

A Priest Named Zacharias

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction:

- A. Luke 1:5-7 - There is only a limited amount written in scripture regarding Zacharias the priest, the father of John the Baptist, but we can learn from his:
 - 1. Example of Life
 - 2. Expression of Doubt
 - 3. Exclamation of Faith
- B. Background of Zacharias ("God has remembered")
 - 1. Zechariah (Ζαχαρίας in Greek, Zacharias in KJV) is the father of John the Baptist, a priest of the sons of Aaron, a prophet (Luke 1:67-79), and the husband of Elisabeth, cousin of Mary the mother of Jesus.
 - 2. The duties at the temple in Jerusalem alternated between each of the family lines descended from those appointed by David (1Chron. 24:1-19). Luke states that during the week when it was the duty of Zechariah's family line to serve at the temple of the Lord, the lot for performing the incense offering fell on Zechariah (Luke 1:8-11).
 - 3. It is not known for certain when or how he died.
 - a. Origen suggests that the Zechariah mentioned in Matthew 23:35 killed between the temple and the altar may be same man.
 - b. Tradition states that when King Herod ordered the death of all males under the age of two in an attempt to prevent the prophesied Messiah from coming to Israel, Zechariah refused to divulge the whereabouts of his son (who was in hiding), and he was murdered by Herod's soldiers.
 - 4. In 2003, a fourth century inscription on the Tomb of Absalom, a first century monument in Jerusalem, was deciphered as, "This is the tomb of Zachariah, the martyr, the holy priest, the father of John."
 - a. Gideon Foerster at the Hebrew University states that the inscription tallies with a sixth century text stating that Zechariah was buried with Simon the Elder and James the brother of Jesus

I. EXAMPLE OF LIFE

- A. Zacharias and Elisabeth were both righteous and walked blamelessly.
 - 1. Although Elisabeth hadn't born Zacharias children, he took seriously God's pronouncement regarding divorce in Malachi 3:16
 - 2. Barren wives were commonly put away under the Law of Moses. He lived with her all of his life without putting her away, setting himself apart from most of the Hebrews around him.
- B. He was a model priest
 - 1. Priests in this day and age had to draw lots to offer the incense. It was a rare privilege; some priests had never been chosen by lot
 - 2. Zacharias was an old man; he spent a lifetime in faithful service waiting for this - Ecc. 7:8
 - 3. How many in his day could be called blameless? No one could charge anything against him - Deut. 6:4-5

II. EXPRESSION OF DOUBT

A. Luke 1:8-20

B. When the angel appeared, Zacharias was afraid (Nadab & Abihu?)

1. He told him his prayer had been heard; he obviously had been praying for a son in spite of his years and Elizabeth's age
2. His wife was going to have a son, and he was to call his name John. John was not to drink wine or strong drink, and he would be a prophet in the spirit and power of Elijah.
3. Then Zacharias asked the wrong question: how God was going to do this since he and Elizabeth were old.
 - a. He would have known of the account of Abraham and Sarah.
 - b. He had been praying for a son in spite of his age
 - c. He was talking to an angel that miraculously appeared to him
 - d. But he inexplicably felt and expressed doubt.
4. Gabriel gave him a sign. Zacharias would not be able to speak for a time because he did not believe Gabriel's words.

C. The experiences of others with doubts can be enlightening

1. Doubts can come to the faithful and devout - Matt. 28:17; Mark 16:11
 - a. Thomas doubted the testimony of ten apostles - John 20:24-25
2. In spite of our doubt, God expects us to believe His message sent through reliable and trustworthy sources.
 - a. Mark 16:14; Rom. 10:17; Luke 1:19-20
3. Doubts can be overcome by an honest investigation of truth.
 - a. John 20:27; John 5:36
4. In spite of having doubted, when one returns to faith, the Lord will receive and use him to God's glory.
 - a. Zacharias became more than a priest; he was inspired to become a prophet, too.
 - b. Job 42:5; Mark 9:24

III. EXCLAMATION OF FAITH

A. Luke 1:21-25, 57-66

B. God released his tongue, and Zacharias' first words were in praise of God

C. Zacharias became more than a priest; he became a prophet - Luke 1:67-80

1. He bound together for the first time in the history of the world, all of the prophecies of salvation from the beginning of the world in the person of Jesus Christ - Gen. 3:15, 22:18
2. He revealed the role of his son John, who fulfilled the prophecies of the return of Elijah, greatest among prophets - Mal. 4:5-6; John 1:7-8, 29

D. What a transition from the weakness of doubt to powerful faith and proclamation of the glory to come!

1. "If Christ spent an anguished night in prayer, if He burst out from the Cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' then surely we are also permitted doubt. But we must move on. To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation." (Yann Martel)