

# connect360

BIBLE TEACHING GUIDE

## Standing by His Word

### GOD FULFILLS HIS PROMISES

A STUDY OF LUKE

Taylor Sandlin • Jeff Moran  
Stephen Wyrick • Kendall Little  
Duane Brooks • Keith Lowery



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

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# Standing by His Word

## *God Fulfills His Promises*

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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?

### TEACHING AIM

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



## Bible Comments

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### Understanding the Context

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Luke wrote his gospel to assure an early Gentile believer named Theophilus. Theophilus may have wondered how the story of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, offered hope to all people, no matter their background. Luke's gospel seeks to answer that question, not only for Theophilus, but for all those who wonder if Jesus' story isn't simply for a select few, but for everyone.

Luke carefully revealed how Jesus is the Savior of the entire world without losing sight of the fact that He is also the promised Jewish Messiah. He wanted his readers to see God's sovereign hand at work throughout the history of Israel and in the life of Christ, so they too can believe that this same God is actively saving the world through Jesus.

Luke wove in Old Testament promises and stories throughout his gospel. Sometimes he directly quoted the Scriptures like in today's lesson, where the angel announced John the Baptist's birth by drawing directly from Malachi 4:5–6. Other times, he simply alluded to Old Testament stories, inviting careful readers to connect the dots for themselves.

Luke's willingness to allow readers to make these connections on their own reveals a commitment to the Holy Spirit's role in drawing people to faith in Christ. Luke's trust in the active work of God also showed up in his emphasis upon the importance of prayer as a precursor to receiving divine revelation. In the initial pages, the angel appeared to Zechariah in response to both his and the people's prayers (1:10–13), a pattern that repeats itself throughout the gospel and the book of Acts (Luke 3:21–22; 9:28–36; 22:41–44; Acts 9:40; 10:9, 30; 13:2; 22:17). For Luke, those who earnestly seek the truth about Jesus in prayer will find it, often discovering more than they ever anticipated, just like Zechariah.



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## Interpreting the Scriptures

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### A Righteous Couple (1:5–7)

**1:5.** “Herod” is Herod the Great who ruled from 37–4 BC. He was an Edomite, making him an unfit ruler in the eyes of many Jewish people. He was introduced in Luke’s gospel as the “King of Judea,” but by the end of the book Jesus would be crucified as “the king of the Jews” (Luke 23:37–38).

“Zechariah” means “*Yahweh* has remembered.” The divisions of the Jewish priesthood were named for Aaron’s twenty-four descendants (see 1 Chronicles 24:1–19; Nehemiah 12:1–7). Like her husband, Elizabeth is also a descendant of Aaron.

**1:6.** When Luke described Zechariah and Elizabeth as “righteous in the sight of God” he did not mean that they were perfect. They were, instead, in right relationship with God having followed the Lord’s commandments and decrees including those that provide the means for the forgiveness of sins. It does mean they were a people who sought to do God’s will in the world. Luke’s description of Zechariah and Elizabeth echoed God’s description of Abraham in Genesis 26:5.

**1:7.** The couple’s righteousness stood in contrast with their inability to have a child. At least one promise in the Old Testament connected obedience to the fruitful bearing of children (see Deuteronomy 7:12–14). Their plight is not unique. Elizabeth’s age and barrenness, like her righteousness, also recalls the life of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 11:30), along with other key figures in Israel’s history including Rebekah (Genesis 25:21); Rachel (Genesis 29:31); Samson’s mother (Judges 13:2, 5); and Hannah (1 Samuel 1–2).

God has in the past delivered families from the pain of infertility. When He has done so in the past, His actions brought joy not only to the individual couple but also advanced His plans for the nation. Luke’s introduction of this special couple heightens the anticipation that God might be acting in a similar fashion once again.

## A Visit to the Holy Place (1:8–10)

**1:8–9.** Israel had as many as eighteen thousand priests serving across the country. They spent most of their time in their hometowns. Two times a year, their division of priests went to Jerusalem to serve in the Temple for a one-week shift.

Jobs were assigned by lot and on this occasion, Zechariah, got a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to go into the Holy Place and offer incense to the Lord. Zechariah, with two assistants, carried live coals from the great altar in the Temple Courts into the Holy Place. He placed the coals on the altar of incense, which sat in the center of the room in front of the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place and was to then bow in prayer (Exodus 30:1–30). The burning incense stood as a powerful picture of the prayers of God's people being lifted up into the very presence of God (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8).

**1:10.** Luke, more than any of the other gospel writers, highlights the importance of prayer. Here, the people who are at the Temple worshiping join the priests in prayers. They stand as a reminder that for all the shortcoming of Israel, plenty of people longed to see God act in a powerful way and sought Him in prayer.

## The Angel's Announcement (1:11–17)

**1:11–12.** The verb “to appear” indicates a real appearance and not simply a vision.

Angels often announced the birth of major figures in the Old Testament (Genesis 16:10–11; Judges 13:3–21). People believed that angels served God's presence in the Temple (Isaiah 6:1–3; Zechariah 3).

Fear was the common response to an angelic visit or supernatural event (Judges 6:22; 13:6, 22; 2 Samuel 6:9; Isaiah 6:5; Daniel 8:16–17) and would be a common theme in Luke's story (Luke 1:65; 2:9; 5:26; 7:16; 8:37; 21:26).

**1:13.** Divine communication often began with the command to not be afraid (Genesis 15:1; 26:24; Daniel 10:12, 19).

“Your prayer has been heard” is ambiguous. Was it the prayer Zechariah just prayed or the ones he had been praying his entire life? Was Zechariah still praying for a child in his old age? Had his prayers over the years shifted to prayers for the nation? The righteous in Israel faithfully prayed for the deliverance of Israel (see Luke 23:50–51).

Whatever the case, God was acting on behalf of his family and the nation. “Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son,” recalls God’s similar announcement to Abraham (Genesis 17:19).

Usually, the father named the child. God claimed the right to name this child as sign of His direct intervention (see Genesis 16:8, 11; 17:19; 1 Kings 13:2; Isaiah 7:14). John means “God is gracious.”

**1:14–15a.** John’s significance meant that many beyond his parents would rejoice in his birth. Joy and rejoicing occur as responses to God’s saving acts. God was saving Zechariah and Elizabeth from childlessness. Through that child, God was inaugurating salvation for His people.

John’s greatness before God derived from his role as the forerunner to Jesus. Jesus noted that no one greater had been born of a woman before John (Luke 7:28). Greatness is no preventer of difficulty. While many would rejoice because of his birth, he would face plenty of opposition in his life (Luke 3:7, 20; 7:29–30; 9:7–9; 20:4–6). The same is for Jesus.

**1:15b.** John’s life was marked by asceticism and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Unlike those who took a temporary Nazirite vow, John’s consecration was to be for his entire life (Numbers 6:1–21; Judges 13:4–5). Abstinence from alcohol allowed others to more clearly attribute his distinctness to the work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–15; Ephesians 5:18). The presence of the Spirit in John’s life was evident even in his mother’s womb (1:41–44).

**1:16–17.** John’s prophetic function involved two main responsibilities. First, he would call people to repentance. To “bring back” or “to turn” is a common picture of repentance in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 30:2; Jonah 3:10; Hosea 3:5; 7:10). The picture of repentance continues in the image

of parents turning their hearts to their children and the disobedient turning to the wisdom of the righteous.

John's ministry was a fulfilment of the prophet Malachi's promise that God would send the prophet Elijah to lead the people to repentance prior to the coming judgment of the Lord (Malachi 4:5–6). Luke understood John to be the fulfilment of the promise.

In Malachi's day, it was understood that Elijah would be the forerunner of God's great judgment day. Different groups of Jews connected that to different understandings of the Messiah's role in ushering in God's final victory. While Malachi originally likely imagined God following the arrival of a human Messiah, Luke understood that something unexpected had unfolded. God's Messiah had come, but He was more than the people expected, for in the Messiah, God, Himself, had shown up in the flesh.

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### **Focusing on the Meaning**

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The angel's word to Zechariah proved to be God's answer to over five hundred years of prayers. Since the time of Malachi, faithful and pious Jews had been praying for God to deliver Israel from her bondage. Understandably, the people offered those prayers alongside their own very personal prayers for healing, deliverance, and in the case of Zechariah and Elizabeth, a child.

We do not always know why God chooses to delay an answer to our prayers. Sometimes, like Zechariah and Elizabeth, our personal prayers may over the course of a lifetime merge with the community of faith's prayers for ultimate deliverance. Those transformed prayers do more than we can imagine to keep us in right relationship with God.

Instead of giving up on God, we stand with all those who yearn for His coming. When perhaps we least expect it, God will show up and answer our prayers in ways that exceed all our hopes and dreams. How could Zechariah and Elizabeth have ever anticipated the role they would play in God's plan of redemption? Because they were faithful in prayer, they were as prepared as they could be to hear from God when He finally made His move.

What prayers do you most often offer to God? How might those prayers be connected to the church's larger prayer for God's will to be done in the world and for Christ to come again and set all things right? How can connecting our personal prayer needs to the prayers of God's global church keep us attentive to the coming of the Lord?

# Teaching Plans

## DISCOVERY PLAN

### Connect With Life

1. Listening can be difficult. Especially when our listening is competing with a lot of background noise. This activity will help your class understand the importance of intentional listening. It will also help them understand how difficult it is to comprehend information in a noisy environment.

Instructions:

- Ask for one volunteer.
  - Have the rest of the group be the noisemakers.
  - Begin to instruct the volunteer to do things such as stand and hold one arm up in the air, put both arms in front of you, touch the top of your head with your left hand, sit down, stand up and turn around, etc.
  - Ask the noise makers to start chattering once you start giving instructions to the volunteer. The chattering should try to distract the volunteer.
2. After the game, ask the class the following questions.
    - Was it difficult for the volunteer to follow instructions?
    - Why was it difficult?
    - How is that like what we face when we try to listen to what God has to say to us?
    - What types of noise compete with our hearing?
    - What ways can we take steps to tune out that noise in our lives?

3. Open the class in prayer by asking God to prepare our hearts to listen for what He may be saying to us today as we study this lesson. Take away those things that distract us in our personal life and keep us from growing closer to Christ.

## Guide Bible Study

4. Read Luke 1:5–7. Use material from the sidebar “Infertility and Barrenness in the Bible” from the *Study Guide* to provide insight and possibly comfort for those in your class who know those experiencing infertility. Have students answer the following questions.
  - What do Zechariah and Elizabeth have in common?
  - What circumstances could have made Zechariah feel like his prayers may never be answered? What could have caused Zechariah to have little hope/faith?
  - What could have affected Zechariah’s listening skills?
5. Read Luke 1:8–10. Using the information in this *Teaching Guide* from the section “A Visit to the Holy Place” share the significance of the priestly duties that Zechariah performed. This was truly a once-in-a-lifetime shot for Zechariah. The altar of incense was located in the center of the room before the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. The veil that separated the two symbolized the separation between God and humanity due to sin. That veil was torn when Jesus died removing the barrier between us and God. Ask the class the following questions:
  - What was the significance of Gabriel coming to Zechariah in the Temple?
  - What does it say about the faithfulness of Zechariah and Elizabeth?
  - What happens when people pray?
  - What happens when the whole church prays for God to work among His people?

6. Read Luke 1:11–17. Have class members answer the following questions:
  - What was Zechariah praying for?
  - As a priest, would Zechariah have been praying for the nation and for the people?
  - Was the birth of John the Baptist something the nation of Israel needed as well?
7. “Your prayer has been heard,” are such beautiful words in our Scripture passage today. Comforting words because we know we have had prayers answered. Share with the class a time you remember having an answer to prayer. Have class members share in small groups about a time when their prayer was heard, and they received an answer. Bring the group back together and ask if anyone would like to share an answered prayer. Then ask what takes place after we have a prayer answered?
8. Divide the class into groups of 3–4 and have them answer the following questions:
  - What things did the angel tell Zechariah that John the Baptist will accomplish?
  - What promises did Gabriel make concerning the child who would be born to this elderly couple?
  - What was John’s main purpose in life to be (Luke 1:16–17)?
  - What does it mean that John would come “in the Spirit and power of Elijah”?
  - How does this passage connect to Old Testament prophecies (Malachi 4:5–6)?

(A copy of this assignment is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at [www.gc2press.org](http://www.gc2press.org).)



## Encourage Application

9. What can help you prepare to listen to God?

- To listen to God, I need to \_\_\_\_\_ in my life.
- I listen best when I \_\_\_\_\_.

(A copy of this assignment is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for the study at [www.gc2press.org](http://www.gc2press.org).)

10. Ask class members for suggestions about what we can do to be ready to listen to God this week in our spiritual journey?

Have class members take a personal inventory of the following:

- Things that keep me from being ready to hear God.
- Practices I can put in place to listen to God.

(A copy of this assignment is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at [www.gc2press.org](http://www.gc2press.org).)

Give the class a few minutes to complete the inventory. Then ask members to think of one practice you can add to your spiritual journey in the week ahead.

11. Close in prayer asking God to help members be ready this week to listen for ways He may be speaking to us. Ask God to remove those things that challenge our listening and take us away from spending time with Him.

## DISCUSSION PLAN

### Connect With Life

1. Have students complete this phrase: “I have trouble listening because \_\_\_\_\_.” Encourage open discussion until time to begin the lesson.

(A copy of this assignment is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for the study at [www.gc2press.org](http://www.gc2press.org).)

2. Provide time for responses to the opening prompt, then direct the class to consider the Main Idea for this lesson. Explain that today's lesson will help them discover or be reminded of opportunities in their spiritual walk that will help them listen to God.
3. Open the class in prayer asking God to help us be open to listening to Him today. Have one minute of silence before you close the prayer by asking God to help us listen for Him and His still small voice amid our busy lives.

## Guide Bible Study

4. Read Luke 1:5–7. Have class members answer the following questions:
  - Who were Zechariah and Elizabeth, and what do we learn about their character and social status?
  - Why is it significant that Elizabeth was barren and they were both old?
  - How does their situation parallel other biblical stories of childless couples?
    - Abraham and Sarah—Genesis 11 and 21
    - Samson's parents Manoah and his wife—Judges 13
    - Samuel's parents Hannah and Elkanah—1 Samuel 1
5. Read Luke 1:8–10 and use information in this *Teaching Guide* to explain how this was a once in a lifetime shot for Zechariah to be chosen to go into the Temple of the Lord and burn incense. Ask class members the following questions:
  - What does the people's presence outside praying during the incense offering tell us about the importance of this event?
  - What events or circumstances would be a reason your church could come together for corporate prayer?

- What can we learn from Zechariah and Elizabeth's obedience in times of disappointment?
6. Call attention to the sidebar, "Be Ready For Worship" in the *Study Guide*. Ask class members to look at the list of helpful ideas to reclaim Sunday in the Study Guide. What other ideas could be added to help us make Sunday worship a priority?
  7. Read Luke 1:11–13. Have the class answer the following questions:
    - How does Zechariah react to the appearance of the angel?
    - What is the significance of the angel telling Zechariah not to be afraid?
    - What message does Gabriel give Zechariah about his prayer being heard?
    - What does this passage teach us about God's timing and faithfulness in answering prayer?
    - How can we draw encouragement from Zechariah and Elizabeth's story when we face long-term unanswered prayers?
  8. Read Luke 1:14–17. Have the class list the three facts the angel Gabriel revealed about the purpose of John's life. Explain how Malachi 4:5–6 is the Old Testament prophecy of the coming of John the Baptist. John the Baptist preached in the Spirit and power of Elijah and prepared the way for Jesus.
  9. Have the class share with the group ideas of how we are called to prepare the way for the Lord in our own lives and our communities, like John did. Write their answers on a marker board. Looking at the list, ask class members to focus on one idea they can begin or renew in their lives this week. Remind class members that we are all fellow ministers as we spread out into our homes, our neighborhood, our schools, our work, and other areas where we come into contact with people. Spend a few minutes as a class praying for these opportunities that will help us prepare the way to reach people for Christ.

10. Share the following agree/disagree questions to summarize the lesson:

- Zechariah and Elizabeth were chosen because they were sinless.
- God sometimes delays answering prayers for a greater purpose.
- Being righteous means life will always go smoothly.
- God only uses young people to accomplish His plans.
- John the Baptist was chosen before he was born to serve a special mission.
- Zechariah's fear shows a lack of faith in God.
- John's lifestyle was meant to reflect his devotion and separation to God.
- God often uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways.
- If I must wait a long time for an answer to prayer, I should just stop praying for that request.

(A copy of this assignment is available in "Teaching Resource Items" for the study at [www.gc2press.org](http://www.gc2press.org).)

## Encourage Application

11. Call attention to the phrase in verse 13 when Gabriel says: "Your prayer has been heard." Ask class members what is on their prayer list right now? What should be on their prayer list?

Have class members take time to fill out the "Prayer List" handout. Have a copy of the mission organizations your church supports as a reference for your class.

- One need I pray for myself is \_\_\_\_\_
- One need I pray for my family is \_\_\_\_\_
- One need I pray for a friend is \_\_\_\_\_
- One need I pray for a neighbor is \_\_\_\_\_
- One need I pray for in our city is \_\_\_\_\_
- One need I pray for in our church is \_\_\_\_\_

- One need I pray for a staff member at church is \_\_\_\_\_
- One need I pray for our nation is \_\_\_\_\_
- One mission our church supports that I can pray for is \_\_\_\_\_

(A copy of this assignment is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for the study at [www.gc2press.org](http://www.gc2press.org).)

12. Spend time as a class in a closing prayer sharing prayer requests and praying for one another.