

connect 360

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Standing by His Word

GOD FULFILLS HIS PROMISES

A STUDY OF LUKE

Davey Gibson

Julie Wood

Ellis Orozco



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Standing by His Word: God Fulfills His Promises
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide

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Introducing

Standing by His Word

God Fulfills His Promises

A Study of Luke

Background

Luke began his gospel to set out its purpose: in verse one “Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us” (NIV).

The four Gospels are the heart of the Bible. They present the good news of God’s revelation in Jesus the Christ. They each proclaim the same message, but they each do so in a different way. The present study will move through the gospel of Luke identifying the promises of God along the way. One of the ways Luke’s version distinguished itself is that it has a sequel in the book of Acts.

Who was Luke? The author’s name does not appear in the gospel, but strong evidence points to Luke. Paul mentioned a man named Luke who accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys. Paul also mentioned “Our dear friend Luke, the doctor” in Colossians 4:14. Paul also referred to Luke as one of his “fellow workers” in Philemon 24. Most likely, Luke was a Gentile who was well-educated in Greek culture, a physician by occupation, and a loyal friend to Paul.

When all scenarios are considered, two options emerge for the dating of Luke's gospel: 1) A.D. 59–63, and 2) the 70s–80s. Luke wrote passionately about God's overall plan of salvation. In support of the growth of the Gentile churches, Luke asserted it was God's plan all along to include Gentiles in the family of God.

One noteworthy recipient of the letter is included in the open verses of the gospel—Theophilus. Two theories focus on the identity of Theophilus. 1) He was a real person who was a convert to Christianity. Luke addressed him as “most excellent,” suggesting a person of high social standing in Roman society. His Greek name implies he was a Gentile. 2) Another interpretation suggests Theophilus was not an actual person but a symbol. The name means “one who loves God.” While this view is a possible explanation, the context suggests Luke wrote to a particular person rather than to people who “loved God” in general.

Over the next weeks, you will focus on the promises of God as revealed in the gospel of Luke. In addition to Luke, you will investigate the promises recorded in the Old Testament and how God kept these promises.

Dr. Stephen Hatfield

Standing by His Word

When someone makes a promise, you expect that person to keep their word. It is a verbal commitment to perform a future action. How do you feel when a person breaks a promise? How do you feel when someone does what they say they will do? With our always faithful God, we never have to worry about Him breaking a promise. He will always fulfill His Word.

Luke began his gospel with this theme “Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been **fulfilled** among us” (1:1, NIV, emphasis added). In this study of Luke, we will discover how God made good on His promises He made centuries earlier. Primarily, we will see how Jesus was the fulfillment of many Old Testament promises and how He kept His Word to His disciples. In *Standing by His Word: God Fulfills His Promises*, you will study the ways unexpectant recipients, long-sufferers, skeptics, and close friends all responded to these promises and their fulfillment.

The Jews as a people had suffered 400 years of slavery in Egypt, seen the Northern Kingdom of Israel destroyed, endured 70 years of exile in Babylon, and were suffering under an oppressive Roman occupation. God in His silence had not spoken to them in hundreds of years. They wondered if God would ever keep His promise and send His Savior to them.

In the book of Malachai, God promised He would send a prophet like Elijah who would come to proclaim the day of the Lord, which was kept through John the Baptist. Isaiah the prophet told of a Messiah who could come as the Suffering Servant to announce the good news of the arrival of God’s kingdom and the Day of the Lord. Luke recounted the fulfillment of this promise as he told how Jesus was born God in the flesh and placed in the manger. Jesus taught and foretold many things to the disciples. One of the most important was that He would suffer, die, and rise from the dead. Secondly, He would go to the Father but one day return to Earth for His followers.

Waiting is not always easy, especially for a promise to be fulfilled that does not have a deadline. Some wait several years to

get married or have children. Families may save many years or even wait until retirement to take that dream vacation they have promised one another. A child waits eagerly for Christmas in hopes of receiving that one desired toy.

In *Standing by His Word: God Fulfills His Promises* these lessons from Luke will give evidence of how God always keeps His Word. Many were not ready to receive the promise, some were ready but needed to be convinced, and a few responded immediately to Jesus. How will you respond to this kept promise?

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NOTE

¹ Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writer or GC2 Press with all its comments.

Standing by His Word

God Fulfills His Promises

A Study of Luke

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lesson 1



The Promised Birth of a Prophet

MAIN IDEA

After centuries of silence, God announced His prophet.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How do I listen for God?

STUDY AIM

To understand that Christians need to be ready to listen to God

QUICK READ

God promised Zechariah he would have a son who would prepare the way of the coming Lord.

Introduction

A fairly modern practice in the digital world of social media are birth announcements and gender reveals. These practices have become more and more elaborate, involving staged and choreographed participation and even great expense to surprise all who are present. These 60-second clips will then go by for 24 hours on an Instagram or Facebook reel feed.

Can you imagine what the birth announcement for John the Baptist would have been like? There wouldn't be enough "shocked" or "heart" emojis in all of Judah! Both Zechariah and Elizabeth had their prayers answered—but it wasn't in the way they were expecting. Luke started his telling of the complete gospel narrative with an ordinary family and how God was beginning to fulfill promises made generations and centuries before.

Luke proclaimed a gospel message that was begun by the Spirit of the Lord moving in powerful ways. This gospel is for all nations, all people. Zechariah was obviously not ready for what God was saying to him. The same God that made the announcement to the elderly priest about a son who would become a powerful prophet, is the same God still working in and through ordinary people today. Will we be ready when God speaks to us? Will we believe?

Luke 1:5–17

⁵ In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.

⁶ Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷ But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸ Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Not Throwing Away His Shot (1:5–9)

As Luke began his gospel, we are invited into a story—we are introduced to a place, a time, and a family. The place is Jerusalem.

The time is during the reign of Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.). The family is Zechariah and Elizabeth. We immediately learn they are righteous before God, keeping all the commands of the Torah and all the expectations of pious Jews. We learn about Zechariah serving faithfully with his division of priests. We read about the once-in-a-lifetime shot to offer the incense at the Temple. The story of God's great work wasn't starting in Herod's palace or with mighty warriors or leaders. It began with an ordinary family. It began in the Temple. Zechariah and Elizabeth were the example of what true Israelites should look like—except they did not have children, which some might have been seen as a curse by the Lord, yet this faithful family continued to serve and worship the Lord.

Infertility & Barrenness in the Bible

Stories of infertility are found in both Old and New Testaments. We read about Abraham and Sarah or Jacob and Rachel, the fathers of the faith (Genesis 30:22–24); Manoah and his wife, the parents of Samson (Judges 13:3–25); Elkanah and Hannah, the parents of the great prophet, priest, judge, and military general Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1–20). In each story, God worked in what the world would see as a hopeless and cursed situation. For in that time, barrenness was considered the punishment of sin.

Today, families continue to struggle with the challenge of infertility. How can the church minister effectively to couples struggling with infertility? How might God work to redeem even this heartache in a way that is only possible for Him?

Zechariah and Elizabeth lived in the hill country in Judah. As a priest from the division of Abijah, one of 24 divisions of priests that performed duties in the Temple for one week, two times each year, Zechariah would have to travel to Jerusalem for his Temple service. Dr. David Garland notes that Zechariah was serving at 3:00 pm in the afternoon (the ninth hour) during the time of public offerings that take place twice a day. It was the tradition that all of the duties of the priests would have been decided by casting lots. When the lot fell to Zechariah, he knew this was his once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to burn incense and pray in the Holy Place.¹

We can almost see the unexpected shock on Zechariah's face when he entered the Holy Place to begin the offer of incense that day. There was likely at least one prayer request on his mind, Elizabeth and her barren state and their desire for a child. If God would hear his cry, now must be the time. This was his one shot to prostrate himself before the Altar of Incense and seek the face of the Almighty. The priest with a barren wife and no hope was crying out for God to hear and act—for God to save. Garland continues that this righteous priest must have prayed not only for his own request, but also for the requests for his people, that “God will not only answer the prayers of a desperate couple but of a desperate people.”² In the rest of the gospel, we will encounter other righteous men and women who are praying fervently for the restoration of Israel. This time, priestly Zechariah was not ready for what would happen next.

An Angelic Announcement (1:11–17)

Throughout Scripture, angelic beings function as a bridge between God and His people on earth. Angels bring messages of calling, of warning, and of comfort. At almost all recorded angelic encounters, we find that the first response by the one receiving the message is fear. Even with Zechariah, a priest in the Temple, husband to a daughter of Aaron, living an upright and holy life—the encounter with the angel of the Lord, Gabriel, terrified him. Why would Zechariah be surprised? He was performing his priestly duty in the sanctuary of God. Did he not expect God to send an answer to his prayer? Had he prayed for so long all hope was lost for a response from the Lord? God often will speak to us from the midst of the everyday moments in life—we should always be ready to hear from the Lord. Can even Sunday worship in our sanctuaries and worship centers become so mundane and routine that we don't look for the Lord?

Zechariah was in the right place and at the right time. Gabriel came to deliver his message. As we further examine the angel's words, we can identify several multifaceted themes including both an identity for the child and a call of vocation, who he will be and what he will do for Israel, for his family, and for the Lord.

First, Gabriel declared that a child was coming, not just any child but a son. This was a special child, and his name would point to his special calling. The name John means “YHWH is gracious.” And God has indeed shown His great favor on Zechariah and Elizabeth and on all of Israel as John's coming would signal the great end of all the waiting and hoping that God would give decisive action to redeem His people. John would be a joy and a delight to

both his parents and all of Israel. He would be “great in the sight of the Lord.” Even the Lord Jesus, John’s cousin, affirmed this greatness in Matthew 11:11. John’s greatness was not a greatness of status, but of calling and purpose from the Lord. Gabriel continued that John must not drink alcohol or any intoxicating drink. His message was reminiscent of a Nazarite vow (Numbers 6); however, no other requirements were mentioned. Knowing that the child would be filled with the Spirit even before birth, prepares Luke’s readers for the response of Elizabeth when Mary came to visit. Like the coming of the Holy Spirit in the first of Acts, Luke would highlight the role of the Spirit at each step of the beginning of his gospel as well.

The identity of the child would also prepare us for his vocation. Gabriel further explained that he would bring back many people in Israel to the Lord. He would carry on the mission and spirit of Elijah. He was the forerunner, the one who would prepare God’s people for something or Someone even greater. This vocational call came from Malachi 3–4. Remember, all this was taking place in the Temple, the center of Jewish religious life. And his message was the answer for the final promise in the Old Testament—the last prophetic message spoken on the earth from the Lord up until this time. Like the words from the prophet Malachi, John’s birth announcement was given with an expectation of faithful obedience. For John would be a prophetic voice crying out a message of repentance, reconciliation, and justice.

Be Ready for Worship

For many families, Sunday morning is the most hectic day of the week. What message does it send to our children or grandchildren when we approach Sunday as a chore rather than a choice to meet corporately for worship?

Let's reclaim Sunday and make it the best day of the week for our family!

- Do not over-program Saturday night to help everyone know how special the next day is.
- Have a fun, enjoyable routine on Sunday—a favorite food for breakfast or something that sets the day apart as special.
- Make Sunday as much about family as possible—make meeting with His people non-negotiable but involve everyone in how to make God a priority.
- Help everyone understand the interconnectedness of our faith. We are not called to live as “lone ranger” Christians; rather, help show how all are called to be a part of God's family.

Word of God Speak (Malachi 4:5–6)

When people often say they feel God is not speaking to them or has not answered a particular prayer, I often ask how they expect God to answer. By acknowledging the ways we are looking for God to speak to us, we can often determine if in fact He is already answering our prayer or if we are looking in a wrong direction. While God uses large theophanies throughout Scripture

to get the attention of His people, He also speaks through a still, small voice or by offering the greatest gift of all—His presence. The simple reminder “I will be with you” is the best reassurance we will ever need.

Gabriel’s message had to immediately take the aged-priest’s mind back to the prophet Malachi. God speaks most clearly through His Word. When I received my first “big-kids Bible,” a children’s Bible given to me by my grandparents, there was a bookmark that came with it. On the bookmark written with golden letters over a picture of an open Bible was the phrase, “Wisdom is gained every time your Bible is opened.” What a powerful promise that we might not ever realize unless we open the Word daily and allow the voice of God to speak. God cannot ever say something that will contradict His Word. It is in His Word that many encounter God for the very first time.

Implications and Actions

I have heard it said of our denomination, “Baptists are a people of the Book.” It has been a long-held distinctive of Baptists that we each have the responsibility and freedom to study God’s Word for ourselves. We are no longer in need of a priest like Zechariah to go and offer sacrifices or burn incense on the altar. We can hear from God directly because He has sent His One and Only Son to be the mediator and become our High Priest for all time (Hebrews 4:14). But we must prepare ourselves to hear from the Lord. The next time you open your Bible, take a moment to be ready for what the Lord will say. Trust in His Word. The same Spirit that filled John the Baptist from birth longs to fill us, so we

too can be ready for action—prepared for whatever God will do in and through His people today.

The coming of John the Baptist affirms that even the greatest human limitations—such as infertility—do not limit God. Do we believe God is still working even through what the world would say is impossible? Zechariah and Elizabeth are testimonies of the promise—“What is impossible for humans is possible for God” (Luke 18:27).

Questions

1. Where are some places and times you know you have felt the Lord speaking to you? What were some of the circumstances that made you open to hearing from the Lord?
2. When all hope is lost, are you ever tempted to stop praying? What might God be wanting to teach us when we go through difficult times?

3. Has the Lord ever responded to a prayer in a way that was totally unexpected? What was your response to the surprising work of the Lord in your life?

4. In what ways can we be prepared to listen to all the ways that God will speak to us? What will help us to be ready to act obediently to what has been said?

ENDNOTES

¹ David Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2011), 65.

² *Ibid.*, 66