

## THE PROPHECY OF ZACHARIAS

Luke 1:57-80

**Intro:** Every birth of a child is to the parents an exciting event. And yet there is always some apprehension connected with a child's birth lest something might go wrong. But I doubt if any of us can appreciate the joy which Zacharias and Elisabeth had when their child was born because they were past the age when they could normally have children. And that is what got Zacharias in trouble with the Lord because His response to the angel, Gabriel, when he told Zacharias that he would have a son by Elisabeth his wife, was:

Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years (Luke 1:18).

For that reason he was unable to speak during the whole time of Elisabeth's pregnancy as a judgment from the Lord.

Nevertheless, Elisabeth did give birth to a son. She did well, and the baby was born safely and healthy. So Zacharias had more than one reason to be thankful to the Lord.

On the eighth day of their baby's life, in obedience to Lev. 12:2, some came, probably priests, to circumcise the baby, and to name him. It is never said in Scripture that the first child should be given his father's name, but evidently that custom had been practiced for some time when Zacharias and Elisabeth's baby was born. And so it was assumed by all that their son would be named, Zacharias. But Elisabeth objected, and said that his name would be John. And this bothered those who had come to do the circumcising, and so they said to Elisabeth, "There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name" (Luke 1:61). Elisabeth might have been overruled by the people who were there, and so she made signs to him to ask him what he wanted their baby to be named. Well, Zacharias still could not speak, and so he indicated to them that he wanted a writing tablet. On this tablet he wrote, "His name is John"! The order of the words in the Greek text is, *John is his name*, thus making it very emphatic that their baby had already been named, and that he and Elisabeth would not consider any other name. And then several amazing things happened.

In the first place we are told that all of the people who were there at the time, "marveled." This means that they were amazed, but, at the same time, they did not object. They seemed to sense that there was something very unusual about this child – and, of course, there was!

The second unusual thing that happened was that for the first time in nine months Zacharias was able to speak. His unbelief brought on his dumb-

ness, and his obedience caused it to be restored. Both were caused by the Lord. And it is significant that Zacharias' first words after all of that time were words of praise for God. And I am sure that his words of praise were not primarily that he could speak again, but that God in His faithfulness, wisdom, and power, had fulfilled His promise in giving the baby John. And not just in the birth of their son as such, but because of what the angel had revealed to him about the ministry that this son would have.

But then look at verse 65. Word of this quickly spread throughout all of the surrounding area, probably because Zacharias as a priest was well known, and most people were aware that he had been unable to speak. So when they heard what had happened in naming the baby, the people took this news into their hearts. And everywhere people were saying, "What manner of child shall this be!"

At this point Luke tells us that Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he began to prophesy. The verb, *to prophesy*, has a twofold meaning. Its primary meaning is *to preach*; but it also means *to predict the future*. In verses 68 through 75 Zacharias was preaching; in verse 76 through 79 Zacharias was predicting the ministry that his son would have after he grew up.

When Zacharias was preaching, he was praising God that He was fulfilling promises that had been given to the people of Israel by "His holy prophets" (see v. 70). He was doing what preachers today are supposed to do. He was bringing out the meaning of God's promises in His Word. And he was doing this under the blessing of the Holy Spirit. And notice that in this first part Zacharias was speaking to the people

But when he spoke to baby John, telling him what His ministry would be, He was speaking as only a few of the men of God in the past have done, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That type of prophesying came to an end with the completion of the NT. There are men today who claim to have the gift of being about to foretell the future, but they can only predict what has been recorded in the Word of God. When they go beyond the Bible, they only *think* that they know what is going to happen, but they are deceived, and anyone who believes them is deceived as well. To put it plainly, such men are *false prophets*.

But let look at our text. And first we have:

## **I. ZACHARIAS PREACHING TO THE PEOPLE (Luke 1:68-75).**

Notice that he addressed God as "the Lord God of Israel." And in the

same verse, 68, he called them, “His people,” that is, *the people of the Lord God*.

Notice “for us” in verse 69. And “we” and “us” in verse 71. In verse 72 we have “our fathers.” And “our father Abraham” in verse 73. And in verse 74 we have “us” and “we” and “our” – all addressed to the Jews who were before him. And in verse 75 we have “all the days of our life.”

I point all of these pronouns to you so that you will see that Zacharias really believed that the long-delayed promise of God for the salvation of His people, the spiritual descendants of Abraham, had come. His words seem to indicate that he believed in salvation as we know it today, but there was also the hope expressed in his message that God was sending One Who would deliver the nation from their enemies. This, too, was promised by the prophets of the OT, but that part of the promises of God (we know now) awaits the time when the Lord Jesus will return to the earth. We haven’t seen that yet, but that was one of the great expectations of the Jewish people when they realized that the Lord Jesus Christ was their Messiah. You may remember that even just before the ascension of our Lord, His disciples asked Him, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). That was still their hope as it had been throughout the Lord’s ministry. And some day Israel will be delivered from her enemies, but that awaits the second coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth.

It seems that Zacharias combined the idea of salvation from sin as well as deliverance from their enemies, but his emphasis was definitely upon the latter.

But now let us look at the second part of his message, and we can call this:

## **II. ZACHARIAS’ PREDICTIONS CONCERNING HIS SON ((Luke 1:76-79).**

Now there is no question but that Zacharias’ emphasis in what he said to his baby boy meant that baby John, when he became a man, would be involved in proclaiming the message of salvation from sin to the people of Israel. His ministry was to be a ministry preparing the way for the Lord, the Messiah. It was to be a ministry of giving the “knowledge of salvation” to the Lord’s people as to how their sins could be forgiven, and that salvation would be, not because they were Jews, nor because they had earned salvation as a reward, but it would be “through the tender mercy of our God, to bring them out of darkness and death “into the way of peace.” Here is the doctrine of reconciliation. The Jewish people needed to be

delivered from their enemies, but of far greater importance was their need to be delivered from divine judgment. And the One Who was coming would eventually bring both to them, the latter being first.

And we all know now how wonderfully John the Baptist fulfilled the ministry to which he had been appointed by God. Who can forget those simple yet powerful message, “Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). John’s message in those words show that his understanding of the Gospel was that it was not just for Jewish people, but it would include Gentiles all over the world. In this he was far ahead of his generation in understanding the ministry of Christ.

It is very apparent to those who read the Gospels, that there were very few in Scripture who surpassed John the Baptist in his devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. He had his surprises like we all have in the work of the Lord, and the greatest was his imprisonment. But he left behind him an outstanding example of one who was completely the Lord’s. Who can forget those great words, “He (speaking of Christ) must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). And it seems that no one had the ministry that John the Baptist had, probably not even our Lord. The foundation of his ministry is laid in the words spoke by Gabriel to Zacharias, and then in these prophetic words of Zacharias as he preached to the Jews, and as he spoke prophetically to his baby son, John.

But I want to get now to my emphasis in this brief series surrounding the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. What names and/or titles of our Lord do we have in this prophecy of Zacharias? I want to call your attention to four that we have in our text for today. Let us call this:

### **III. THE NAMES AND TITLES ZACHARIAS USED FOR OUR LORD.**

The first is in verse 69:

#### **A. “An Horn of salvation” (Luke 1:69).**

Thayer, in his Greek dictionary, says that since animals, and particularly bulls, defended themselves with their horns, and this is what gave them courage and strength against their enemies, this was used by God to describe the Messiah as a mighty and valiant and triumphant Savior.

This is brought out by David in Psalm 18 where we read in verses 1 and 2:

- 1 I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.
- 2 The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer;

my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

Our Lord Jesus has shown His strength and courage not only in doing what was necessary for our salvation, but even in overcoming all of the resistance that we put up before we were saved.

The word “horn” is used only here in all of the NT. But this once is very important because it points out that our Lord is sufficient for all that is necessary for our salvation. And remember what we have learned about the three tenses of salvation – past, present, future – justification, sanctification, glorification.

We come to a second name in verse 76.

### **B. “The Highest” (Luke 1:76).**

When the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary, he told her that she would conceive and bring forth a Son Whose Name would be Jesus, and that He would be called “the Son of the Highest.” Here in our text we are told now that Zacharias’ son John would become “the prophet of the Highest”! So we see that this term, “the Highest,” belongs not only to the God the Father, but also to God the Son.

This is the equivalent of “the most High God” to whom we were introduced in the story of Melchizedek in Genesis 14. In verses 18 and 19 of that chapter we read these words:

18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:18-19).

And then farther down in the chapter when the King of Sodom was trying to work out a compromise with Abram, this is what we read in verses 21-23:

21 And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.

22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,

23 That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.

In the book of Hebrews we read that our Lord Jesus is a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec. So the Name, the Most High God, or as

we have it here in Luke 1:76, “the Highest,” means that there is no god who is greater. He is the Supreme God, and to the earth He is its Creator and Possessor and Sustainer. This world belongs to the Godhead. They created it, They sustain it. It, and everything in it, belongs to Them. And so They, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in supreme and sovereign authority over all creatures, and every nation. When I hear our politicians talking like they are the ones who hold the destiny of the world in their hands, I would like to tell them that this world belongs to the Lord , and His will, not theirs, is going to prevail.

Long ago, a Psalmist, probably King David, wrote:

The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations (Psa. 33:11).

And many years afterward, his son, King Solomon, expressed the same truth in these words:

There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand (Prov. 19:21).

Puny man is nothing in comparison with God. And the mightiest nation on the face of the earth is just a drop in a bucket to the Lord. *And if we persist in ignoring the Lord, and doing what is expedient to us, we may find out, as other nations have, how quickly the Lord can bring us to nothing. Our politicians are concerned about what is pleasing to their constituents so they can preserve their careers. What they need to be concerned about is what is pleasing to the Lord or they won't have any careers.*

Our Savior is the sovereign God. No one is greater than He. And this is what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he described our Lord in Rom. 9:5 as the One “Who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.”

But as much as I would like to stay on this point, I must go on to the third Name, and it is much akin to “the Highest.” It is found in the same verse as “the Highest.” Our Savior is:

### **C. “The Lord” (Luke 1:76).**

He is Deity. He is the Master. And He is working all things out according to the counsel of His own will. He is in charge of every creature on the face of the earth. But let us who know the Lord Jesus as our Savior, recognize that we are His, not only by birth, but by the new birth. He is our Lord. And I trust that you and I who belong to the Lord are realizing in these days how important it is that we live to do the will of God, and that we are careful to search His Word to know what His will is. Americans have been deceived into thinking that what we approve is right, and

what we disapprove of is wrong. Let me remind all of us today that right and wrong are determined by God, and we in our country have legalized a number of things that are abominable in the sight of God. And we won't get away with defying His will because God is LORD, and Jesus Christ is LORD, too. How wonderful it is to know the Lord, and to do His will, but there is nothing more treacherous than continually defying the will of God. God is very patient, but there will come a day when His patience is exhausted. Read Revelation and see the judgments that are ahead for this world.

But I have one more Name, or Title, which Zacharias used for our Lord. And it is:

#### **D. “The Dayspring from on high” (Luke 1:78).**

The meaning of this expression is given to us in verse 79. The dayspring is the dawning of the day. It is when the light of the sun begins to dispel the darkness of the night. It speaks of the life which follows death.

This is the equivalent of saying that the Lord Jesus is “the Light of the world.” Or, as we shall see in our Sunday School lesson for next Sunday, we have these ominous combined with wonderful words concerning our Lord Jesus Christ:

1 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall (Mal. 4:1-2).

How very apparent it is today that our world, our nation, is enveloped in darkness, the darkness of ignorance concerning God, and the darkness of God's hatred of sin. But the Lord Jesus as “the Dayspring” can bring us light if and when we realize our depraved and sinful condition, and turn to Him Who is the Light of the world. He alone possesses this Title. Ane He is the One Who said:

I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8:12).

There is no way for any person to come out of the darkness and despair of sin unless he turns to Christ for salvation. And we have overwhelming evidence nationally and internationally that we as a nation are groping our way through a darkness that deepens all of the time. When we come to Christ, He guides “our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79).

**Concl:** I don't know what God's will is for us as a nation. Often a nation gets so corrupt that total judgment falls on it. We feel that it can't happen to us, but let me tell you that it can. Our only hope is that God will be gracious to us, and send us a mighty awakening so that people will confess their sins, and turn in repentance and faith to Christ for salvation. We have had warnings in hurricanes and floods and diseases and wars and crime which is out-of-hand. The whole world is in a turmoil, and people's lives are in turmoil to. And it is all because we have left God and His Word out of our lives. The Bible points the way to hope for us, and that hope if focused and centered in Christ. May those of us who know Him, be careful that we are walking in fellowship with Him every day. And should it be that even one is here today who does not know the Lord, seek Him now while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. He is the "horn of our salvation," the Supreme God, our "Lord," and "the Light of the world." As we approach the Christmas season, how important it is that we make sure that we know why He came. John the Baptist was raised up to tell his generation, and we who know the Lord are to be witnesses to our generation.