

Title: Zechariah's Faith
 Text: Luke 1:57-80
 Main Point: Strong faith requires development.
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 Series: None

INTRODUCTION

Christians understand that Christmas concerns the coming of Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews introduces his letter: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Hebrews 1:1-2). God's plan for the world took its final form at the coming of the Lord Jesus. God established a new covenant with Jesus, marked by His grace to a degree never before known. Jesus was the "door" to heaven, revealing the way to God in this life that ends in the forever life with Him, and all who love God.

Jesus' coming also defined the uniqueness of Christianity. As the article *What Makes Christianity Unique?* by www.gotquestions.org states:

Is Christianity really unique, or is it just one of many roads on the path to truth? Is Christianity truly unique among the many religions around the world? If it is, what makes it so? Unique among all religions, Christianity makes several claims that others do not. First, all other religions exhort man to reach up to God and grasp hold of Him through their own efforts. Christianity is the only religion where God reaches down to man. Second, other religions are systems of do's and don'ts to appease God; whereas Christianity is a relationship with God. Third, Christianity looks to the Bible as the singular source of truth. Finally, Christianity is based upon truly the most amazing event in all of human history—the resurrection.

Finally, the coming of Jesus enforced God's faithfulness. "The Old Testament is replete with anticipations of the coming Messiah, containing numerous predictions about His birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and glory. (Ron Rhodes, *A Popular Survey of Apologetics for Today: Fast Facts Every Christian Should Know* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2023), 197) These prophecies create a unique "fingerprint" of the Messiah, and the Bible asserts that only Jesus Christ matches this precise description. (Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ Answer Booklet: Solving the Biggest Mystery of All Time* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017) More than 100 messianic prophecies foretold specific details, including Jesus' virgin birth in Bethlehem, His miraculous ministry, betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection (Rhodes, *A Popular Survey of Apologetics for Today*) Isaiah 53 is considered particularly compelling, offering a haunting and poetic prediction of a Messiah who would suffer and die for the sins of the world, written over seven hundred years before Jesus' birth. (Got Questions Ministries, *Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2002–2013) Jesus Himself frequently referenced these prophecies, claiming to be their fulfillment and interpreting the Scriptures as pointing to His identity. (Rhodes, *A Popular Survey of Apologetics for Today*) Mathematician Peter Stoner calculated the odds of just eight prophecies being fulfilled by chance as one in a hundred million billion - comparable to finding a specifically marked silver dollar in Texas filled two feet deep with such coins. (Joe Coffey, *Smooth Stones: Bringing down the Giant Questions of Apologetics* (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2011)

God fulfilled hundreds of promises over thousands of years with the coming of Jesus. God demonstrated His faithfulness to His people the moment Mary gave birth to Jesus. "For the LORD is good; His steadfast love

endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations” (Psalm 100:5). God proved His faithfulness with Jesus’ coming; however, throughout history, men and women struggle to believe God is faithful. Today, we consider Zechariah’s struggle of faith regarding the birth of his son, John the Baptist, who was to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus.

DISCUSSION

1. When I speak of faith, I mean “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).
2. For decades, Elizabeth and Zechariah prayed that God would give them a child (Luke 1:13). In their waiting, they served God in righteousness and blamelessness (Luke 1:6). We do not know whether they were still praying or whether God answered previous prayers. What we do know is that Elizabeth was “advanced in years” (1:7) and “barren” (1:7). However, God has no limitations, and the “fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4) had come for Jesus to appear. In preparation, John the Baptist would prepare the way for His coming. Announcing God’s will, the angel shares that God will answer their prayers for a child; Elizabeth will give birth to a son, John the Baptist, who “will be great before the Lord” (1:15). Despite their righteousness, blamelessness, and answer to prayer (Luke 1:13), Zechariah’s faith wavered: “You will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words” (1:20).
3. Insightful are God’s different actions to Zechariah and Mary (1:18; 1:34) for seemingly the same response.
 - 3.1. I offer some attempts to reconcile God’s different responses.
 - 3.1.1. “The distinction between Zechariah’s and Mary’s responses reveals a profound difference in their attitudes toward God’s miraculous intervention. While Mary’s question arose from faith, Zechariah questioned the truth of the revelation. Mary simply inquired about how God would work, whereas Zechariah’s doubt ran deeper. (Walter L. Liefeld, “Luke,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 828.)
 - 3.1.2. “God, who sees the hidden secrets of the heart, perceived something deeper in Zechariah’s response. Zechariah’s doubt stemmed from looking too exclusively at the natural world, essentially reasoning whether God’s promise could truly be fulfilled. By doing so, he indirectly questioned God’s credibility.” (John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 1:23–24.)
 - 3.1.3. I believe Zachariah lacked faith in God’s power to work in the conjugal relationship to bring about John’s birth. At the same time, Mary questioned how a virgin could have a child (God suspended the natural process for a miraculous birth).
 - 3.2. I like what James Edwards says, “Zechariah’s request in v. 18 is similar to Mary’s in v. 34 and in itself does not appear objectionable. Gabriel’s spiritual discernment, however, understands it as an expression of disbelief (v. 20), and as a consequence, Zechariah is rendered mute until the birth of the child—Gabriel’s sentence results in an impairment that disqualifies Zechariah from further priestly duty. Disbelief is not the result of Zechariah’s feelings, doubts, temperament, or circumstances, but of personal choice. The divine word is given as an invitation to choose faith, and the choice of faith awakens further faith.” (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament*

Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2015), 39).

Biblical Insights from Zechariah

1. Zechariah's waiting on God was where his faith weakened. He and Elizebeth prayed for years for a child with no answer. When God answered, Zechariah doubted.
 - 1.1. Godly waiting believes God knows more than I and is working for my best.
 - 1.2. Godly waiting does everything within God's boundaries to resolve the situation. At the end of human potential, you wait for God's goodness.
 - 1.3. Godly waiting recognizes the cultural demands for instant results and resists them for God's good purpose.
 - 1.4. Godly waiting is marked by the expectation that God will break the silence with His purpose.
2. Mature Christians should lead in displaying faith, "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ, says Paul (1 Corinthians 11:1). I am speaking of those who, through life's struggles and pain, have been tested yet remain firmly committed to Jesus.
3. Zechariah's righteousness and blamelessness were insufficient for this faith challenge. Godly character does not always equate with strong faith.
 - 3.1. Strong faith rests on firm trust in God even when natural solutions are lacking.
 - 3.2. Like a physical muscle, strong faith is developed in preparation for life's testing.
 - 3.2.1. Faith is developed through specific passages in the Bible (2 Kings 6:16-17; Job 1:22; 2:10; 13:15; Psalm 34:8; Hebrews 11).
 - 3.2.2. Faith is developed through reading Christian biographies and accounts of those who demonstrate strong faith (Daily Bread, Guideposts, and other short stories).
 - 3.2.3. Faith is developed in group settings within the church where those who are strong in faith share life.
 - 3.2.4. Faith is developed by choosing faith; that choice awakens further faith.
4. A takeaway question: What are you currently doing to develop your faith for a time of testing?