

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Luke 1: 5-25

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Luke Chapter 1. We will read verses 5 to 25 today.

Verse 5: "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth."

In this brief passage, Luke clearly sets forth the historical background, stating that it was during the time of King Herod of Judea. According to history, we know that Herod was not a Jew; he was an Edomite. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, whose brother Jacob was the ancestor of the Jews.

Historically, the Edomites had always been a trouble to the people of Israel, and by now Israel had been without a nation for 400 years. For more than 400 years, God had not spoken to the Israelites, and the land of Judea had passed under the rule of several powers: first Babylon, then the Medes and Persians, then Greece, and now it was the Roman period. This Edomite, Herod, through flattery and political maneuvering, obtained his position and became the king over the Jews.

He was a king in name only; all real power was in the hands of the Romans, yet nominally he was the ruler over the Jews. How unbearable this must have been for the Jewish people! It is against this tragic background that Luke writes, "There was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah; and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth."

The story quickly shifts to two people, Zechariah and Elizabeth, both descendants of priests. The name Zechariah means “God remembered,” and Elizabeth means “God’s oath.” The names of these two individuals reveal that their families were devoted to fearing God. Even in such unfavorable circumstances, they still hoped in God’s remembrance and still looked forward to God fulfilling His promises.

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

What is remarkable is that, at that time, the priestly system still seemed to exist, but the entire priesthood had become corrupt. Yet even within this fallen priesthood, there were still some priests who faithfully performed their duties, like Zechariah, continually hoping that God would remember His promises.

Verse 7: “ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.”

Among the Israelites, being unable to bear children seemed to be a great shame. They had prayed to God for children, yet it appeared that God had not answered their prayers. It was in this context, which seemed entirely hopeless.

Verse 8-9: “So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. “

Zechariah, however, continued to faithfully perform his duties. At that time, there were over ten thousand, almost twenty thousand, priests, and they served in shifts at the temple. Among so many priests, each day one would be chosen by lot to enter the temple and burn incense. According to the proportions at that time, each

priest would likely have only one opportunity in his lifetime to be chosen to enter the temple and burn incense.

On this particular day, Zechariah happened to be chosen by lot to enter the Lord's temple and go to the golden altar of incense to burn incense. Since the Holy of Holies could only be entered once a year by the high priest, regular priests were not allowed to enter. Even among the priests, it was extremely rare to have the opportunity to go inside and burn incense, and Zechariah happened to be the one chosen.

Verse 10-12: "And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him."

To understand the background at this time, God had not spoken to Israel for nearly 400 years. After the last prophet, Malachi, there was a 400-year period during which God did not speak to His people. Yet on this very day, when Zechariah went into the temple to burn incense, God chose to send His angel to stand by the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, of course, he was afraid.

Verse 13-15 "But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.'"

This angel not only appeared to Zechariah but also brought him wonderful news. They had long been praying for a son and had none, and as they grew old, their hope of bearing a child had all but vanished. At this moment, God sent an angel to

tell Zechariah, “Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.”

We know that Zechariah means “God remembered,” Elizabeth means “God’s oath,” and John means “God’s grace.” God remembers every word He has spoken to His people, and when the time comes for His promises to be fulfilled, He bestows His grace; John is the embodiment of God’s grace.

Not only that, the angel also told Zechariah, “You will rejoice and be glad, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord.” He is to be like a Nazarite, “he shall drink neither wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb.” This is a servant whom God intends to use greatly, dedicated to the Lord for his entire life, and filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb.

Verse 16-17: “And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah,’ to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

When we hear this statement, we might not feel much, but when Zechariah heard it, he must have been greatly astonished. Why? He was likely a priest well-versed in the Old Testament. In the last chapter and final verses of the last prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:5–6, it says, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”

The angel’s words very skillfully connect the Old Testament with the New Testament. And the key to this connection is John. He is the Elijah who was prophesied to come. As it says, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet,” what is his task? “To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.” Just as the angel told Zechariah, “He will have the spirit

and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and to bring the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous.” He came to the earth to prepare God’s people; he was to prepare a suitable people so that when God’s Son, Jesus Christ, came, the people would be ready. He is the forerunner of the Messiah.

God did not speak for 400 years, and when He began to speak again, He immediately picked up from the very last words spoken 400 years earlier. This was fulfilled in Zechariah’s son, John. Luke very skillfully uses this one statement—concerning the son Zechariah would bear, John—to connect the Old Testament and the New Testament. The last words of the Old Testament become, in effect, the first words of the New Testament.

Verse 18: “And Zacharias said to the angel, ‘How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.’”

Zechariah was much like us. When God spoke to him, he did not immediately respond in faith. He thought to himself, “I am now advanced in age, and my wife Elizabeth is also beyond the age of childbearing—how is this possible?”

Verse 19: “And the angel answered and said to him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.’”

Gabriel is an angel, whom God uses specifically to deliver messages, especially the message of great joy.

Verse 20-21 “But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple.”

Normally, when a priest went inside to burn incense, he would be extremely cautious, fearful of making a mistake. After completing the task, he would quickly leave. But unexpectedly, Zechariah stayed inside for a long time, and when he finally came out...

Verse 22-25: “But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying,”“Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.””

It is very remarkable that after God had hidden Himself from His people for 400 years, He chose a humble priest—not the high priest, but a priest who had always looked to God and remembered His promises, Zechariah—to open the prelude to the New Testament. And because Zechariah initially struggled to believe, God caused him to be unable to speak; in fact, this was a special act of God’s grace.

Many times, when we experience God’s very special grace in our lives—just as John was conceived in Elizabeth’s womb—these things cannot easily be shared with others. Therefore, God caused Zechariah to be unable to speak. For the next nine months, he had time to reflect deeply and repeatedly on what had happened.

Toward the end of this chapter, when Zechariah finally spoke, we see that his words were extraordinary, full of praise and worship to God. So, no matter what our current circumstances in life may be, and regardless of whether the church today seems desolate, if we are willing, like Zechariah, to faithfully do our duty, then at God’s appointed time, miracles and wonders will begin to occur in our lives, showing that God’s grace is once again coming to His household.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for giving us such Scripture. Just as Zechariah, a faithful servant, served in Your house, and at the appointed time You bestowed Your special grace, help us in this period of waiting to have steadfast faith—being certain that You will remember, certain that You will fulfill Your own promises, and certain that You will grant Your grace. Bless my life today so that I may experience Your perfect grace. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ.