

When You Don't Believe God Answered Your Prayer

During an ordinary day while Zechariah was performing his regular priestly duties, he was chosen by lot to minister before the golden altar of incense in the Holy Place.¹ This in itself was a big deal, but what happened next was something that was hard for even a man of God to believe. An angel appeared, and what he said made unbelief come to Zechariah.

A Righteous Couple

Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were advanced in age and they were childless. Scripture also tells us “they were both righteous, approved in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in the commandments and requirements of the Lord.”²

In that day, many Jewish rabbis taught that for a couple to be childless was a sign of God's disfavor. Perhaps the couple had a secret sin no one knew about. Whatever the case, barrenness was a stigma in their culture. It was such a big deal that Zechariah could have divorced her and married a younger woman with whom he could have heirs.

Instead, his decision was to make the issue a matter of prayer. We know this because of the angel's quite crazy announcement. “Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord.”³

He Couldn't Believe

This should have been a time for Zechariah, a man who had longed for a son, had prayed for a son, had endured ridicule and gossip because of not having a child, to rejoice. He was a priest. He knew the story of Sarah conceiving Issac in her old age. He must have realized it was possible.

Still he didn't believe it, couldn't believe it. Elizabeth was old, at least over 60 and well-past child-bearing years. One source says she was 88⁴ when John was born. If that is true, it's easy to understand Zechariah's next words.

"How can I be sure this will happen?"

What Silence Does

The angel was not happy with his response of unbelief. "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was He who sent me to bring you this good news! But now, since you didn't believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time."⁵

When he came out of the temple he could not speak. When he went home, though, Elizabeth became pregnant. Her response was "How kind the Lord is. He has taken away my disgrace of having no children."⁶

For Zechariah, the time of silence was a way to focus on trusting God completely. Now he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God's word to him was true. Living in silence, though, was God's way to prepare him for more to come. He would be the father of the forerunner of Jesus. He needed unparalleled belief, faith and trust for the continued journey ahead of him.

When God Answers

We are all prone not to believe when we receive an answer to something we have been praying about for years. We get to the point that we don't believe God will ever answer our prayers. We begin to think our problems are bigger than God and that even God can't help us.

This is exactly what happened to me on my journey. I didn't think God had an answer for my problem of extreme weight gain. At 430 pounds, I felt I was doomed. I had tried every fix imaginable, every single one. I had failed at every turn.

Just when I felt it was my darkest hour, though, God's power came to my rescue. It came at the moment I realized that on my own, with my own strength and resources, I am powerless to overcome this addiction. I need Him. I need His power to activate in my weakness.⁷

¹Luke 1:8-9 AMP

²Luke 1:5 AMP

³Luke 1:12-15 NLT

⁴New World Encyclopedia: Elizabeth

⁵Luke 1:19-20 NLT

⁶Luke 1:25 NLT

⁷2 Corinthians 12:9 MSG

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Sugar Addiction and Sweet Freedom. *Get a free chapter of her memoir on her blog at Teresa Shields . Connect with her there or on her Facebook page or Twitter.*