words and life would later be overshadowed by the One he came to serve. Zechariah remembers the words of the angel to him (verses 13-17), and echoes God's promise *"to turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God."*

4- **PROMISED.** Just as God spoke through the prophets of old, now He prophesies through Zechariah, announcing the fulfillment of His promises in the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 3:16 exhorts *"let the word of Christ dwell in you richly"* which can only happen as you spend much time reading and meditating on all that God wrote down for you. May your words likewise be full of God's Words!

Zechariah's words were appropriate for the occasion of circumcising a male Israelite, but even more so as this child was to be the messenger of Messiah: *"as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath that He swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days."* These words capture the majesty and mystery of God's longsuffering lovingkindness, in keeping His promises. Put all your trust in Him! □