

- *Severe chastening*

1. God's purposes for our lives not easily aborted

- *Privilege not withdrawn*

- *Elizabeth gives birth to a son*

2. God's chastening does not go on forever

- *His name was to be John - insisted his mother*

- *His name was to be John - insisted his father*

3. God's chastening ends when we have learned what he wants to teach us

Zacharias had been severely chastened for his unbelief. For many months he had been unable to speak ^{□1} and unable to hear (as 1:62 suggests). He had been living in a world where he was cut off from people and had much time to think over what had happened.

1. **The purposes of God for our lives are not easily aborted.** One might think that because of his unbelief, God would abandon Zacharias and withdraw His prediction that John the Baptist should be his son. But God does not withdraw His plans easily and lightly. He does not deal with us as our sins deserve. The great privilege that was being given to Zacharias was not withdrawn. The angel had insisted that his words would be fulfilled despite Zacharias' unbelief ^{□1}

So in due course Elizabeth gives birth to a son ^{□1}. For five months she had kept her pregnancy secret ^{□2}, but then after Mary's visit in the sixth month she felt free to share her news. Her friends and relatives rejoiced over what had happened ^{□3}. People were rejoicing but Zacharias was shut out of the celebrations because of his deaf and dumb condition.

2. **The chastening of God does not go on for ever.** When God expresses His displeasure it may feel as if He has abandoned us for ever. Zacharias must have had many long and lonely months cut off from the joys and pleasures involved in anticipating the birth of his son. But the chastening of God does not go on for ever.

The child was born and after eight days the normal custom of circumcising the boy was about to take place. The name was to be given at the same time and it was taken for granted by everyone that he would be named after his father ^{□1}, but Elizabeth insisted it was to be 'John' ^{□2} as the angel had said ^{□3}. The name is Johanan; 'John' is the common English form. It means 'The Lord has shown favour'. The birth of John was a sign of great mercy to his parents, but it was also the beginning of the time when God was showing mercy to the world in the sending of Jesus. John would prepare the way. 'The **LORD** has shown favour' was the name of the person who would go ahead of Jesus, God's Son.

The name suggested by Elizabeth evidently causes a lot of surprise and even some disapproval. Surely the child should be named after his father or after a member of the family ^{□1}. They call for Zacharias and despite his impediments they are able to explain what is happening and ask his opinion ^{□2}. He asks for a writing tablet and, to everyone's surprise, insists that the name should be John.

3. **God's chastening ends at the point where we have learned what God wants to teach us.** At the point where he insists that the name should be John, he can speak! The point where the chastening ends should be noted. He has had many months in which he could do little but pray. Now he firmly resists attempts from his family to give his son a different name. He is now determined to respond to the angel's instruction concerning the name ^{□1}. He is obeying the angel with the obedience of faith. He does not want to take the risk of displeasing God any further. It is to this point that God has been wanting to bring him.

□1 1:20,22

□1 1:20

□1 1:57

□2 1:25

□3 1:58

□1 1:59

□2 1:60

□3 1:13

□1 1:61

□2 1:62

□1 1:13

When he expresses his obedience to what he knows is God's will concerning the name, at that point the chastening ends.

4. New obedience brings fresh joy

4. **Zacharias' new obedience brings him fresh joy.** As soon as he can speak he begins to praise God! Despite the months of solitude he has no criticism of God. He has learned much and is now ready to acknowledge that God has been dealing with him. His mouth is opened and for the first time he is able to speak of what happened in the temple ¹. He immediately praises God and tells everyone what has happened. It leads to a respect for God and His ways coming upon the people who hear Zacharias' story ². It stirs the hearts of the people all around the area and they begin to expect that something special is about to take place through this child ³. From the very moment he is born the hand of the Lord is upon John. There is widespread publicity concerning what has happened. John grows up from his earlier days under the care and direction of God.

1:64

1:65

1:66

• *God's hand on John from birth*

John had a special work to do for God. The greater the task that God wants us to fulfil, the greater will be the early workings of God in our lives. John had a very special work to do. There would be much suffering in it. The hand of the Lord was upon him but this would not stop his being arrested later on in his life. Eventually he would be murdered by Herod Antipas. Yet none of this prevented him from completing his life's work. He had a special work to do for God and God made it clear in the very circumstances of his birth. The last phrase of verse 66 is seemingly part of the people's comment. The people could see that the Lord was working powerfully through John, Zacharias' son.

• *A special work from God*

• *Much suffering*

The whole story is typical of what happens when God moves suddenly and powerfully. God is sovereign. He is a mighty king and when His people are in weakness He can act unexpectedly and powerfully. This is the way it was when Jesus was about to come into the world. God began to get people ready. Zacharias' chastening was the prelude to God's working in new and wonderful ways.

• *A prelude to God's working in a new and wonderful way!*



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