



August 1, 2021

“God Remembers His Oath”

Luke 1

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Have you ever thought that God was silent in your life or indifferent about what you might be going through? There was a time in biblical history when God was silent for four hundred years, but he was not absent or indifferent! He was planning things according to his time and purposes that would fulfill the words of the prophet Micah concerning the birth of John the Baptist. These things are a reminder for us concerning God’s faithfulness to all of his promises. He is working on our behalf. His silence does not mean that he is absent or indifferent. He has not forgotten anyone who trusts in him!

Historical Background

1. Each of the four gospels has a different emphasis about Jesus.
 - a. **Ezekiel 1:10** - *“As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle.”*
 - b. Matthew - The Messiah-King, symbolized by a lion
 - c. Mark - The lowly Servant, symbolized by an ox
 - d. Luke - The Son of Man, symbolized by man
 - e. John - The Son of God, symbolized by an eagle

2. Luke’s Gospel
 - a. Luke emphasizes the humanity of Jesus while still recognizing that Jesus was fully God and fully man.
 - b. Luke emphasizes Jesus had compassion for all people, not just the Jews, which was personally important to him because he was a Gentile.

- c. Luke was the only Gentile writer of a New Testament book, having written both the gospel account and the book of Acts.
- d. Luke wrote primarily for Gentiles.
- e. Luke was a physician.
 - i. [Colossians 4:14](#) - *"Luke the beloved physician..."*
 - ii. Luke wrote from the perspective of a physician concerning the circumcision of Jesus; Jesus perspiring droplets of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, which is called hematidrosis; and the miracle of Jesus reattaching Malchus' ear that had been cut off by the sword-wielding apostle Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- f. Luke's gospel was written to Theophilus, whose name means lover of God.
 - i. Pastor Gary and many Bible scholars believe Theophilus was a real person while others believe that the name is a pseudonym for the Church.
 - ii. He was most likely a man of wealth and high social standing, and it's likely that Luke was his personal physician.
- g. Luke was a traveling companion of the apostle Paul; there are a number of references to their travels in the book of Acts.
 - i. Luke was the only Believer with Paul during one of his imprisonments.
 - 1. [2 Timothy 4:11](#) - *"Only Luke is with me."*
- h. Luke was not one of the twelve apostles, so he relied on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.
 - i. [Luke 1:2](#) - *"... those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word..."*
- i. One of the eyewitnesses Luke interviewed was Mary; this seems certain because of the details of the conception and birth of Jesus, which are not found in the other gospels.
- j. The details recorded in [Luke 9:51-19:27](#) are not recorded in any of the other gospels.

3. Gabriel's Announcements

- a. Luke was the only gospel writer to include Gabriel's private and in-person announcements of the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus to Zacharias and Mary, respectively.
- b. Pastor Gary said, "[John the Baptist's] conception was just as much foretold by the angel Gabriel as was Jesus' [conception]."

4. Zacharias

- a. Zacharias' name means God remembers.
- b. Zacharias was a priest in the line of Aaron.
- c. Zacharias wife was Elizabeth; her name means oath of God.
- d. Bible scholars and historians estimate that there were more than twenty

thousand priests, so there was a lottery system of sorts to determine the duties of the priest.

- e. Zacharias was chosen to light the incense on the altar of incense.
 - i. [Luke 1:8-9](#) - *“So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.”*
 - ii. This was an esteemed service in the temple, just below that of high priest.
 - iii. This would have been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Zacharias.
 - iv. The altar of incense was at the curtain to the holy place in the temple.
 - v. The incense was a fragrant aroma that symbolized the prayers of God’s people.

5. Gabriel and Zacharias

- a. [Luke 1:11-12](#) - *“Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.”*
 - i. Pastor Gary said, “By the way, angels in the Bible are not these effeminate golden-haired creatures that adorn our Christmas cards. They are majestic and mighty and glorious and powerful.”
 - ii. Angels are described as masculine in the Bible.
 - iii. The only other time Gabriel is mentioned in the Bible is in [Daniel 8-9](#).
 - iv. Gabriel was not an archangel; he was the messenger angel.
 - 1. Michael is the only archangel mentioned in the Bible.
 - v. Gabriel said nine things that were important to Zacharias:
 - 1. Don’t be afraid
 - 2. Your prayer has been heard by God
 - a. Pastor Gary said, “I wonder how long Zacharias had been praying? ... How many decades had he been praying? ... Let’s say he [was] seventy [years old] and they got married around [age] twenty. For fifty years he [was] praying. ... What a wonderful example to us of the persistence of prayer. [In] those days a barren wife was [one of the] grounds for divorce. ... Notice that Zacharias did not put her away. He was devoted to God, and he was devoted to his wife, and instead of putting her away he prayed for her.”
 - 3. Your son’s name will be John
 - a. John means God is gracious.
 - 4. You will have joy and gladness at his birth
 - 5. John will be great in the sight of the Lord
 - 6. John will be devoted to the Lord

7. John will be filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb
8. John will bring many people to the Lord
9. John will be the fulfillment of the prophesy of the Old Testament prophet, Malachi
 - a. [Luke 1:17](#) - *"He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah..."*
 - b. [Malachi 4:5-6](#) - *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."*
 - c. Pastor Gary said, "There are two ways to interpret what Malachi wrote and both are legitimate. The first is that what Malachi wrote was actually [writing] about was when Elijah would in person return to the earth... before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, [which] is a reference to the tribulation period. Out of seven years of tribulation recorded in the book of Revelation, the last three and a half are the most intense. [This is] the great tribulation. [In [Revelation 11](#), the Bible teaches] that God will send two witnesses to the earth, and when you look at the miracles that the two witnesses perform, it is consistent with [them] being Elijah and Moses. We don't know for sure who those witnesses are, [but] most Bible scholars believe Elijah and Moses, as do I. I think that what Malachi [was] saying [was] that Elijah himself will return in person before the end of the great tribulation to evangelize, [so] that people might hear the good news of the gospel. ... However, there is another way to interpret his words and we know this to be true because Gabriel [quoted] them in reference to John the Baptist. And what Gabriel tells us is that John the Baptist will come as a forerunner to the Messiah in a fulfillment of [Malachi's prophesy] and that John the Baptist, though he's not Elijah, comes... in the spirit and power of Elijah, [which] is consistent with Malachi's prophesy, and *'he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.'* So we know that this has to apply to John the Baptist. Now, here's why this is so important. [When] Malachi spoke [these] words in 400 BC, God did not speak another word until he [sent] John the Baptist as a prophet. For four hundred years God was silent; he didn't send a

single prophet to Israel. ... [Between Malachi in the Old Testament and Matthew in the New Testament, there's a gap of four hundred years known as the silent years]. ... But how many of you need to understand and hear this: **God's silence does not mean his absence or his indifference.** His timing is perfect... Some of you have been waiting on God for something and you are wondering, 'Why doesn't [God] show up? What's taking him so long? Why doesn't he hear my prayer? Why doesn't he answer?' I get it. There are human feelings and emotions we have... but don't [misunderstand] the fact that when [God] seems to be silent, his silence does not mean his absence or his indifference. ... **[For four hundred years God was waiting] for the right time to do what he wanted to do among the right people, for the right reasons, for the right purpose.**" (Emphasis added)

- d. Pastor Gary said, "What is God doing in the silence of your life? ... God is still actively involved; he's just waiting for his perfect timing in all things. He's doing things on your behalf that you may not see or understand, but it is always for your good. Don't think that God is indifferent. God cares and God knows, and God is up to what he's doing on your behalf according to his best for you."

6. God remembers his oath

- a. The combined names of Zacharias (God remembers) and Elizabeth (oath of God) indicate to us that God remembers his oath.
- b. Pastor Gary said, "It was no coincidence that God brought these two particular people together for this particular purpose; not just simply to bless them by giving them a son, which God did, but also to remind us through their union that God remembers his oath, and four hundred years later he brought forth John the Baptist in fulfillment of [Malachi 4:5-6](#) as the forerunner and herald of the Messiah. ... The next time you think [that] God has forgotten you or he doesn't care, or he seems to be silent, remember that his silence does not mean his absence or his indifference.
- c. [Psalm 145:13b](#) - *"The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made."* (NIV 1984)
- d. [2 Peter 3:9](#) - *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness..."* (NIV 1984)
- e. [Psalm 27:14](#) - *"Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!"*
- f. Pastor Gary said, "God will never give us less than his best, but it may not

always be what we want. ... You can still trust the character and nature of God that he will always give his best, nothing less, even though it may not always be what we want.”

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Luke 1:1-17](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide an overview of the historical background of the book of Luke. (See #1 and #2 above)
3. Review and discuss the points in Pastor Gary’s outline concerning Gabriel and Zacharias (See #3 through #5 above)
4. Read and discuss the nine things Gabriel said that were important to Zacharias concerning John. (See #5v above)
5. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s comments about interpreting Malachi’s prophecy. (See #5v-9c above)
6. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s remarks about God being actively involved in our lives even when it seems like he’s distant or indifferent. (See #5v-9d above)
7. Spend time talking about the fact that the Bible and personal experience demonstrate that God remembers and keeps his oath. (See #6b above)
8. Read and discuss [Psalm 145:13b](#), [2 Peter 3:9](#), and [Psalm 27:14](#). (See #6c through #6e above)
9. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s comments about the importance of trusting the Lord in all things. (See #6f above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)