



The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

⁵In the days of Herod, king of Judea^a, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah^b; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth^c. ⁶They were both righteous in the sight of God^d, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord^e. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years^a.

^a **1:5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea.** This creates context for these events Luke records. All who investigate just what went on “in the days of Herod” may understand. This would be like someone writing a history of our times and saying, “In the decade that followed the World Trade Center attack...” Sources of information about our time will be abundant. So it is with “the days of Herod.”

- Herod became governor of Galilee (appointed by his father Antipater the Idumean) when he was only 25.
- He gave the impression that he was a tough, law and order ruler.
- He carried the favor of the Jews by marrying into a prominent Jewish family.
- A political opportunist, he found a way to get into power in Jerusalem and obtained the title “King of the Jews.”
- He was known for his vicious treatment of those he perceived as rivals.
- He was the patriarch of an infamous family whose depraved lives cluttered the landscape of the first century Roman empire.

^b **1:5 there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah.** Zacharias means “the Lord has remembered.” He was from the tribe of Levi, specifically, one of the sons of Aaron permitted to serve as a priest. The division of Abijah to which Zacharias belonged was selected by lot in the days of King Solomon to serve as “group eight” out of twenty-four groups serving in the temple two weeks each year:

Now the first lot came out for Jehoiarib, the second for Jedaiah, the third for Harim, the fourth for Seorim, the fifth for Malchijah, the sixth for Mijamin, the seventh for Hakkoz, the eighth for Abijah, the ninth for Jeshua, the tenth for Shecaniah, the eleventh for Eliashib, the twelfth for Jakim, the thirteenth for Huppah, the fourteenth for Jeshebeab, the fifteenth for Bilgah, the sixteenth for Immer, the seventeenth for Hezir, the eighteenth for Hapizzzez, the nineteenth for Pethahiah, the twentieth for Jehezkel, the twenty-first for Jachin, the twenty-second for Gamul, the twenty-third for Delaiah, the twenty-fourth for Maaziah. 1 Chronicles 24:7-18

Since this was the eighth priestly division, we can place the date of his service (eighth week of the Hebrew calendar) in either April-May or October-November. It is not possible from this evidence to calculate the date of the birth of Jesus.

^c **1:5 he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.** Luke gives prominent place to women in his history. Jesus taught them and made use of them in His ministry. Elizabeth the mother of John, Mary the mother of Jesus, Anna the prophetess, the widow of Nain, the sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet, a number of women who contributed to the support of His ministry (8:1-3: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna), Mary the sister of Lazarus, Martha the sister of Lazarus, the poor generous widow.

^d **1:6 They were both righteous in the sight of God.** The words “in the sight of God” are packed with theological importance. There is an infinite difference between this view and the human view. God’s accounting is invisible to us.

^e **1:6 walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.** This second statement about the character of Zacharias and Elizabeth coincides with the teaching of James about faith and works. The kind of righteousness we need is the kind we can only get from God. It is credited to our account on the basis of Christ’s righteousness. It comes to us by faith.

The Gospel of Luke
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⁸Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, ⁹according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense^b. ¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering^c. ¹¹And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense^d. ¹²Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him^{e, f}.

The blamelessness spoken of here is the way the righteous walk among men to demonstrate their faith in God.

^a 1:7 **But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.** This shows that hard times are not necessarily related to some kind of divine payback for sins of the past. God sends difficulty to His most faithful people with great design.

^b 1:9 **he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.** It would have been a rare occurrence for a priest to have this responsibility—perhaps only once in his life. The cleansed priest brought the burning coals from beneath blood sacrifices and burned fragrant incense before the Lord. The altar of incense stood in front of the veil before the Most Holy Place.

This was one of the priestly tasks that the men of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16) and King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26) craved before God judged them. It was reserved for the sons of Aaron.

This was the place where men approached God on an earthly level. It is a picture of prayer (as Psalm 141:2 shows). The fragrant smoke ascended to symbolize both the prayers (Revelation 8:3-5) and the protection (Leviticus 16:13) of those who approach God. It would have been fitting for Zacharias to pour out the desires of His heart in this place more than any other on earth.

^c 1:10 **the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.** It was not only the priest who sensed this as the proper place to pray. This is the right picture of the corporate prayer meeting. With the priest in place, approaching God, the people considered this as the time of access.

^d 1:11 **And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense.** See Luke's detail. If you know what the temple looks like you can picture just what Zacharias saw.

^e 1:12 **Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him.** This is the proper human response to angelic visions. When people see other-worldly beings they are struck with awe and fear (see Moses, Daniel, shepherds, the women at the tomb, John...).

^f 1:5-12 Zacharias and Elizabeth must have been what we would call prayer warriors, but that does not mean they were used to seeing God give them what they asked when they prayed. They spent years faithfully serving Him and carrying a not-so-private hurt. Prayer is not a discipline you develop so you can get what you want from God. Instead...

1. It is a testimony that you think God is good even when He does not give you what you ask. Zacharias and Elizabeth were faithful.
2. It is a rehearsal of the attributes of God for those who pray. Once the character of God is foremost in your mind, does it really matter if you get what you want?
3. It is God's means of molding His servants into useful instruments. Do you think Zacharias and Elizabeth were ready to rear the forerunner of Messiah? What got them to that point?
4. It is God's way of making you grow to the point where you want what He wants.
5. It is a constant reminder that our High Priest lives and continually pleads for us before the Father's throne.

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