

**Luke 1:67-80**  
**The Song of Zacharias**

In his *Homilies on the Gospels*, the 8th century Anglo-Saxon Church father, the Venerable Bede, wrote “By his appearance in the flesh our Lord visited us when we were sinners. He visited us as a doctor visits an ill patient, and, in order to cure the ingrained sickness of our pride, he gave us the example of his own humility. He redeemed his people by giving us freedom, at the price of his own blood - we who had been sold into the slavery of sin and were committed to serving the ancient enemy.”

The Bible has many songs of praise. Moses sang praises to God after Pharaoh’s army was destroyed (Exodus 15), Deborah and Barak praised God after the defeat of the Philistine leader Sisera (Judges 5), Hannah sang to God after the birth of Samuel (1 Samuel 2), the book of Psalms is composed of praises to God. Already we have read the praises of Mary and Elizabeth in this gospel.

This song of praise is called the “Benedictus” after the opening words in the Latin Vulgate. As we would expect of a priest, Zacharias praises his God from themes found in the OT. It is more than just the praise of a first-time father; the song of Zacharias is a recounting of the great covenants with God that culminate in the coming of the Messiah.

That Zacharias was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (v.67) as he spoke reminds us that, like the OT prophets, his words were the words of God. He acknowledged that God had “accomplished the redemption of His people,” (v.68) which was true both in history and in the coming of the Messiah. To Zacharias, it was all the same - as He had done in the past, the God of Israel was raising up a “horn of salvation” (v.69) for His people.

**The Davidic Covenant**

Jeremiah 23:5, “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD,  
When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch;  
And He will reign as king and act wisely  
And do justice and righteousness in the land.”

Isaiah 11:1, “Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,  
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.”

Psalms 132:17, “There I will cause the horn of David to spring forth;  
I have prepared a lamp for Mine anointed.”

These passages and others informed Jews that the Messiah would be from the line of David. That Mary was a descendant of David, Zacharias must have known since she was a relation. That this had been “by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old” (v.70) is a reference to Nathan’s words to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-13 in which God establishes His covenant with the house of David, “<sup>12</sup>When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup>He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

The promise was fulfilled in the short term by the building of the temple under Solomon and the expansion of the kingdom. Neither lasted, though, as division and idolatry split the kingdom and it was

eventually conquered first by the Assyrians (722 BC) and then the Babylonians (586 BC). The temple itself would be destroyed in 70 AD by the Roman general, and future emperor, Titus.

The “the salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us” (v.71) - a quotation from Psalm 106:10 - could not be a reference to the short-term fulfillment of the promise, but rather was the praise of Zacharias for the coming Messianic kingdom that would complete the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant,

### **The Abrahamic Covenant**

The “fathers” referenced in v. 72 refers to the OT fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The covenant God made with them began the story of the redemption of the nation of Israel.

Abraham was a native of the powerful Mesopotamian city-state of Ur. He was not a worshipper of the one true God when he was called, “Joshua said to all the people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.’”” Joshua 24:2. Nevertheless, God sovereignly chose him to relocate to Canaan and become the father of Israel.

The “holy covenant” which God “swore to Abraham”(v.72-73) is first mentioned in Genesis 12 where God promised to make Abraham “a great nation” and affirmed that through him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” Genesis 12:2-3. The nation of Israel was to be conduit through which salvation would come to all. For example, the Scriptures were written by Jews, the Law was established for the nation of Israel, and the Messiah would come from the line of the great Jewish king, David. As Christ, Himself, said “salvation is from the Jews,” John 4:22.

The story of the formalization of this covenant is told in Genesis 15. In a ritual that was similar to others used in ancient Near Eastern cultures, the covenant was validated by the sacrifice of animals and the passing between them of the participants. Genesis 15:9-18 tells of the confirming of the covenant.

“<sup>9</sup>So He said to him, ‘Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.’ <sup>10</sup>Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. <sup>11</sup>The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.”

“<sup>12</sup>Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. <sup>13</sup>God said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. <sup>14</sup>But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. <sup>15</sup>As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. <sup>16</sup>Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.’”

“<sup>17</sup>It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. <sup>18</sup>On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram,”

It is significant that only the Lord passed between the sacrifices. That is, the Abrahamic covenant was a unilateral covenant; it was not dependent on Abraham. While Abraham, or his descendants, could break the covenant, the keeping of the promises was vested in God alone.

The promise was that Israel would be “rescued from the hand of our enemies” and “serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days” (v.74-75). Again the complete fulfillment of this covenant can only be understood in the context of the coming of the Messiah. Like the Davidic covenant, however, the Jewish people rejected the Messiah and did not enjoy the benefits of the promise.

### **The New Covenant**

But in God’s sovereign plan, there was still a way. The previous covenants had not provided a way of salvation. They offered blessings, but not a way of dealing with the insurmountable human problem of sin. This human problem was the issue.

In speaking of the Mosaic covenant the writer of Hebrews says, “if the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second,” Hebrews 8:7. Neither the promised blessings of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants nor the threatened curses of the Mosaic law were capable of overcoming our sin nature. We are simply unable to keep the commandments of God, even when He reduces the entire law to simply doing two things, Mark 12:28-31.

At the conclusion of his song of praise, Zacharias turns from addressing God to prophesying over his child. John will be “the prophet of the Most High [El Elyon]” (v.76) a phrase that was commonly understood to be Israel’s God. His calling would be to announce the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1.

But John’s understanding of the intent of the Messiah was not what was expected. Israel longed for a king, John 6:15, “Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.” The promise of the New Covenant was not of this world.

John would prepare the way for a Messiah who would provide for His people “the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins” (v.77). This “circumcision of the heart,” Deuteronomy 10:6, can only be accomplished by the “tender mercy of God,” (v.78) and was expounded in Jeremiah 31:31-34,

“<sup>31</sup>Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup>not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup>But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup>They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’”

That the light will “shine upon those who sit in darkness,” (v.79) can be understood in two ways. It can refer to either spiritual darkness (sin), or intellectual darkness (ignorance) or, perhaps, both. In any case, the New Covenant provides both justification for sin and spiritual awakening.

Lastly, the New Covenant is a covenant of peace. Not peace with the world, but rather peace with God. Christ emphasized this, John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” Our faith in Him confirms it, Romans 5:1, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This threefold blessing forgiveness of sins, light in the darkness, and guidance in the way of peace is the essence of the New Covenant for which John would prepare the way.

### **Take Aways**

Appreciate the thankfulness of a Jew at the coming of the Messiah. It is as Christians will be at the second coming.

So much of our faith in God is predicated on His having kept His promises. We need less faith today than the OT saints. With God, the future is as certain as the past.