

# God Breaks His Silence

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[ 0 : 00 ] We just turned there last week. Now, second time you know right where it is. Gospel of Luke. What an honor to have so many missionaries among us.

Angels. Angel is a messenger, right? What a blessing to have you here. We pray God blesses you today. Okay, it's an honor to have everybody here.

I'm glad. Okay. Okay, Gospel of Luke. The setting is the last.

Luke is recording for us the very first words of God in 400 years. The last time he had spoken to Israel was the book of Malachi.

These are the very first words that Israel hears. So, if you're able, please stand as I read from the Word of God.

[ 1 : 05 ] Gospel of Luke, beginning at chapter 1, verse 5. In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the division of Abijah.

And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron. And her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God. Walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

But they had no child. Because Elizabeth was barren. And both were advanced in years.

Now, while he was serving as priest before God, when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot.

And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.

[ 2 : 16 ] And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, do not be afraid, Zechariah.

For your prayer has been 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 before the Lord.

And he must not drink wine or strong drink. And he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb.

[ 3 : 18 ] And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will 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 for the Lord a people who have been prepared.

And Zechariah said to the angel, how shall I know this? For I am an old man.

And my wife is advanced in years. And the angel answered him, I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God.

And I was sent to speak to you. And to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent.

[ 4 : 23 ] And unable to speak. Until the day that these things take place. Because you did not believe my words.

Which will be fulfilled in their time. And the people were waiting for Zechariah. And they were wondering at his delay in the temple.

And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them. And they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute.

And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After these days, his wife Elizabeth conceived. And for five months, she kept herself hidden, saying, Thus, the Lord has done for me.

In the days, when he looked upon me. To take away my reproach.

[ 5 : 37 ] Among men. So reads the word. Let us pray. Our Father, help us to hear this word.

This significant word. The first words you spoke for four centuries. Help us to grasp the significance of who John is.

Who his parents are. When this was revealed. Where it was revealed. And why John is significant. As the one who goes before the Lord. So there's so much to see. Oh Lord, help us to grasp what you want us to grasp this morning.

Open our eyes. And open our ears. And particularly, turn our hearts to you. We ask in Christ's name. Amen.

[ 6 : 43 ] Please be seated. This might be tough.

It's tough to just get through the reading. All right. Trying to hold myself together. Sure. Have. Speaking of the silence of the Lord.

The Lord has been silenced 400 years. Have you experienced God's silence in your life? Not 400 years. Unless you're really advanced in years.

Periods of time where God is not answering. You experience seasons of painful suffering.

And yet God seems quiet. You're enduring reproach. Because the suffering you're dealing with. Appears to others as if.

[ 7 : 46 ] Something's wrong with this person. Morally perhaps. Why would they suffer such? And praying for perhaps even years.

For God to move. In a good way. A way that it would even honor him. And yet he. He does not answer.

Or he is silent. So why does God delay. His promises. And. And his answers.

And why do faithful people. Experience God's silence. By faithful people. I mean people seeking the Lord. Not perfect people.

But people continually. To say. Seeking. The Lord. Why is God silent there? Is God. Forgotten. It may feel that way.

[ 8 : 43 ] Doesn't it? Feel like. He's not there. So have you felt his silence. Have you experienced. The disappointment.

Of. God being quiet. While you. Endure. Hardship. Your prayers. That receive no answer. If this goes on a long time.

Do you. Are you tempted. To give up. To quit. I mean. It seems like God's not listening.

It seems like God. Has forgotten. He has not healed. He has not given that job.

That I need. He has not brought that child. He has not returned that child. Many things we pray.

[ 9 : 39 ] And we pray. And we pray. And. Silence. Has God passed us by? What is happening.

When God. When God. Is silenced. In Luke 1. We see. That God. Finally breaks. His silence. With good news. Of the birth of John.

So in Luke. 1. Verses 5 to 7. We meet some people. That had experienced. The silence of God. We meet. Zechariah. And Elizabeth. They are righteous.

People. They are faithful. People. Yet. We are told. In verse 7. That they are childless. And at the end of the text.

We. We are told. By Elizabeth's prayer. That. In their childlessness. They are experiencing. Reproach. Because it seems.

[ 10 : 35 ] To everyone else. They must be cursed. Something must be. Very wrong. They live under the old covenant.

Remember. Which. The promise. Of God's covenant. In. Exodus. Right. When he gave the law. Before he gave the law. In Exodus 19. He said. This is my covenant. If you obey. My voice. And do all. That I command you. What will I do?

I will bless you. Your children. Will be. Many. So. What are. John.

And Elizabeth. Zechariah. And Elizabeth. To do. They've been faithful. They should be blessed.

What is wrong? Why? You can understand.

[ 11 : 34 ] Their. Disappointment. Why? Why is God. Not. Given. What he promised. And why is he silent?

They're righteous. But they must be. Questioning. Am I not righteous. Enough? Am I somehow. Not faithful? What. Did I do?

That God would punish. Me. So. God has been silent. Not just. To Zechariah. And Elizabeth. But. To all of Israel.

For 400 years. Not a word. Has been spoken. Since the prophet. Malachi. Why this delay? Or again. Has God. Simply. Not only forgotten. Zechariah. And Elizabeth. But. Has he forgotten. Israel? We're told. In verse 5. These are the days. This happened.

[12:28] In the days. Of. Of. Herod. There were several Herods. This is. This is the first one. This is Herod the great.

This is the one who was king of Judea. In other words. Not just king of. Over one area. It would be his sons. Who. The kingdom would be divided among four ways. This is Herod the great. He was king of Judea. Which was from. From the tribe of Benjamin. All the way to the northern. Up into Galilee. He had the whole area.

Beside. And plus. Past the Jordan. To the other side. This is Herod the great. Now. He did some great stuff. He. He helped rebuild the temple. He financed and helped rebuild the temple. To be a great. Great building. But he also did other building projects. He built multiple. Pagan temples. He was. He wanted to be king of the Jews.

[13:29] The problem was. He didn't have the lineage. He's a descendant of Esau. Esau. Who was an enemy of. Israel.

So he's a false king. A puppet king. And obviously Rome is in control. And you know. He was appointed. He's not really a king. He's appointed as more of a governor.

But he had power. Within his. Kingdom. So these are hard times.

Understand. Again. You know. Not long ago. We went through the history of Israel. We saw that Israel. Right. The promise. To Abraham. And then. Redemption. And Moses.

And we had. Rebellion in the wilderness. Remember. And then they come back. And they have. The promised land. Is fulfilled. Right. God keeps his promise. To promise breakers.

[14:25] Right. And. And shortly after that. He raises up a king. He raises up David. Who establishes. A united kingdom. Remember the timing. Of all that. Remember. This was their apex.

This is. Seems like God is fulfilling. All the promises. He made to Abraham. They're. They're a great nation. Right. And they're. Here. They had promised. That through Judah. They would become. A king. And.

David seems to be the king. Because he established peace. On every side. I mean. That guy made. Peace. He subjected.

Everyone. Then he handed the kingdom. Over to his son. And. Solomon. Remember. Solomon. Had a good start. Had a bad ending.

Because he became apostate. And rejected the Lord. And. Served the gods. Of his wives. And. From that point. Remember. From Solomon.

[15:22] That's where everything went down. Following Solomon. Were more evil kings. And more evil kings. And we. Remember. By time we come back into the land. With Ezra.

Nehemiah. Remember. It's rubble. Remember. There's no. And what kind of land. The land. The land promise. You know.

Is still. They're still servants of. Of Babylon. Persia. So. This is the context. Into which we come. Israel. Israel. Israel. Is still. Under. The oppression. No longer. Of. Persia. No longer. Of Greece. But now. Rome. And Rome. Is. As. Daniel's vision. Showed. Was. A crusher. Right.

[16:15] The iron. So. That's what they're under. Just. Just realize that. Okay. They're still waiting for. This Messiah. Remember.

The Old Testament told us. All those promises. That. This king would come. From Abraham on. This king would come. And he's going to be like David. And he's going to take David's throne. And when is he coming? Because he's not here.

God has been silent. Okay. So these are hard times. And it seems hopeless. And here we focus in now. On just two people. Zechariah.

And Elizabeth. Who. Now are. I like the term. Old. But. Apparently there's a more old. By. Zechariah says. I'm old. My wife. She's advanced.

In years. So I. I don't know. What that means. If that means super old. Right. So you get old. But then they're super. There's really. She's reached the top. Of the. Advancement.

[17:11] So for them. I mean. It certainly seems. Hopeless. Hopeless. So here's the scene. In which God breaks his silence.

He has not forgotten them. In fact. The first person. That he speaks a word to. Is named. Zechariah.

He has not forgotten. Because he speaks to. A man named. God remembers. Zechariah. God remembers.

Interesting. Interesting. God. So what is the significance of John? What we see then. Zechariah. Then. We learn about the background.

We learn about the mission. Of. This. Son. To be born. So here's the significance of John. We'll see it in these two ways. God's first words. Are. To.

[18:07] Zechariah. Who happens to be a priest. This will be. The father of John the Baptist. His mother by the way.

Is no. Outcast. Her lineage goes to Aaron as well. So we have a legitimate. Priestly family. Into which. John is born. We. We forget that when we read about John. He's a prophet. No. He's born into a priestly family. So his background is significant. And then the angel tells us who this John will be.

And what he will do. And so we. We'll see. Secondly. He's significant in his mission. So let's look at his background first. John is a bridge.

He's a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He's a bridge between Old Covenant. New Covenant. He's kind of that individual that's standing there between Malachi.

[19:02] And Matthew. Yeah. So here. Here he is. And we're going to see. Luke is going to continue to give us parallels between John the Baptist and Jesus.

There are. They have parallel ministries that are distinct. So his background is he's born into a priestly family. He's born into a priestly family.

But this family is really relatively unknown. And they are certainly unlikely parents for one who comes who's so significant.

So why these parents? They're unknown. Verse 5 tells us, you know, there was a certain priest. There was. ESV has. ESV has. There was a priest. But in Greek there was a certain priest.

I mean, there was kind of an anybody. Somebody priest. Just kind of a. Kind of an unknown guy. Just a priest. Nobody really knows. But in verse 6 we find out that this priest and his wife were righteous.

[20:10] They were righteous before God. They're walking blamelessly in all the commandments. They're faithful, faithful people. They love God.

They believe God. And they are faithful. They continue to. Even in all the heartbreak they've experienced for years, they continue to be faithful. These are remarkable people.

All the darkness and hardship and reproach and disappointment and discouragement, they still are faithful.

So their righteousness, I would say, is a righteousness by faith, not by works. There are the works. There are the fruit. They are doing those things.

But what keeps them going when they've experienced so much heartbreak? And it lived in such hard times. What keeps them going?

[21:06] Faith. Faith. Christi just read for us 1 Peter 1 that talks about faith, which is more precious than gold.

Especially the faith that's tested through hardship. They had this. It's an improbable birth to these parents.

They're too old. She's child. They're childless. She's barren. He's old. Yet they continue to serve by faith. So we find out, what does this man do?

Verse 8. What does Zechariah do? Well, he serves as priest before God when his division was on duty. So his division, there's 24 divisions that were divided back in the time of David.

And he falls under Abijah. And so his division is one of those 24. And so two times a year, he comes and serves in the temple. The whole division comes to serve in the temple.

[22:11] And there's lots to do in the temple. A lot of blood to clean up, right? A lot of, you know, they got to make the incense. And they're doing the oil. They're doing all this. Lots of things, obviously.

Offerings coming, right? They're dealing with all that stuff. So they rotation. So he's there. That's his rotation. Verse 9. According to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by Lot to enter the temple of the Lord.

Okay. So not only is John born to unlikely parents who are too old, he's born to a father who is experiencing an unlikely priesthood.

He's chosen by Lot. Josephus estimated there were 18,000 priests during the first century, during this time. So I divide that by 24, and James tells me that that's 750.

So Zechariah's division would have had 750 people. 750 priests. They do the Lot thing. Lot is not a person, by the way. He's not chosen by some guy named Lot.

[ 23 : 19 ] He's chosen by Lot, which means they draw lots. So out of 750, it's Zechariah. What are the odds? One in 700.

One in 700. Thank you. I appreciate that. I'm glad when you connect those dots. So it's just chance. So think about the background here. Here he's born to these old, unlikely, improbable parents. And now his father has this absolutely unlikely opportunity to serve in the temple.

Now, not just serve in the temple, but he's chosen. Watch verse 9. Not just that he's serving. He's already serving. But according to the custom priests, he was chosen by Lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. That's the chosen honor.

That's the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to go in to the holy place where we have, and I don't know which side is which.

[ 24 : 26 ] I don't know if the lamp stands on this side and the table show is on that side, but let's just say that. It goes in where, you know, the bread is sown out every week and where the lights are trimmed every morning and every evening.

And right here is the incense, right in front of what? The curtain, the veil, which blocks what? The holy of holies.

Where is the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat and the presence of God, right? Nobody goes in there except the high priest once a year, and boy, he better be prayed up.

Otherwise, they keep the rope and they pull him out of the rope, right? If he doesn't. So, but he doesn't get to do that. He's not a high priest, but he gets to go in and do this great honor.

So that's the unlikely situation. Once-in-a-lifetime. And then look at verse 11. Where does this revelation happen? So Zechariah, he's unlikely, right?

[ 25 : 35 ] He's coming in. He says the once-in-a-lifetime he comes in. And that's when God chooses to reveal things. That's when God chooses to speak. And he speaks through Gabriel, who stands, verse 11, at the right of the altar of incense.

Right where Zechariah is coming. All right. Told you I'm going to have trouble. Can't read.

I got a new Bible. I'm supposed to be able to read. I can't see a word. Oh, that helps. So the angel comes.

So here we have unknown parents, unlikely priesthood, and a unique place. As Zechariah is burning incense, which, by the way, remember the incense being right in front of the presence of God.

He burns the incense. It creates an aroma, right? Four unique fragrances that are put together in a certain way that then are burned. And then the aroma and the smoke goes through the veil and over the mercy seat.

[ 26 : 47 ] So Exodus describes it as the smoke being over the mercy seat. So what is incense? What's this a symbol of? Prayer. What are the people doing outside while he's doing this, right?

They're praying, right? This is the hour of prayer. And the incense is that symbolic picture of going right into the presence of God. Zechariah has the privilege of doing that.

So it's at this unique place. And please note the emphasis. This is what stood out to me, the emphasis on the word incense. It happens three times. Verse 9, right?

He's chosen to burn incense. Verse 10, the people are praying outside at the hour of incense.

Verse 11, the angel of the Lord is standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

Emphasized. Also, the word priest is emphasized several times. Also, the word temple is emphasized several times. Maybe it's significant. I don't know. The Bible repeats words.

[ 27 : 50 ] Maybe they're important. Maybe where this happens is really significant. Because my questions are always, why there? Why there? Why there? Why that person?

Why then? God hasn't spoken for 400 years. And this is when he's going to speak. And this is where he's going to speak.

Probably very significant. A unique place for God's word to come. So, why here?

Why at this moment? I believe God is foreshadowing the significance of John, who is not the fulfillment of the temple, but he's the bridge to the one who is the fulfillment of the temple.

What John's father is doing, Jesus will do. What John's father does, but only to a point, and only for that day, Jesus will do one time.

[ 29 : 00 ] And he doesn't stop at the incense. He doesn't stop at the veil. In fact, he rips the veil, and he goes inside. And he doesn't do it in the man-made temple, the one that Herod rebuilt for them.

He will do it in the real temple. The one that the earthly temple is simply a copy of. He's going to do it in the original. Because he is the veil.

His flesh is the veil, and he goes right into the very presence of God. And when we go to Jesus, where do we go? We don't stop at the veil. And we don't wait for a priest to help us.

We go right to the presence of God because we know his son. And because his son has made a way. So, here are the words of Hebrews that describes this.

He's talking about the temple and how it was built and all of its significance. So, in Hebrews 9, 6, he says, The preparations having thus been made, the priests, like Zechariah, go regularly into the first section.

[ 30 : 07 ] Right? The holy place. Performing their ritual duties. But into the second, the holy of holies, only the high priest goes. And he, but once a year.

And not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the what? Unintentional sins. What about the intentional sins? What about those? What about when we're rebellious? Are those not covered? They're not covered. Not covered. Blood of the lamb and they only cover unintentional.

You know, the oops didn't mean that. Went to a funeral, touched the dead body. Okay, I need to be clean for that. Okay.

Watch this now. By this, by this going into the temple. By this, the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet open.

[ 31 : 10 ] As long as the first section is still standing, which is symbolic for the present age. According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect, cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper.

But deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body, the exiled, external, imposed. There's a time limit until the time of reformation.

There's coming a time when things will change. But when Christ appeared as high priest, is Jesus a high, was he a descendant of Aaron? No, he's a descendant of Judah.

How does he get to be high priest? He's different, isn't he? He came when Jesus appeared, when Christ appeared as high priest of the good things that have already come.

Then, through the greater and more perfect tense. See, there we go. Not that earthly one. Not the one made with hands. That is not this creation. Not Herod's temple. He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood.

[ 32 : 27 ] His precious blood. His holy blood. His untainted by sin blood.

Thus, securing not a once a year redemption, but an eternal redemption. You've been bought. You've been paid for. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, if that sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, in other words, that cleanses them and purifies them outwardly.

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, how much more will that purify not just your outside, but your conscience?

Oh, do we want a clean conscience? Oh, do I want a purified conscience? His blood purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

[ 33 : 30 ] So, yes, the temple is significant. The temple points to Jesus' fulfillment. Jesus is the time of reform. And John is starting that time.

He's preparing for that time. John is a bridge between Old Testament, Old Covenant, and New Covenant. He comes from a priestly family.

He is the last of the old. And his birth signals the new is coming.

Jesus himself said of John in Luke 16, the law and the prophets were until John. He's the marking point. Law and the prophets till John.

Old Covenant till John. Then, since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached and everyone is forcing his way into it because, oh boy, I want the good news.

[ 34 : 31 ] I want the new covenant. So, verse 13 now, that's the background. Now we come to the message in verse 13. What does the angel say about this John?

Verse 13, angel said to him. Now, obviously, you know, verse 12, Zechariah, you know, the angel appears to him. Zechariah's troubled. The word troubled there means shaking.

He's trembling. Same word that's used of Herod when he hears that a new king is born. He was trembling. That's the kind of guy Herod was.

He was, it's all about him. But, Zechariah, so isn't it interesting that every time the scripture, not almost, almost every time the scripture announces that an angel appears, what's the response?

Oh, boy. No. When people tell you they saw an angel and, oh, I feel such peace, uh-uh. They didn't see an angel. Because in scripture, every time you see an angel, oh, they're scary.

[ 35 : 47 ] They're impressive. They're powerful. Okay? And it's usually the first words they have to say is, okay, fear not. Not here to kill you.

So then the angel speaks, fear not. Why? What's the message? Your prayer has been heard.

Your prayer has been heard. Your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son. You'll call his name John.

And you'll have joy and gladness. And many will rejoice.

This John, he'll be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink. No wine, no beer, no liquor. He will be, but he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

And he will turn many children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him, the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah. To do what? To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to wisdom, to the wisdom of just.

[ 36 : 50 ] And to summarize, what is his mission? It's to make ready for the Lord a people who have been prepared. To take those people that the Lord has already prepared.

In other words, this is what the grammar is saying. Those people that the Lord has already prepared. Somehow, John's preaching will find them and prepare them.

It's kind of like when you're saved, you know? When the word of God suddenly awakens you.

Because you've already been, what does Ephesians say, been chosen when?

Before the foundation of the world. I just didn't know it. Until I was awakened. And the word of God is the powerful thing that opens my ears and awakens me from being dead to alive.

And that's what the text is hinting at. That he will make ready for the Lord a people, and the grammar is perfect, passive, who have already been prepared. Before he makes them ready.

[ 37 : 57 ] Okay. Okay. So his mission, let me summarize it this way. Because that's how he summarizes it at the end of verse 17.

His mission is to make ready a people who have been prepared by the Lord. And he's going to do this in some different ways. First of all, he's coming as an encouragement. We see in verse 13.

You know, he's going to bring joy. He will bring joy and gladness. Many will rejoice at his birth.

Right? Zechariah is told, your prayer has been heard. Your wife will bear a son, and she'll call his name.

Yahweh is gracious. Yo, anah. God, Yahweh gives. Anah, giving. Yah, Yahweh. Yahweh gives.

Yahweh is gracious. Which is significant because in verse 25, what Elizabeth experiences is the grace of God. It takes away the reproach.

[ 38 : 56 ] He's a gift of joy and gladness. Many will rejoice at his birth. He is the answer to their years of pain and reproach and hopelessness.

By the way, is that a familiar story? Old people can't have children. God giving them, you know. Abraham and Sarah.

In fact, every patriarch, Abraham and Sarah, they were barren. Sarah was barren. Right? Delay. Birth. Isaac and Rebecca.

Rebecca. Rebecca was. Is it Rebecca or Rachel? I always mix up. Rachel? Rebecca. Okay, whatever. Isaac. Isaac's wife was also barren.

Had to wait 20 years before, right? They get the birth of the twins. Jacob, same thing. Right? Jacob had two wives.

[ 39 : 52 ] The wife that he loved. The wife that he loved, barren. Rachel. Right? Get it right? Okay. Whichever one was Jacob's. Again.

So there's a pattern. Don't get stuck on the name. There's a pattern. God keeps using when he's going to move forward with his plan.

First, there's a promise and a delay. There's always a delay. We saw that as we looked at the Old Testament. We saw 400 years here. Another 400 years here.

Another 400 years here. Before the big movement. So it's a familiar story. So who is John going to be?

Verse 15. The angel says, he will be great before the Lord. Which means he'll be significant. He'll be powerful before the Lord. Not necessarily before people.

[ 40 : 49 ] But he's great. He is great before the Lord. He's important to the Lord. He must not drink wine or strong drink. So he's obviously sober and set apart. He'll be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Significant. You know, some people think he had the Nazarite vow, right? You're not supposed to touch any liquor and you're set apart. Well, John's not a Nazarite, but he is set apart.

More significantly, he'll be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. Is that possible? Is it possible for a brand new born baby to be saved?

Must be. Must be. Jeremiah said the same thing. I was set apart from my mother's womb. How did he know that? All right.

Found that later, apparently. I don't know. Maybe there's pre-born knowledge. I don't know. That was something. He was from his mother's womb.

[ 41 : 46 ] And we see evidence of this later when Mary comes to visit. Remember this baby in the womb. Six-month-old baby. Woo! Leaps. I don't know what that's like. I have no idea what childbirth is like for the mothers.

You get kicking and stuff. I don't know what leaping is. That's good. That's like another level. That's like old and then advanced and all that. So. So he's an answer to prayer after.

But he will be great. He says, be filled with the Holy Spirit. So he's set apart, dedicated to the Lord.

Verse 16. He's a reformer. He will turn people.

He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. In other words, many of the children of Israel, many of the Jews at the time, were not looking to the Lord.

They had abandoned the Lord. They had walked away from the Lord. They are ignoring the Lord. They are straying once again. Just like in the time of Elijah. So John is called to bring them back.

[ 42 : 47 ] To turn them back to the Lord. He will go before. So he turns many of the children of the Lord to the Lord their God. And he will go before him. Who?

Before the Lord their God. He will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah. To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. The disobedient to wisdom.

Interesting. The disobedient to the wisdom. Disobedience is foolishness. Wisdom of the just. To summarize.

To make ready. To prepare. To equip the people. A people for the Lord who he has made ready. Or he has prepared. Just as John is prepared by the Lord to do this work. Like Elijah.

[ 43 : 44 ] What was Elijah like? Spirit and power of Elijah. Remember Elijah? He was kind of a weird dude. He lived out in the desert.

With a camel coat. Kind of like John dresses. I think he ate insects with honey. I don't know. But he was a very powerful dude.

Remember he faced off. How many prophets of Baal? 450. And another 400. And another guy.

Right? He faced them off.

He just taunted them. Right? Oh, maybe you're God sleeping. Remember that? And then the whole fire and the water. And the whole, you know, the victory thing. He confronted Ahab.

One of the most evil kings in Israel's history. He was not afraid to confront kings. By the way, John the Baptist confronted a king too.

[ 44 : 44 ] Yeah. Kind of a little similarity there. There was also a woman involved. In Elijah's case, the woman's name was Jezebel. She's a scary woman. In fact, so scary that Elijah ran 40 days, 40 nights.

Right? Get away from her. And the Lord said, what are you doing here? Get back. It was a long trip just to hear, what are you doing here? Get back. And John the Baptist kind of echoes Elijah's ministry because he also confronted a king about a woman.

Right? King sleeping with his brother's wife or whatever. We'll get to that later. John kind of lost his head on that one. So he's a reformer.

He's also, we see in his father, we see in his father's response an exposure of sin. By allusion. So look at verse 18. So Zechariah hears this.

Your prayer's been answered, Zechariah. Your prayer's been answered. You're going to have a baby. Zechariah responds, verse 18.

[ 45 : 53 ] Now how shall I know? So he goes from fear to, yeah, right. Yeah. How's this going to happen? Literally, according to what? And how does he explain his doubt?

For I am old. It's too late. And my wife, she's not just old. She's advanced in years. I mean, I think he got slapped later.

She found out what he said. But here, Zechariah, okay? We can read that one verse so we can say, oh, how dare him.

He should have thought of Abraham. He should have thought, you know. Shoulda, shoulda, shoulda. Remember Zechariah's situation. He's still a faithful man.

He's still a righteous man. And a faithful and a righteous man can have a time of unbelief. Okay? It's too late.

[ 47 : 00 ] I have prayed for this for years and nothing. Nothing. I'm too old. It's too late.

The problem's too big. Maybe if it came 20 years ago. But I'm too old now. And Sarah, bless her. It just can't be happening.

I have been faithful, yet God has forgotten me. Life has been a big disappointment. It's too late for me to hope now, even in the presence of an angel.

I don't believe anymore. I don't believe he answers my prayer.

Been there? Oh, goodness sakes. Can't see me. And so, in essence, when he says, how shall I know?

[ 48 : 11 ] Or how can I know? Or according to what? In other words, I want proof. Give me a sign. Now, Abraham asked for a sign. God didn't silence him.

Gideon asked for a sign. Didn't silence him. Poor old Zechariah. He asked for a sign. I just need a little help here. Okay.

Well, I'll give you a sign. Here's your sign. Silence. Silence. You will live in silence. You will not hear.

You will not speak until the day this comes true. How do we know? Well, obviously, he couldn't speak because he's, you know, making signs.

But you read later in chapter 1, verse 62. They're making signs to him because he can't hear. What are you going to name him? What are you going to name him? What was it?

[ 49 : 16 ] Oh, never mind. Father's Day, right? Happy. That's the only sign language I know. Need a sign.

Okay. The sign is silence. The sign is silence. You will be silent and unable to speak both until the day these things take place.

Why? Because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in spite of your unbelief. And people are out there waiting and wondering what's going on. What's the delay?

He should be out by now. All he had was one job, right? Just go in and light the, you know, come out. And what's he done? Has he bumbled it? What's going on? And when he came out, he's unable to speak.

So, boom. Unable to speak. And they realized he'd seen a vision. And he kept making signs to them, but they didn't know. I understand. So, his job wasn't done. He goes in and he lights, he burns the incense.

[ 50 : 16 ] And then he's supposed to come out and say a blessing. He's supposed to come out and say the Aaronic blessing, right? Bless. Forgot it. It's gone. Shine upon.

Huh? Shine upon you. God's face. Yeah, yeah. Let God's face shine upon you. Okay. It's in numbers. He's supposed to say the Aaronic blessing. So, obviously, he's coming out and going.

Trying to, you know, sign it, I guess. So, obviously, something's wrong. And then we hear, then Luke tells us the rest of the story, right?

He goes home. He does finish out his service. He goes home. Verse 24, after these days. So, his wife, Elizabeth, conceived. So, we go from Elizabeth back in verse 7, who is barren now, to Elizabeth, who is now, has conceived.

And she does an interesting thing, doesn't she? For five months, she kept herself hidden. Saying, here's what the hiddenness was about for her.

[ 51 : 24 ] And understand that that's probably a custom when they're pregnant to stay hidden, to stay out of public for six months. But this is how she spent that time.

Saying, thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked upon me to take away my reproach among men.

It wasn't reproach from God. It was a reproach from men. Among men. Because she had not conceived for all these years. And so, how it looked by appearance.

What people assumed about her. She must be cursed. She must. She must have sinned badly. We haven't seen it, but that's our assumption. God hasn't blessed. Therefore, she must be punished. So, she bore that reproach.

[ 52 : 28 ] Understand, Mary bore that reproach too. Okay? Lots of whispers. She wasn't married. So, righteous, faithful people of God can look to outsiders like reproachable people.

Because God has not seemed to bless them. God has withheld his blessing. Outward blessing. It wasn't her best life now.

So, all this to fulfill God's plan. John the Baptist is there to fulfill. He's going before. Right? He's going to turn people. He's going to have this baptism of repentance. So, the words of the angel. Very interesting. The words of the angel here to Zechariah echo the words that were promised 400 years before. So, in other words, where God left off, it's exactly where he picks up.

His word to Malachi is now repeated. In the first words to John. He said in Malachi 3, 1 to 4, Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.

[ 53 : 53 ] There it is. My messenger will prepare the way before me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple.

So, John prepares the way. Jesus then suddenly comes to his temple. And the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

But who can endure the day of his coming? When Jesus comes, who can endure? Who can stand when he appears? He is holy, and he is the Lord. For he is like a refiner's fire and like fooler's soap. Every opponent to him, could they stand before him? Could any demon stand before him? Who opposed him?

Who succeeded to challenge him? By the end, they were silenced. No one could deal with him.

[ 54 : 53 ] They still hated him and were going to kill him, but understand, no one could stand before him. No one could endure his words.

Except believers. Sinners welcomed those words. Those were not scary to them. That was not a surprise to them. Not offensive to them.

Yeah, you're right. I need some help. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver.

And they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

John prepares the people for the coming of Jesus. His was a baptism of repentance, a changing of hearts. Who could endure this God that John spoke of?

[ 55 : 57 ] Who can stand before this holy son of God? And yet he alone is the one who can purify and refine your hearts.

Again, in Malachi 4, in fact, the very last words of the book of Malachi are about John the Baptist. The expectation of Elijah coming, which is fulfilled in John the Baptist.

Malachi 4, verse 5 says, Behold, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he, this Elijah, this John the Baptist who comes in the spirit and power of Elijah, he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children.

Same words. He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

So Elijah's got to come and prepare the way. Otherwise, I'm going to wipe you out. Just like he promised to Israel before, unless you repent, I will wipe you out.

[ 57 : 03 ] I will take you down. And he did. I'll take you to Babylon for 70 years. So John was necessary to prepare the way for Jesus.

Jesus was coming. But John is preparing the hearts. He's softening the hearts. He's refining and purifying the hearts. He's calling them to repentance.

He's working on their conscience. He's changing them from disobedient to wisdom. He's opening their eyes. He's changing their hearts through his preaching.

So John prepares the people. It's a message of repentance, turning of hearts back to the Lord, back to family. Interesting, when you turn back to the Lord, what happens to your priorities?

Fathers, once again, turn to their children. Now, when he says he turns the hearts of fathers to children, no doubt that meant individual families.

[ 58 : 03 ] But I think there was a bigger picture about the fathers and the children of Israel. Here's his message of repentance, a message of turning.

Is this a message that you need to hear? How's your heart? Has your heart turned away? Has your heart been discouraged because of times of pain and disappointment and discouragement?

And maybe that's made you fall away. Maybe that's discouraged you. And it's made you start to abandon the things that really matter, like family.

Like times of coming to the Lord. Maybe someone listening, maybe you don't attend because you've been really hurt. And you're holding back.

Maybe this is a message you need to hear. Maybe God has been silent for you. You've been faithfully praying. You're praying for the right things. Yet, yet there's no answer. And you've begun to feel hopeless.

[ 59 : 19 ] And you've begun to feel like, okay, maybe, maybe I'm too old. Forgot to work in my life anymore. Or maybe I'm too weak. Maybe I'm what people think.

Zechariah and Elizabeth, in spite of years of disappointment and pain, continued to walk by faith. They continued to come.

They continued to worship. They continued to pray. They continued to be faithful. They had to be discouraged. And they had to be tempted to give up.

But they did not. Why? Because they had a faith. They trusted his promises. They trusted that he is good.

Though he has not, he's put us through these difficult times. We believe that he is good. That he's conforming us to the image of Christ.

[ 60 : 28 ] They believe that his timing is perfect. Even though it's not my timing. And they believe that he will be faithful to do what is right at the right time.

And boy, when he does. Huh? When you've waited a long time and he has answered that long-awaited prayer. It is sweet.

It is sweet. So, if God delays, remember that his promises, that his purpose is good and right.

Remember that his timing is perfect. Remember that he sees what we can't see. He plans what we don't know. And remember that his plan isn't about you.

It's about him. So, come back to him if you strayed. Come back to him. Return to him.

[ 61 : 29 ] As David Crowder writes, come out of sadness. From wherever you've been. Come brokenhearted.

Let the rescue begin. Come find your mercy. O sinner, come kneel. Earth has no sorrow that heaven can't heal.

So, lay down your burdens. And lay down your shame. All who are broken, lift up your face. O wanderer, come home.

You're not too far. So, lay down your heart. Lay down your hurt. Come as you are.

There's hope for the hopeless and all those who have strayed. Come sit at the table. Come taste the grace. There's rest for the weary. A rest that endures.

[ 62 : 28 ] Earth has no sorrow. That heaven can't cure. There's joy for the morning. O sinner, be still. Earth has no sorrow that heaven can't heal.

Earth has no sorrow that heaven can't heal. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word to Zechariah and Elizabeth. A word we too need to hear.

I pray, Lord, you touch people today who are broken, who are disappointed by your plan. Who are waiting and hurting and experiencing difficulty and struggling to trust and believe.

Struggling to come back. Grant them your grace to come. Grant them the grace that Elizabeth experienced.

When you look upon them and take away their reproach. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen.