



The DAILY JESUS NEWS #008
Jesus' 30 Years of Preparation for Ministry
Faith, Prayer and Prophecy Prepared for Jesus' Incarnation

God Disciplines Zechariah for his Unbelief
Luke 1.18-25

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18 Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I know this for sure? I am an old man myself, and my wife has become irreversibly advanced in her years."

19 The angel said to him, "I, myself, am Gabriel. I have taken my stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to announce this good news to you. 20 And now you will be silent and not be able to speak until the day this happens because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at the perfect time."

21 Meanwhile, the people were still waiting for Zechariah, and they continued to wonder why he stayed so long in the temple. 22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple because he continued making signs to them, but he remained unable to speak.

23 When his time of service was completed, Zechariah returned home. 24 After this, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and then remained in seclusion for five months. 25 "The Lord has permanently accomplished this for me," she said. "In these days, he has watched over me with favor and taken away my humiliation among the people."

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus.*

| CONTEXT DIGEST | |
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| Location | The Temple in Jerusalem |
| Timeline | 15 to 10 Months Before the Birth of Jesus |
| Stage of Jesus' Life | Stage II: His 30 Years of Preparation for Ministry |
| Chapter 2 | Faith, Prayer and Prophecy Prepared for Jesus' Incarnation |
| Section #008 | God Disciplines Zechariah For His Unbelief |

In our previous reading we saw that the angel Gabriel quoted part of Malachi 4.5-6 in his birth announcement to Zechariah. Today's reading reminds us of another prophecy in that final book of the OT, which referred directly to Jesus.

1 *"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.*

2 *But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, 4 and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.* Malachi 3.1-4 (NIV)

The first part of verse 1 referred to the ministry of John the Immerser--the promised son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. The rest of this prophecy described Jesus. He would fulfill these words when he cleansed the Temple twice during his ministry.

On a more basic level, Jesus came to save his people from their sins by first pardoning us, then purifying us through changing into his own likeness. Transformation involves the non-stop application of spiritual discipline. Zechariah became an example of the purifying ministry of the coming Messiah in today's text. Zechariah would later prophecy about Messiah's role in our purification, after God's discipline was complete. How did this work?

The scale and setting of God's answer to Zechariah was too much for him to believe. If Elizabeth had simply become pregnant one day, he probably could have handled that. But for it to be announced in advance by the angel Gabriel, with such a critical role for Zechariah's son in the coming of the Messiah--not to mention being full of the Spirit while still in the womb--this was so far beyond Zechariah's prayer request that he could not take it in. He could not believe what was too good to be true.

Love caused God to discipline Zechariah for his unbelief with nine months of silence. Why was that?

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *"It is written. 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.' (Psalm 116.10). With that same spirit of faith we also believe, and therefore speak."* II Cor. 4.13

Since Zechariah did not believe God's promise to Him through Gabriel, he was not permitted to speak about it at all. In fact, he was not able to speak about anything! This season of disciplining silence created a deep purification, and faith in Zechariah that caused Him to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and deliver a wonderful prophetic psalm of praise to God later on, after his son was born.

God's discipline led to great transformation and glory for Zechariah. He went from silence, to making a contribution to the eternal written word of God--the Scriptures!

The Messiah was coming--and his way would be prepared by John the Immerser--so that we might become fully pure and holy through Jesus, even as HE is holy.

APPLICATION:

God disciplines us, just like Zechariah, because He loves us. (Hebrews 12.4-12)

All of us are sinful, and so we all experience discipline in our relationship with God. He loves us too much to leave us twisted and damaged by sin. So he purifies us. The Messiah came to do this in all of us.

Are you being disciplined now? Do you know someone who is?

Hebrews 12 contains the perfect advice for our need when in discipline. How will you respond to God's love when under His discipline?

Who can you encourage as they are being disciplined?

This all begs the question: much does holiness really matter to you?