

People of Promise  
Zechariah and Elizabeth  
608 words

### A Parental Promise

#### Zechariah and Elizabeth: Embarrassed by the Will of God?

Luke 1:12-17

In the days surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ, the Jewish religious “system” was firmly in place and running smoothly in Jerusalem. Rome’s puppet king, the Idumean Herod the Great, had begun around 19 B.C. upgrading the modest temple built by Zerubbabel when Israel returned from exile. So extensive and magnificent were Herod’s plans for the Jewish temple that it was not completed until A.D. 64 (68 years after Herod himself died).

But all during the construction period, the daily worship and rituals were never interrupted. One thousand priests were trained as carpenters and masons since only they could enter the temple and its inner court. The 24 divisions of priests, in place since the time of King David, rotated on their timetables like gears in a Swiss watch. All in all, life was predictable for the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem, if not perfect. But then an unscheduled event occurred which changed one priest’s, and his wife’s, life--and the life of the entire nation of Israel--forever.

An elderly priest named Zechariah was burning incense before the Lord in the temple. Zechariah’s wife, Elizabeth, had never been able to conceive, and so they were without children--a matter of no small disgrace to them (Luke 1:25). But Zechariah had continued to pray for a child (1:13), and on this day his prayers were answered. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah while he was in the temple and announced that Elizabeth would bear a son named John. And oh, what astounding promises Gabriel made about John: he would bring joy to his parents, he would be great in the sight of the Lord, he would be pure and be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he would prepare hearts in Israel to welcome the coming of the Lord (1:14-17). Surely this “dream” son had been worth waiting almost a lifetime to receive! Little did Zechariah know just how unconventional, how controversial, their son would be in Israel. The well-oiled religious machinery of Judaism was about to come to a gear-wrenching halt because of Zechariah’s and Elizabeth’s son.

If this godly couple (Luke 1:6) thought their son was going to usher in the Messianic age, and that things were going to go from smooth to smoother in Israel, they were mistaken. Being elderly at the time of Gabriel’s announcement, they probably died before their desert-based, honey-and-locust-eating, camel-hair-wearing son started preaching (Mark 1:4-6). And they might have been glad they were gone. For John could have been a real embarrassment to his parents, calling Zechariah’s fellow-priests--and everyone else in Judea--to repent of their sins. John’s ministry was probably nothing like

Zechariah and Elizabeth thought it would be. The promise they were given was easy to receive--the fulfillment of it would not have been easy to believe. Predicting God's moves can be like predicting the direction of the wind (John 3:8).

It's easy to have preconceived notions about what God is doing and where his promises may be leading. If you ever find God's path for your life taking an unexpected turn--one that upsets yours or someone else's status quo--think of Zechariah and Elizabeth:

- What are the dangers of defining God's plan ahead of time?
- Are you willing for God's will to take precedence over your expectations?
- Would you rather be uncomfortable and in God's will, or comfortable but out of God's will?

Let's hope that Zechariah and Elizabeth would have embraced their son's calling from God if they had lived to witness it. Even more, pray that regardless of what God calls you or your children to, you will welcome it with open arms.