



Lesson 3 December 14th, 2024

The Family of Faith

Study Scripture – Luke 2:67-80

Background Scripture – Luke 2:57-80

Key Verse:

“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.”

Luke 1:76-77

INTRODUCTION

You might wonder sometimes what things are most important to God. In this Study you will come to understand why a particular person is named by Jesus to greater than a prophet. We find out who he was and why he is so ranked.

He and his role was testified by the Holy Scriptures thousands of years before he came in a prophecy directly spoken to Jesus as the Father spoke of the coming of His Son to earth to redeem mankind as promised in Genesis 2:15. We should notice how Scriptures put it this way:

***“Behold I will send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You”***

Note we are dealing with an event spoken of in eternity past before the world was created. The role of this man which was named John the Baptist and accordingly the parents he would have are spectacular models for godly people.

So Jesus said of this messenger of His person and work

“Assuredly I say unto you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist”.

This is the most massive of compliments for Jesus was ranking John even more than the many prophets that had come before him.

We can ask ourselves why John would be so complimented. But note that he was the immediate proclaimer to the long waiting and suffering nation of Israel the fact that God’s promise to redeem was finally there among men. This was after 400 long years of silence. There was no prophetic voice during that period of silence.

But Jesus explains how heaven ranked John the Baptist but then surprisingly said the mysterious words ***“but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”.***

John’s role in the proclamation of the imminent presence of the promised Messiah Servant of Jehovah is without peer.

But look now at your role and think about it!

But to make us not able to shy away from the importance of our role now that Messiah has come, died, was resurrected, and ascended to the Father on high, to proclaim that Messiah has come.

Jesus' words stands before us squarely.

But John's role as the Messiah is prepared is further explained

"And from the days of John the Baptist the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

But all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

And if you are willing to receive it, he is the Elijah who is to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!"

So as we look at the prophesy of Malachi 3:1 let us also consider the prophecy of Micah 5:3 which spoke of the time of travail had brought forth the promised salvation for ***she who is in labour has given birth***".

The times were really a time of travail in pain.

We must therefore always keep in the forefront of our thinking that we are examining the lives, the feelings, the hope, the ambitions, the expectations, and the frustrations that people of God experienced as they prayer earnestly and waited on God showing His hand.

Our Lesson Study aims at pointing out to us in no uncertain terms that the Word of God is eternal and relevant to every age. We are constantly reminded by several writers that ***"While nations and kingdoms rise and fall, and principalities and powers come and go, God's word is sovereign over all generations.*** Isaiah said it best in chapter 40:8 of his Book:

***"The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God stands forever".***

Our Study is a marvelous and wonderful example of how God works in the life of the nation as well as in the life of individuals. God does not forget either party when He intends to bring blessings.

We will now have to carefully examine the prophecy of the main person in our Study, the humble village priest Zechariah who speaks about the fulfillment of God's promises. Then after that he will focus on the mission of his son John the Baptist in this overflowing song of praise of what is happening to him.

Let us cast our minds back on what God had promised the nation and all of us. God had promised ***"a horn of salvation"***, and this pictures victory and power in battle.

So now God is going to fulfill His covenant, keep His promises, rescue us, redeem us for a purpose and that purpose is to

"enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days".



We often tend to forget that God has a will, a purpose, and a plan. We tend to treat our lives “in Christ” so very casually at all times.

It is important then for us to realize that we are looking at one who speaks on God’s authority by the inspiration of the Spirit. Before Zachariah even opened his mouth, the Spirit filled his soul and inspired him to sing the praises of God.

It is therefore very important for us to not give much credence to the very large number of people with strong current actions and persuasive abilities that rule the airwaves and the Internet. These people don’t necessarily have any interest in the Word of God and even if some of what they say is true and helpful one writer comments that what they say, **“it’s not likely to have a long shelf life”**.

Note carefully therefore that before Zachariah even opened his mouth the Holy Spirit of God filled and inspired him to sing praises to God.

The lesson for us is quite clear: if you really want to sing praises to God which mean anything, you need the filling of the Holy Spirit or the listening to the Holy Spirit and be guided by Him given that you are in possession of the Holy Spirit since you are “in Christ”. This is absolutely necessary and vital.

Remember also as we study that Zechariah is talking about the calling to proclaim the coming of the Lord to **“give light to those that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death”**.

Do not fool yourself into thinking that that mission is a mission only for John the Baptist. You have been given the task of bringing light to those that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

You have to help the people in the world around you. You have to find a way to help others so that they can be removed from the shadow of death and darkness and so the light of God can shine on them.

So if you’re going to prepare the way for the Lord’s coming so that there finally will be justice on the earth you need to know the truth of God which is found only in the Scriptures. This knowledge of the Word of God which was demonstrated by all those in the 1st chapter of Luke is of vital importance for it will enable you to proclaim that God is decisively working out His purposes, fulfilling His covenants and keeping His promises so that none will be unfulfilled. You must be a testimony to God and to the world and personalize these truths.

We must immerse ourselves in Scriptures for they teach about the character of God, His story of His saving work. Then and only then we will have real joy and praise, and even when we falter for a moment like Zechariah and doubt, we will be brought by the Holy Spirit to recognize that for what it was.

It will remind you that you will always face the darts of the enemy. You will know who your enemy is and always remember that.



Do not forget therefore that your life was not an accident but is part of the larger plan of God. You might not understand this and in the difficult moments of life and the painful experiences you might forget that you are part of something bigger than all these and that you are part of the Grand Story of redemption, forgiveness, transformation, rescue and salvation.

We therefore are looking in this Study at a time of promise and hope. We pray that each one of us will prepare the way for God has blessed us just as He blessed Zechariah.

The first chapters of Luke's Gospel tell the stories of two important and unusual births. Luke presents the events surrounding the births of John the Baptist and Jesus in a way that connects them to each other. In both accounts, the angel Gabriel announced a highly unlikely pregnancy. He first appeared to a country priest named Zacharias and prophesied that his then barren wife Elisabeth, would conceive and give birth to a son, to be named John (Luke 1:8–19).

Gabriel next appeared to a young, espoused virgin named Mary and announced that she was "highly favored" in the eyes of God (1:28) and she would give birth to a son (1:31–33).

The two events are connected on a number of levels. The children to be born were relatives, their births and ministries were linked, overlapped and prophesied in Scripture.

It certainly appears that families, godly family, are especially noted by God for His work.

So look out and watch for your families. Do not mislead them. Do everything you can to have them live according to the Word of God. Let them memorize Psalm 119 if they can.

In this event, one will pass quickly as his work is performed well, while the other lasts into eternity. One child will be the long-awaited Messiah and the other, His forerunner or herald who must precede Him.

Mary and Elisabeth were related (Luke 1:36). Later, when Mary visited Elisabeth, the prenatal John "*leaped*" in her womb and Elisabeth "*was filled with the Holy Ghost*" (1:41). Elisabeth proclaimed her relative to be blessed because of Mary's demonstration of faith and belief in God's words through Gabriel (1:45). The proclamation led Mary to rejoice through a song of worshipful adoration and prophetic expectation ('Magnificat', 1:46–56). Luke's Gospel emphasizes God's work in the world by way of Elisabeth, Mary and their pregnancy experiences.

The Study Text records a dramatic event involving the then mute Zachariah. When Zachariah received Gabriel's revelation regarding Elisabeth's pregnancy, he questioned whether God's promise could come true; this was disbelief, (Luke 1:18). Gabriel gave Zacharias a somewhat ironic sign: he would be mute (dumb) until Gabriel's words were fulfilled (1:19–20). Zacharias would have to endure this sign for the length of Elisabeth's pregnancy. He would not be able to tell what he would most want to tell!

Elisabeth recognized that God was at work in and through her pregnancy. She proclaimed that "*the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men*" (Luke 1:25).



The news of the miraculous births came at a time when the nation Israel was at a low point on every front; political, economic, social and religious. It was a time of darkness and corruption, Israel was then ruled by Rome, who had placed their puppet on the throne, a degenerate man named Herod. One writer comment on Herod and the times:

“The land was rife with immorality. Herod had introduced Roman temples into the land and had built idols to Roman gods. He had introduced the Roman games into the life of Israel. Gentile money flooded the country, causing great economic instability and imbalance. He encouraged Gentile immigration into Israel which upset the economy. Even the priesthood was corrupt; there was much buying and selling of priestly offices. These were desperate times in Israel, times of darkness, weariness, injustice, disease, and economic desperation”.

Still there was a faithful few, among them the elderly Zachariah and Elizabeth, both were said to be *righteous before God* and who had waited a lifetime for a son. Like all Jewish woman, Elizabeth wanted a child, but like the mother of Samuel the prophet, she was barren and had to bear the humiliation and shame that came with that status.

Zechariah was a descendant of Aaron as were all priests in Israel and he had the rare privilege and honor of burning incense on the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place of the Temple in Jerusalem.

On this particular day after a lifetime of waiting, (we can be sure that this timing by God was not an accident, since we should know there are no “accidents” in the life of the people of God), Zechariah he was selected by lot to enter the Holy Place and burn incense connected to the morning and evening sacrifice. As he performed his duty of burning incense and making intercessory prayers for the deliverance of Israel, a multitude of the faithful gathered in the outer court of the Temple and prayed with the priest who represented them in the Holy Place.

One can imagine the powerful emotions going through Zechariah as he finally achieved a lifelong ambition. He prayed, knowing that the faithful remnant of Israel was gathered outside praying along with him, hoping that God would finally send a Deliverer, the promised Messiah. It was then that the angel Gabriel appeared and stood to the right of the altar, in front of the priest. Four hundred years of God’s silence was about to be broken!

Zechariah was troubled and fear gripped him. The angel tried to calm his fear and told him his prayers, presumably for the salvation of Israel and the deliverance of his people were heard and about to be answered. In addition, his prayer for a son, a prayer that he had probably stopped praying for a long time, would also now be answered.

The name of this child would be John, meaning “God is gracious”. He would be the forerunner of the Messiah and his task would be to preach a gospel of repentance to purify the hearts of the people and stir up a desire and expectancy, so that they could properly receive the Messiah. He, John would be as powerful and as effective as the great prophet Elijah.



The many years of God's silence and his own unanswered prayers seemed to have sapped Zachariah's belief in the power of God and though he saw the angel of God and heard his words he reacted with unbelief.

Gabriel disciplined Zechariah for his doubting of God's power; Zechariah was struck dumb which would remain "...until the day these things take place."

This event and the predicted ensuing pregnancy of his wife Elizabeth caused quite a stir in their village in rural Judea. A minor dispute erupts at the official circumcision and naming ceremony of the baby, after Elizabeth's non-traditional choice of 'John' as opposed to Zechariah Junior, is opposed by the more traditionally minded relatives. Zacharias is asked to cast the tie-breaking vote and his written assent to the name John not only startles the dissenting relatives, but his speech immediately returns, and this brings us to our text.

The Text is sometimes called Zachariah's song as he burst out in praise of God for the arrival of the 'times of the Messiah'; God's faithfulness to His promises made to the 'fathers'; His merciful and gracious dealings with His people Israel, along with the relationship of his son John to the Messiah, will be in view.

One might well have understood if Zachariah's praise was more personal, as the birth of his son was a tremendous blessing to both he and Elizabeth and recognized as such by relatives and friends. However, by now he is aware that the Messiah is soon to be born, since Mary spent the last three months at his home.

The priest that he was and educated in the Old Testament Scriptures, he realized the significance and enormity of the birth of his son and that of the One soon to be born. The event far transcended personal interest; this was national. The arrival of Messiah would in his mind trigger the wonderful blessings promised to Israel in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants to which he alludes in his song. There might even be a hint of the New Covenant since forgiveness of sins is linked to both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.

Zechariah is more concerned with the national implications of Messiah's coming and in effect speaks for the nation, giving effusive praise and thanking God for the coming to pass of their most treasured hope, the coming of Messiah and establishment of his rule and kingdom. This is set within the wider sweep of God's eternal plan of salvation and would be a fulfillment of the promises to the Fathers and vindication of God's mercy and faithfulness, particularly after the prolonged silence, following the prophet Malachi. Attendant to this, will be the redemption of the nation and freedom from pagan oppressors, an enduring hope of the Jewish people, reiterated by the prophets over the centuries.

From the vantage point of prophecy, this Coming of Messiah is the subject of prophecies that go well beyond the welfare of Israel, to encompass all God's people of all races and times, beginning with the '*Seed of the woman*' in Genesis 3:15, to the Abrahamic covenant, ... *in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed*, Gen. 12:3. Actually, much of Scripture that preceded the coming of John, was a direct march to this point in history; the Coming of Messiah.



As the eternal plan of salvation approaches a major milestone, the Messianic line is further narrowed from the tribe of Judah to the family of David, as prophesied.

THE TEXT

All of the events and the songs by Elizabeth, Mary, and Zechariah are in the context of a family relationship.

Verses 57 – 66 (Summary). Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months (Luke 1:39-40). Now Elizabeth was about to give birth and Mary returned home a short time before John was born (Luke 1:56).

During the greater portion of Elizabeth's pregnancy, she stayed in seclusion and apparently very few people knew about her pregnancy. Even after coming out of seclusion, her friends and neighbors seemed somewhat unaware until she actually gave birth. Women's clothing at the time was such that a pregnancy even advanced was not necessarily obvious.

...His great mercy... Elisabeth's experience of the Lord's *great mercy* was a taste of the mercy that God would show toward all His people (Luke 1:50, 54). This display of mercy led the people to rejoice *with* Elisabeth, thus fulfilling Gabriel's promises (1:14).

Communal celebration replaced Elisabeth's former feelings of disgrace (1:25).

... they were rejoicing with her ... the reaction of her neighbors and relatives to the birth of John was one of jubilation (vs.14), praise and thanksgiving for the great mercy that God had shown Elisabeth. It was a stigma for a Jewish woman to be childless, (Deut. 7:14).

Mercy is kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help

them. It is part of God's nature, (Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Psalm 103 ...).

Elisabeth's great elation was made even more so because her son was the forerunner of the Messiah. He would turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. He would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, the disobedient would take up the attitude of the righteous. The people of Israel would be made ready for the coming of the Messiah, (Luke 1:15-17).

... on the eighth day ... Zechariah and Elizabeth were careful to circumcise their son eight days after his birth. Typically, this operation was the responsibility of the head of the family. Circumcision of infant males *on the eighth day* after birth was a practice that dates back to the time of Abraham (Genesis 17:9–14) and to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12:3). The practice continued into the first century (Luke 2:21; Philippians 3:5). The rite served as a sign that the infant son was included in the covenant with God.

The Jews customarily named their children when they were circumcised. This custom followed the example of Abraham and Sarah, whose names God changed when He instituted circumcision



(Gen. 17:5, 15). Jesus too, received His name officially at His circumcision (2:21). The angel Gabriel named Him Jesus when he visited Mary, (Luke 1:31).

A minor dispute happens at the circumcision and official naming ceremony of the baby, a formal event. Elizabeth's insistence on the non-traditional choice of '*John*' as opposed to Zechariah Junior was opposed by the more traditionally minded relatives.

... *Not so* ... the crowd's consensus regarding the baby's name was immediately contradicted by the baby's *mother*. The crowd did not understand Elisabeth's insistence on that *name*. John was a common name in the New Testament era (Matthew 10:2; John 1:42; Acts 4:6). However, the crowd's response indicates that no other member of the baby's family (*kindred*) was named John. Scripture does not indicate exactly how Elisabeth knew that her child would *be called John*. Perhaps Zacharias informed her in writing. (Luke 1:63).

The child (John) was not to be named after any relative, for he was not to pattern after even the greatest and best of them; he was to have a decidedly new and individual name, one that matched his great career.

It appears not only was Zechariah dumb, he was also deaf and the guests had to communicate with him in sign language. The Greek word used to describe his condition, (*kophos*), can mean deaf as well as dumb (7:22). Because Zacharias was "not able to speak" (Luke 1:20), he resorted to making signs with his hands to communicate (1:22). His impairment continued until the fulfillment of Gabriel's promises.

As noted, there was a strong difference of opinion about what the child's name should be and Zachariah was asked to cast the tie-breaking vote. His written assent to the name John not only startled the dissenting relatives, but his speech immediately returned and that with effusive praise to God

Zacharias was a priest (Luke 1:8) and was likely trained in various methods of writing. *His name is John*, is what was communicated. Zacharias simply reiterated the name that was given to him by God, communicated through the angel Gabriel and stated to the crowd by Elisabeth.

... *is John*... note the present tense verb; he was already named!

God's instructions should trump opposing tradition every time. We should listen and do, after all it is God who we serve.

The crowd was amazed at the consistent message between Elisabeth and the impaired Zacharias. Luke's Gospel frequently portrays people as being *marveled* (Luke 20:26) and in wonder (24:12) when faced with the results of God's work (Luke 2:33; 9:43; 11:14).

... *they marveled all*... all of this added to the sense of awe and wonder surrounding the very unusual conception and this was felt throughout the whole community. Everyone concluded that John would be an unusual child because '*God's hand was with him*'.



Zachariah's inability to speak resulted from his expression of doubt regarding God's plan (Luke 1:20). However, God's mercy is greater than human doubt. Zachariah experienced this mercy firsthand when *his mouth was opened, and his tongue loosed*. God's mercy, demonstrated through His power over the physical world, is expedient and effective (Luke 5:24–25; 8:43–44; 13:10–13; 18:35–43). God's Spirit filled Zachariah, and he *praised God* (Luke 1:67). This same Spirit worked dramatically in the events and people of the early chapters of Luke's Gospel (1:15, 35, 41, 67, 80; 2:25–27).

Feelings of *fear* arise in a person because of an awareness of danger (Matthew 14:26; John 7:13). However, fear can also refer to the awe felt when witnessing God's work (Luke 5:25–26; 7:15–16). The people that day were in awe and fear when they saw a man who was previously mute now be able to speak. People sensed that God was at work, as news of this birth and all that occurred that day spread throughout all Judea!

Considering the life of John, ... *the hand of the Lord* ... though years passed before John's ministry formally began (Luke 3:1–3), God's presence *was with him*. Old Testament writers described God's presence and power as *the hand of the Lord* working for the protection and flourishing of His people (Deuteronomy 2:15; 1 Chronicles 4:10; Isaiah 31:3; 66:14; Acts 11:21).

Note, when 'God's hand' (power/influence; Holy Spirit's presence) is on our lives, there should be personal expectation regarding our spiritual lives and that noticeable to the observing world!

Verse 67. ... *prophesied* ... Zachariah then prophesied under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and all that the word prophesy means, is to be found in these verses.

To prophesy is to foretell future events under divine inspiration, , to celebrate the praises of God (1 Samuel 10:5,6; 1 Kings 18:29), teach, preach, admonish, refute with regard to the Kingdom of God / the Gospel, (1 Cor. 14:3). The fulfillment of his prophecies will confirm the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

Zechariah's worship reflected the feelings of a man who had waited on God for very long time and addressed the fact that the people of Israel has also waited a very long time for God to fulfill His promises to David (2 Sam.7).

The setting of Zechariah's prayer and prophecy is a family gathering to celebrate the circumcision and naming of this miracle, baby boy. This is a time of great happiness, with friends and family feasting and rejoicing.

The circumcision spoke to the covenant relationship of God with His people commanded in Genesis seventeen. It was likely not lost on any that Abraham had also waited a long time for the birth of the promised son and that God had faithfully fulfilled His promise. God's covenant with them was still in force and underlined by this event in a marvelous way.

No wonder that the theme of this hymn speaks over and over of God '*visiting*' His people, redeeming and bringing salvation. These terms certainly have echo of the Davidic, Abrahamic and New Covenants.



One writer notes what happens when God restored Zechariah's faculties. He regains his voice now after having to write the name of the child as John.

Zechariah's song falls into two parts:

"The first praising God for the promise of redemption; the second prophesying the role of John the Baptist to prepare the way for the coming of the Promised Messiah".

Note the continued stress on God "visiting His people.

Verses 68 - 69. Zechariah loudly proclaimed his gratitude.

Blessed... to bless God, is not to confer a blessing on Him or to invoke a blessing on Him. God does not have need of any blessing, being the source and fountain of all blessing. The self-existent God, The I AM, is blessed forever in Himself, so rather it is to praise and glorify God, on account of the perfections of His nature and to thank Him for all mercies, spiritual and temporal; and especially for Jesus Christ, His mission, incarnation, and the redemption He brings; these are the things for which Zacharias blessed the God of Israel.

Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. (Psalm 72:18 etc.).

...visit... is to look upon; then to look upon in order to know the state of anyone; then to visit for the purpose of aiding those who are in need. This same idea is expressed in Matthew 25:33.

...visited ... accomplished... verbs; God's work!

... redeemed... means to buy back at great cost; pay a ransom. Here Zachariah speaks of both personal and national redemption. The ultimate redemption is from sin and the price the blood of Messiah!

In sending the Messiah, God made a *gracious visit* to His people, whom since the time of Malachi, He seemed to have neglected. God is said to have *visited* His people in bondage when He *delivered* them (Ex. 3:16, 4:31) to have *visited* His people in famine when He *gave them bread*, (Ruth 1: 6).

The idea is that God *visited* His people to see their condition, with the intent of making things right for them and how He made it!

Redeemed, the action that flowed from the *visit*. Note the redemption is mentioned as having already been accomplished, even though the Messiah's herald was even then still a babe.

Zechariah links redemption to the Lord God of Israel, because the promises were made to Israel in a very particular way. Of course, all people of God, believers are redeemed, are ransomed, by the 'blood' (= penal, sacrificial, substitutionary death) of Christ.

Redeemed his people means, He has made a ransom for His people'. A ransom is the price paid or demanded before a captive is set free. So, Christ paid the price to redeem His people from God's justice

The blood of Jesus -- that is, His death in the place of sinners--constitutes such a ransom.



just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His [a]life as a ransom for many.” (Matt. 20:28)

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining[a] eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:12)

The reference here is to the Messiah and not his own son John.

... visited us and accomplished... again, note the use of the past tense, even though Jesus was not yet born. Such is the certainty of God’s promises, and the Scriptures often speaks in this fashion, where future events are announced in the past tense, implying the certainty of fulfillment. God promises are as certain as if it had already happened.

And hath raised up a horn... A horn is a symbol of great strength in Jewish culture. The figure is taken from the fact that the strength of horned animals lies in the horn. The Scriptures often use this metaphor to speak of great strength, (Psalms 148:14; Deuteronomy 33:17; Daniel 7:7, 8; 8:21). The connection with salvation suggests the strength to accomplish the salvation and also a plentiful salvation as in a *horn of plenty*. *I will make the horn of David spring forth there (Psalm 132:17; 1 Samuel 2:10)*

...in the house, means in the family, or among the descendants of David, (2 Sam. 7).

Verses 70 - 71. Zachariah invoked the prophecies and the prophets going all the way back to Genesis, *as* having the same message as he concerning Messiah, thereby authenticating and adding weight to the salvation of which he spoke.

The Scriptures literally, figuratively and symbolically speak of Christ from cover to cover, *And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself,* (Luke 24:27).

Unwittingly or not, the antiquity of his reference along with the citing of the prophets does imply a salvation from sin, rather than the political emancipation Zachariah along with the rest of the nation so desperately sought. The true enemies, of which God spoke through him, were Satan and the sins that warred against the souls of men. The bondage from which Israel most required to be delivered was the servitude of Satan, not political vassalage under the Romans. Yet, the nation was oblivious to their sorry, moral condition, a situation the ‘Forerunner’ would address in his preaching.

A carnal and malignant patriotism had taken possession of the people and their rulers, and the idea of a political deliverance was substituted for that of a moral salvation. Speaking under the power of God's Spirit, Zacharias spoke truth beyond his own full comprehension (1 Peter 1:10-12).

The prophets linked the economic, social and political health of the nation with the state of their relationship to Jehovah and emphatically so at the very birth of the nation in the wilderness,



(Deut. 7:12-24). But even in their most prosperous time there was a 'Day of Atonement', the problem of sin remained!

This is not to suggest that there is no glorious political future for ethnic Israel. The Scriptures do speak of such a time, but this will follow national spiritual rebirth, again the work of Messiah,

And do not fear, Jacob My servant,' declares the Lord, 'And do not be dismayed, Israel; For behold, I am going to save you from far away, And your [a]descendants from the land of their captivity. And Jacob will return and be at peace, without anxiety, And no one will make him afraid (Jer. 30:10). (Rom. 11:1, 25-29).

Verses 72-73. The consummation of the promises, the execution of the covenants, old and new will all be achieved through the agency of *A Horn of Salvation*, through the Messiah; this is the purpose for which he was 'raised up. So, all covenants and promises coalesce and converge in the person of Christ.

God showed mercy and grace to Abraham in the covenants in the promises and oaths He made to him and his children. The oath is recorded in Genesis 22:16-18. It was an oath in which God swore by Himself (*because he could swear by no greater*, Hebrews 6:13-14) that He would surely bless Abraham and his posterity. That promise was now to be entirely fulfilled by the coming of the Messiah, (Gen. 12:2-3; 22:16-18; Rom. 9:7-8).

Although Zachariah spoke from a Jewish perspective, the blessings of Gentiles are inextricably linked to the blessing of Israel.

I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness? (Rom. 11:11-12).

Verses 74 - 75. The desire expressed here has application in both the temporal and spiritual realm. In the temporal sense this might be an allusion to several texts in Exodus, where every mention of the Israelites being set free is followed by the worship of God; *The LORD God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness: (Ex. 7:16).*

One writer comment: **"The great design of gospel grace is not to discharge us from, but to engage us to, and encourage us in, the service of God. Under this notion Christianity was always to be looked upon, as intended to make us truly religious, to admit us into the service of God, to bind us to it, and to quicken us in it. We are *therefore* delivered from the iron yoke of sin, that our necks may be put under the sweet and easy yoke of the Lord Jesus."** (Matt. 11:30).

... serve Him without fear ... note, God's people should serve him with a sense of security and a serenity of mind. We should show God a parental, reverent and obedient fear.



On the spiritual front, the manner of worship; *in holiness and righteousness* can only come from hearts that are new as in.... *And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh:* Ezek. 11:19 or

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people, (Jeremiah 31:33). It is through the New Covenant in Jesus' blood that righteousness is conferred on sinners, justification. Zechariah spoke of the times of Messiah.

...delivered out of the hand of our enemies... promised in the Davidic Covenant which has its ultimate fulfillment in David's 'greater Son'.

Verse 76. ... *And thou, child,* ... Zacharias finally gets to 'his son John', but there is no sense of personal esteem, or self-congratulations or gloating but rather the entire emphasis is on Lord Messiah and any light on John, derives from the privilege and blessing of serving the Lord. ... *called the prophet of the Highest* ... John's official role is announced and is a clear reference to the prophecy of Malachi 3:1-3; *Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.*

John is to be the prophet of the *Highest*, Jesus Christ is *the Highest*, for He is *God over all*, (Rom. 9:5).

John activities and ministry would be circumscribed by his office of prophet to the *Highest*.

...Go before the face of the Lord ...the imagery is that of a herald going before a king to announce the imminent arrival and to prepare the way for the royal visitor.

To prepare his ways ... the preparation, the message - get ready for the soon appearing King; His immediate 'Kingdom' is spiritual, thus the herald will exhort to repentance and reformation of behavior. *And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. (Luke 3:3-6).



Verses 77 - 78. ... *the knowledge of salvation* ... John will educate the people regarding salvation, not only on what to do, but what to expect. They were to know that it was provided, (*To give*) and that the Author of salvation was about to appear.

... *salvation* ... the essence of salvation is the remission, the forgiveness, the pardon of sins and effected only in the people of God. It is the remission/forgiveness of sins that is the distinctive of the salvation accomplished by Jesus and ties him to the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34: *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.* The idea here is that the salvation about to be offered was that connected with the pardon of sin.

The kind of salvation that some Jews of the first century expected was that of political freedom and an end to oppression under foreign empires. Those Jews who were most militant in holding this desire were the Zealots. One of Jesus' twelve apostles was called a "Zelotes" (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13), likely for his identification with this group. They believed that God's kingdom and the people's salvation would come through military and political power, sometimes requiring violence.

John would *give knowledge of a salvation* beyond political interest. The people, the Jews would be shown a spiritual salvation. John was not the first to proclaim God's salvation; prophets before him proclaimed similarly (Isaiah 25:9; Jeremiah 3:23; etc.). The hope and mercy that God's people desired would come not from an act of human warfare but from God's redemption and salvation in Christ (Psalm 130:7-8; Acts 4:8-12; 2 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 9:28; etc.).

The underlying Greek word for *remission* is translated elsewhere as "forgiveness" (Mark 3:29; Acts 5:31; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). John would be "*preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*" (Luke 3:3).

Zachariah's prophetic song reveals that God's plan of salvation is bigger than political salvation. People, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality, would experience salvation when they had their sins forgiven by God.

Note, all God's saving actions towards men arise from His mercy.

... *tender*... in current Hebrew thought was linked to the vital organs which were seen as the seat of the more tender affections, especially kindness, benevolence, compassion; hence our heart (tender mercies, affections, etc.)

... *Because of the tender mercy of our God* ... the salvation accomplished, the forgiveness of sins was as a result of the *tender mercies of God* and not an indifferent gesture that happen to bless some. The pardon we receive is strictly on account of God's great mercy. People have no merit,



no grounds on which to appeal, only our pathetic and pitiful case to recommend us to the divine compassion.

...Sunrise from on high ... the morning light, the aurora, the rising of the sun; light is the essential or basic meaning here and Jesus is often said to be Light: the true Light lighting every man, coming into this world"(John 1:9); But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings(, Malachi 4:2); And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil, (John 3:19).

Christ is indeed the light of the world. *I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star, (Rev. 22:16).*

... VISIT US... WITH THE INTENT TO BLESS!

Verse 79. The figure of *Sunrise* in these verses is taken from a caravan crossing the desert that loses its way and is overtaken by night; they eagerly await morning that they may know which way to go. But the light does not break-out suddenly. First its dawn; some red streaks appear in the sky; then the eastern horizon brightens; then the first rays and so God's redemption plan unfolded.

It started with an angelic visitor to an old childless priest and his wife; then a visit to a young, virgin and the story continues; then the herald is born and then a Baby! ...The righteous in Israel must have pondered Malachi 4:5-6 and the ensuing four-hundred-year silence and ask when? Now, according to Zechariah, the darkness was past; 'Dawn' had arrived to end the night!

...to guide our feet... continues the figure.

... the way of peace ... the peace referred to here is much more than the absence of hostility. The Jewish greeting 'shalom' has the sense of fullness / contentment / wholesome. It is both the 'peace of God', that inner assurance of having God's goodwill in contrast to 'sitting in darkness and the shadow of death'. Then it is 'peace with God' which comes through the forgiveness of sins and a restoration of fellowship with the Creator. Sinners are at enmity with God, they are the enemies of God and are the object of His wrath. Reconciliation is only through his Son, Jesus.

Verse 80. Filled with the Holy Spirit the child John grew. He became stronger and stronger with each passing day. Clearly he did not follow the way of his father and become a priest. He remained in the wilderness of Judea and from there he presented himself to the people as Messiah's forerunner.



The words used to describe John's early life do not imply that he was cut off from society and live as a hermit. He probably went up to Jerusalem on occasion to the required feasts, and worshiped on the Sabbath.

Staying in the wilderness from his early life in true Nazarite spirit, he was free from the corrupting influence of the rabbinic authorities, and spent time alone with God who taught him for his great future role in his nation. He lived free from the distractions of ordinary life.

It was very important for John to be physically and spiritually strong for his role was a difficult one. So Luke advises us that there was a period of preparation before John began his ministry. His growth and development involved separation from much of his nation's religious system.

John was able to stand apart from the life of the nation and see its errors and deviations from the truth. He could and did speak boldly against the evils of his day.

He was certainly no *reed shaken with the wind*. He was rugged as the desert and understood his ministry to be a ministry of reform just like that of Elijah. So he spoke strongly to Israel challenging them morally, and demanding and they turn away from the evil values of their society.

He labored so faithfully that we are told that even Herod Antipas a high authority feared and observed him, except that Herod would not give up his adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. (Mark 6:20-28).

This verse tells us that the fundamental message of John was his proclamation that the Messianic Age was about to begin. He was the Herald preparing the way of the Lord and many multitudes crowded to hear his words.

They found as Zechariah predicted that John had a different view of the nature of God's kingdom from those of his hearers. They expected that Messiah would deliver them from the foreign oppressors, but John warned that Messiah's coming would be a time of judgment for Israel.

(See Luke 3:9, Matthew 3:12).

Hence John would call for repentance, a real, radical, complete change of heart and life. This repentance would produce "*fruits worthy of repentance*". The nation had to come out of their complacency and blindness. They had to fulfill God's demand for righteousness. They had to be baptized as a sign that they were participating in the true cleansing of the nation. Only extensive moral reform would prepare Israel to meet God. So John preached as Mark 1:3 records

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight."



CONCLUSION

The 'song' of Zachariah is an example of the unity of Scripture. Here in twelve verses prophecy reaching back to Eden is connected all the way to the birth of John the Baptist and beyond. At the

At the center of it all is Jesus, the Savior of mankind.

The psalm of Zechariah reflects his personal experience and his knowledge of Scripture. The Holy Spirit inspired him and out of his own soul, we have received this wonderful hymn of praise and prophecy.

We too should have a song in our hearts, a song of praise that is born of our spiritual experience with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our song might not be inspired in quite the same sense as this song of Zechariah, but our song or testimony should be such that it can be used by the Holy Spirit to draw men to God the Father.

Zachariah's prophecy is in sharp contrast to what happened at his encounter with the archangel Gabriel. Clearly much maturing happened in the interim and our response to God's faithfulness and blessings, should like Zachariah's, be heartfelt and effusive. He did not even *know* Jesus yet, but he praised Him, he loved Him, he was passionate about Him. How can we excuse ourselves if we do less!

Yes, Zachariah previously expressed doubt (vs.18) but God is faithful and merciful despite our unbelief. His faithfulness invites us to give Him praise. His mercy calls us to embrace His forgiveness. We like Zachariah should proclaim God's salvation for all to hear. Where God's salvation is present, darkness and death will turn to light and life.

The work of John the Baptist was most important as Scripture regard him as the greatest of the prophets.

The prophet Malachi had predicted the coming of Messiah who would come as the rising sun and bring healing in his wings.

Thus, Zechariah would close his song with the most important picture of Christ the Messiah and would say the unforgettable statement:

"Through the tender mercies of our God

With which the Dayspring

from on high has visited us;

To give light to those which sit in darkness and the shadow of death

To guide our feet into the way of peace".

So Zechariah's praise for the Messiah gushes.

Remember Zechariah and Elizabeth and ourselves were chosen to be part of something magnificent. God offers that to all of us.

Do not look on Zachariah and Elizabeth as some great heroes of the faith for they were just normal, ordinary human being trying to be faithful to the Lord. Zechariah and Elizabeth were open to what God would do. Likewise, we saw Mary fulfill what God wanted her to do (Luke 1), especially in service to Elizabeth, but later on when it was her time to give birth. Then we



cannot underscore what John the Baptist had done in his life. He let the Holy Spirit guide him so that he may properly prepare the way for the Messiah.

From all the promises given to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, to David and leading to the lives of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, and John, we see God working with these families to showcase that all true believers are part of the family of God, and He will direct their lives to glorify Himself, and through the redemption offered by Jesus, further glorify and magnify His name.

So should we.

We should also remember that God has chosen us when we were weak and were not highly regarded by those in the world. So let us move on to our complete victory in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We therefore pray that you will learn these important lessons from the lives of all the family member of the household of God.

