

Who was Zechariah in the Bible?

There are a few prominent men in the Bible named Zechariah (alternate spelling Zacharias or Zachariah). One was an Old Testament prophet who prophesied in the days of Haggai and who wrote the book of Zechariah (Ezra 5:1; Zechariah 1:1). This prophet is also mentioned by Jesus as having been murdered by the rebellious and disobedient Jews of his day (Matthew 23:35). Another prominent Zechariah was a king of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 15:8). King Zechariah was a wicked man, the last of Jehu's doomed dynasty, and he was assassinated after only six months on the throne. And, finally, there is the priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5). It will be this Zechariah discussed in this article.

Zechariah is actually the first person mentioned in connection with the Christmas story. The book of Luke records that Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were righteous, God-honoring people who had no children and were well past childbearing years (Luke 1:6-7). Zechariah, as part of his priestly duties in the temple, was chosen to enter the Holy Place to burn incense before the Lord (verse 8). While he was ministering in the temple to the Lord, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him that he and Elizabeth had been chosen by God to have a son who would be the forerunner of the Messiah (verse 17). They were to consecrate their son as a servant of God and were to name him John.

Although this was great news, Zechariah did not initially believe the angel. He objected that this could not be possible, since he and his wife were too old (Luke 1:18). Because of Zechariah's unbelief, Gabriel told him that he would be rendered mute until the baby was born (verse 20). Zechariah was immediately unable to speak, and, when he came out of the temple, he had to communicate with hand gestures. The people gathered outside the temple praying understood that he had seen a vision of some kind (verse 22). Zechariah

went home, and it happened just as the angel had said. Elizabeth became pregnant (verse 24).

The next time Zechariah is mentioned is after the birth of his son. At the child's circumcision, Elizabeth's family and friends wanted to name the baby after Zechariah, but Elizabeth insisted that his name should be John (Luke 1:59-60). When they consulted Zechariah, he asked for a writing tablet and "to everyone's astonishment he wrote, 'His name is John'" (verse 63). Immediately, Zechariah was able to speak and began at once to praise the Lord. Luke 1:67-79 records the prophetic words that Zechariah proclaimed, which may have been in the form of a song. His words indicate the change of heart and the faith that had grown during his nine months of muteness.

From Zechariah we learn that, when we faithfully follow the Lord and continue to lift up our prayers to Him, He hears us and answers according to His will for our lives (Luke 1:13; 18:1; 1 John 5:14-15). There is nothing too hard for the Lord. God's plan may look very different from what we think we want, but His way is always the best. Zechariah may have thought he only wanted a son; God gave him a prophet whose name is forever linked with the story of Jesus Christ.