

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 1- Luke 1:67-80** 19- The Song of Zacharias- Part 3

February 22, 2009

Luke 1:67-80

I used to apologize for asking people to open their Bibles and follow along with me during the sermon- but I was wrong for apologizing, and I no longer do that. I don't make any apology now for opening the Word of God week after week, month after month, and year after year, because I really don't have anything to say that could even compare with what God had said in this Book. And nobody else does either- but dear friends, my goal in this Church is to get to a place where I don't say one single original word in any of my sermons, that I would simply know the Bible well enough, and that I could so rightly interpret it that I could simply repeat to you what God has already said.

Today- our ears and minds are being filled with Man's wisdom and Man's philosophy and Man's logic and Man's reasoning that cannot change our lives; that has no power to save our souls and that will not make us wise. So we are so blessed, so honored, so privileged to have the record of all that Jesus did and said in the pages of these 66 inspired, infallible, and inerrant Words.

Very quickly- turn with me to **Psalms 19**. This is the passage that best describes what we believe about the Bible- why we preach and teach expositionally, and why I do not want to say one single original word. **Psalms 19:7:**

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.

10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

So through expositional preaching- through line upon line, precept upon precept teaching, verse by verse through an entire Book of the Bible- You will find the very same six things about the Bible that David found out:

1. That the Word of God is perfect
2. That the Word of God is sure and steadfast
3. That the Word of God is right
4. That the Word of God is pure
5. That the Word of God is clean
6. That the Word of God is true and righteous altogether

And the result of you knowing these six things about the Word of God- is that these six things will happen to you:

1. Your soul will be converted
2. Your simple mind will be made wise
3. Your heart will rejoice
4. Your eyes will be enlightened
5. You will endure forever
6. You will belong wholly to the Lord

Moreover- or in addition to all of these six things- the Word of God will be more desired than gold and more desired than fine gold, and the Bible will be sweeter than honey and much more sweet than the drippings of the honeycomb, and by the Inspired, Infallible, Inerrant, and Authoritative Words of Scripture- you will be warned, you will be corrected, and you will be changed so that you may glorify God, and the result of that change is that your joy will be full.

So that is why I do what I do, and I pray that you see the great value in all of this- because the whole mandate and calling of a preacher

is to make God's Word known. And so Sunday after Sunday, month after month, year after year we look into the Word of God and we discover here such profound and immense Treasures of Truth that once we have begun to develop an appetite for the Word of God- frankly nothing else will satisfy us.

Now let me give you a little bit of background. There are four biographers of all that Jesus is and all that Jesus said and all that Jesus did in his First Advent- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And each one of these men wrote about the Life of Jesus from a perspective unique to each writer- covering the very same Story and the very same Truth. But when you put all four Gospel Accounts together- you get this perfectly harmonious composite picture of the full and complete Record of Jesus Christ.

And one of those four biographers is the Gentile writer named, Luke. And as we have discovered- Luke was, by profession, a medical doctor- but by Divine calling- Luke was a diligent historian, a very careful biographer, a thoughtful theologian, and most of all- a committed follower of Jesus Christ.

Luke was commissioned by God Himself to write the story of Jesus Christ- which is the greatest story ever told. And Luke really took this commission seriously, and he penned the longest and most detailed of the four Gospels. Though there are more chapters in **The Gospel According to Matthew**- there are more words in **The Gospel According to Luke**- and even after completing this Gospel Account- Luke wasn't finished with what he wanted to write- so he just kept writing the great Story of Salvation and wrote 28 more chapters in another Book that we call today- **The Acts of the Apostles**.

So this man named, Luke, is responsible for giving us fifty-two chapters of sacred, inspired Scripture- so that is why I say he is a very diligent historian. Luke starts before the birth of Jesus, and goes through the conception of Jesus, the birth of Jesus, the life of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the commission that Jesus gives to His apostles, and then launches into the story of the spread of the Gospel and the establishment of the Church throughout the world.

So, we're really studying a Biography as we journey through **Luke**. But it's more than just a Biography- it's also a Book of Theology because

as we have already seen- Luke is a very thoughtful, very careful and a somewhat systematic theologian.

Now we're not very far into this Book- we're only at the end of Chapter 1, and yet we have already being introduced to the profound depths with which Luke understands Theology. And in his most remarkable way- as he unfolds this Story of Salvation in the form of a narrative- it is injected at precise points with rich and deep Theology.

Now as Luke begins to unfold the greatest Story ever told- he starts with two great miracles- two conception miracles. In one case, an old barren couple, an old priest by the name of Zacharias, probably in his seventies or eighties- married to an old woman named Elizabeth- also in her seventies or eighties- not physically able to have children- barren all their lives- and having a stigma for that barrenness- and God miraculously allows them to conceive and have a son. That's the first conception miracle you're introduced in Luke's narrative.

The second one is even more remarkable because this one is not to otherwise barren people being miraculously able to conceive- but this is one in which a young virgin- who has never known a man- miraculously conceives a child by the Power of God- Who literally implants the child in her virgin womb. That woman being Mary, the virgin, who is pregnant with the Son of God, the Son of the Most High, the Messiah, the Savior of the world- Jesus Christ.

So the whole great Redemptive Story of Jesus then is launched by this writer with two conception miracles. In both cases there is an appearance of the angel Gabriel, and in Redemptive History- nobody had heard from an angel in over 400 years, there hadn't been a prophet in over 400 years, there hadn't been a miracle in over 500 years, and there hadn't been multiple miracles in a longer time than that. But Luke says at the time when the Messiah was coming into the world- angels appeared, a prophet is born, and miracles happened. And there is a flurry of Divine activity which, in a sense, is a preview of coming attractions because when the Messiah comes- there will be massive miracles wrought by Him and by His Apostles- the likes of which the world had never seen before and has not seen since.

The remarkable unfolding of the greatest Story ever told then is built around these two narratives of conception miracles and births. The first is the conception and birth of a man named John, and John is the prophet, the first prophet in 400 years and the last Old Testament

prophet, and by the words of Jesus, "**The greatest prophet up to that time who had ever lived.**"

So John Baptist's responsibility was to be the forerunner of the Messiah, the herald of the Messiah, the announcer- who would point to and identify the Messiah, and who would get the people ready for the Messiah's arrival by having them face their sins and repent and be prepared to receive their Savior.

The second birth is the birth of the Messiah Himself- Jesus Christ- Who is miraculously placed into the virgin womb of Mary to be born as Savior and King- the Lord of Salvation.

Now for this morning we come to the end of chapter 1. We have just read about the birth of John. The birth of Jesus occurs in chapter 2. We've already studied both conception miracles. We have gone through the announcement by the angel Gabriel in both cases. We have met the parents of John. We have met the parents of Jesus- Mary being His earthly physical mother and Joseph- His sort of *adoptive* parent who wasn't involved in the birth at all- but nonetheless was the legal father by adoption.

Now at the birth of John Baptist- a very common ceremony occurred eight days later and that was circumcision. Circumcision was a traditional Jewish occasion in which the surgery occurred which identified every male child with the nation Israel. And it was probably on that day of circumcision when everybody was gathered together, family and friends- that the miraculous Work of God occurred in the life of Zacharias. You remember that he had been unable to speak the whole time of his wife's pregnancy because of his unbelief, and his tongue is now loosed at the time of the circumcision of this child and out of his mouth, starting in verse 67, comes praise to God.

Now remember, Zacharias is a priest in Israel. He understands Jewish Theology very well. He understands the Old Testament Scriptures very well. So what comes out of his mouth is just rich with Old Testament Theology and Scripture. It's just loaded with it. Verse 67 says his father, Zacharias, probably holding this little eight-day-old baby in his arms, and being filled with the Holy Spirit- which several times in this first chapter of **Luke** is an indicator of someone is about to speak the Word of God, and that was the case with Zacharias here. Filled with the Holy Spirit- he prophesies gives us a message right from God- and says this beginning in **Luke 1:68**,

68 “Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,
69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant—
70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—
71 Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US;
72 To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant,
73 The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,
74 To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear,
75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

And we must understand that Zacharias knows what's going on here. He knows that the Messiah is already in the womb of Mary- because Mary has just spent three months at his house visiting with his wife. And he knows the Messiah is to be born and that this is the culmination of all of God's Plan of Redemption. He knows the Messiah is the Horn of Salvation- horn meaning the Authority and the Power of Salvation. And he knows the Messiah is coming.

So this is not just a song of praise for his son who is the forerunner of Messiah- although he does speak to the child in verses 76 and 77, calling him the prophet of the Most High who goes before the Lord to prepare His ways. Zacharias knows the role that his child is to play. But he knows much more than that- he knows that the birth of his son signals the arrival of the Messiah- Who is only a few months behind- already forming in the womb of Mary. And so this old priest is celebrating the blessedness of God who has finally fulfilled His Promises to David and to Abraham, and has brought Redemption and Forgiveness and Salvation to Man.

Now any priest worth his salt would have his heart filled with the hope of Redemption. You see, a priest's job was to bring God's people before God. That's what priests did. They were the intermediaries between God and the people. They cared about God's Will, they knew God's Word, and they cared about God's people.

And so any true and righteous priest would have cared about the Salvation of his brothers and sisters in Israel. And Zacharias cared

deeply about this. And when he heard the most remarkable News that the Messiah was to be born- the forerunner already being held in his own arms- his own dear son was to be the prophet of the Most High who would make the people ready for the arrival of Messiah- Zacharias immediately understood what was going on.

And this was the high point- the great pinnacle of Redemptive History. The Redeemer was about to be born- the great Messiah- the King- the Savior of the world was soon to appear. Angels, messages from God, miracles and the Messiah- Zacharias understood all of this- but he understood it in a limited Old Testament way. He understood it with an Old Testament perspective.

And let me talk about this for just a moment by way of review. You cannot understand the flow of Redemptive History- you cannot really get the clear picture of the relation of the Old Testament to the New unless you understand the significance of the term "Covenant".

God made certain Covenants with Israel, pledged or promised in the Old Testament to be fulfilled later on by what is accomplished by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. And that is the main difference between the Old and New Testaments. God made Promises in the Old and God fulfilled those Promises through Christ in the New. And it is very sad that there has been so much misunderstanding about the Covenants in our day. There's an awful lot of needless dialogue going on today about what the Covenants are and what the Covenants mean and how we are to understand the Covenants- what their nature is and whether they've been revoked or whether they're permanent and how they're going to be fulfilled and are they literally to be fulfilled or are they figuratively to be fulfilled and what are the actual Covenants and so forth and so on.

But I don't really think it's that difficult. Now don't get me wrong- it is a very critical issue in understanding Redemptive History to understand the Covenants- but we don't have to overdo it. And frankly, that's why I've slowed down our journey through the various Books of the Bible- because if we can just get what God is saying- if we can savor Christ in all of Scripture- we won't be deceived.

Now as I told you last time- as Zacharias sees the Messiah coming to bring Redemption to Israel- first of all- as well as to the world- as he sees the arrival of the Savior that he calls the "Horn of Salvation," this

old priest sees this in fulfillment of three great Old Testament Covenants.

The first of those Old Testament covenants we call the Davidic Covenant. It was a Covenant or a Promise made by God to King David. It first appears in **2Samuel 7**- and we've gone over that so we won't do it again. But Zacharias knows this- notice **Luke 1:69**. Zacharias says,

69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant—

70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—

71 Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US;

So Zacharias says that God has raised up a "Horn of Salvation" for us, and then he immediately connects that Horn of Salvation to the House of David- which involves deliverance, or Salvation from the enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

So Zacharias knows immediately that the arrival of Messiah is the fulfillment of that Promise that God made to David back in **2Samuel 7**. In that Chapter- God told David,

"I'm going to bring a Son out of your loins sometime in the future and I'm going to give him a kingdom like no other kingdom has ever existed. And I'm going to give Him a glorious kingdom, and He is going to reign over Jerusalem. And He is going to reign over Israel. And through that nation- He is going to reign over the whole world."

Now there are several indications of this Davidic Covenant that occur in other portions of the Old Testament. But the Davidic Covenant was the Promise that a Messiah would come who would be King. And He would establish the royal line of David again in Jerusalem. And He would reign over Israel- that is to say that Israel would be a sovereign nation again with their own Sovereign King- something they had not experienced for a really long, long time because they were either under Babylonian rule, or under the rule of the Medo-Persian Empire or they were under the distasteful and heinous and idolatrous and pagan leadership and rule of Greece, and now as the New Testament is being written- they were under the horrifying idolatrous, and pagan

occupation of Rome. So the land of Israel was forever being besieged and ruled by their enemies and those who hated them.

But the Promise to David was that some day they would be free from all of that. And that some day they would again be a sovereign nation like they were under David with their own Sovereign King- who would not only be sovereign over Israel- but Who would rule the entire world with a rod of iron.

And the psalmist had referred to that as well in **Psalm 2** and many other places. So this is the mind set of Zacharias, and so this old priest realizes that the arrival of Messiah signals the fulfillment of this Davidic Covenant and that this Redemption involves the fulfillment of God's Promises to David. So that was the Davidic Covenant.

But there was a *second* Old Testament Covenant that God made with Abraham- even before the Davidic Covenant. And this Covenant is recorded for us in **Genesis 12, Genesis 15, Genesis 18, Genesis 22**, and repeated several other times.

And this Covenant was that God would give to Abraham a great nation, a great land, and an immense blessing. And the fact of the matter is- that the Jew didn't have their land at the time of the New Testament. Their land was occupied by the Romans. Their land had been literally whittled down to a small portion of the original Promise that God gave to Abraham.

And there was tremendous conflict. The Jew was not experiencing blessing at all in that land. They were not experiencing righteousness and holiness in that land. But Zacharias knew what God had promised to Abraham, and so he says this in **Luke 1:72**- turn there with me- **Luke 1:72**:

72 To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant,
73 The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,
74 To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear,

That was the Abrahamic Promise or the Abrahamic Covenant.

So Zacharias knew about these two Covenants- Davidic and Abrahamic. And the Jews had lived in the light of their fulfillment- always looking forward to the time when these two Covenants would be

fulfilled. They had waited and waited for many centuries for these two Covenants to come to pass.

But there's yet another Covenant here in this passage that is critical to everything. While David and Abraham is mentioned in this passage in Luke- the name of this third or this New Covenant is not mentioned. But, it is the New Covenant, and we know that because of its component parts. So beginning in **Luke 1:77**, after that brief address to the child John in verse 76- Zacharias comes in to verse 77 and introduces the New Covenant. And here is the nature of the New Covenant- read with me **Luke 1:77**:

77 To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins,

78 Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,

79 TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace.

Now we have to understand, dear friends, that there's no issue of forgiveness in the Davidic Covenant, and there's no mention of forgiveness in the Abrahamic Covenant either- but it is only in the New Covenant where God promises the forgiveness of sins in which verse 78 God expresses tender mercy. It is the New Covenant, verse 78, that brings the Dayspring from on high which shall visit us to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and it is the New Covenant that guides our feet into the way of peace in verse 79.

Now when I first read this- it didn't strike me that Zacharias was talking about the New Covenant- but when I began to take those phrases that are used here, the reference to forgiveness, and to tender mercy, and to the dayspring from on high shining in the place of darkness, the shadow of death and guiding our feet in the way of peace, when I went to the Old Testament to find the source for these terms- there wasn't any- so then I realized that this is all about Zacharias joining in with Jeremiah and others and prophesying that through John pointing the way to the Messiah- the New Covenant was finally going to come in where we may be forgiven and saved!

So, this is, in fact, the third great Covenant- the New Covenant.

Now I remind you, there are three other Covenants in the Old Testament, too. One made to Noah that God would never again destroy the world by water, that's the Noahic promise. One made that God would have a permanent priesthood by which people could have access to God, the Priestly Covenant. And then the Mosaic Covenant was the Law of God in which God stated His moral perfection, and His holy and righteous Standard. But none of those three, not the Noahic Covenant, nor the Priestly Covenant, nor the Mosaic Covenant, had a Salvation feature in them. Those were *not* Covenants associated with Salvation.

There's nothing in the promise to Noah that requires Salvation. There's nothing in the Priestly Covenant requiring Salvation. And there's absolutely nothing in the Mosaic Law that can save anyone because no man can be saved through the Law, because no man can keep the Law perfectly and continuously.

But both the Davidic and the Abrahamic Covenants *do* require Salvation. In other words, the Jews couldn't receive the King and His Kingdom, and they couldn't receive the land and its blessing unless they were saved- unless they were forgiven and redeemed- so there *had* to be another Covenant- a "Saving Covenant" and that's the New Covenant.

And let me say this another way. When God made the Promise to David of a coming King to establish the glorious throne of royalty in Jerusalem- freeing Israel freedom from all its enemies and bringing them sovereignty and autonomy and a Kingdom like no other kingdom that ever existed- a Kingdom that would literally spread itself across the whole world and that the Messiah would reign over it with a rod of iron- a Kingdom that would never end- that would be eternal- that was an amazing and a thrilling Promise that the Jews had long awaited to see it fulfilled.

And when God promised Abraham a great nation, a great land, and great prosperity, and great blessing, and the righteousness and holiness and all of that- that, too, was a great and thrilling and amazing Promise and the Jew had longed to see.

But they hadn't received the fulfillment of either of those Promises and the nation of Israel still hasn't received the fulfillment of either Covenant today. Why? Because there's a barrier- and the barrier is sinful disobedience. That's the barrier- their own willful and continual disobedience to God. They couldn't please God. They couldn't keep the Mosaic Covenant. They couldn't keep His law. They were disobedient.

They were sinful- so consequently the whole nation of Israel has been cursed.

Now mark this. There has always been a faithful *remnant* of Jews all throughout time who *did* see their inability to keep the Law, and who came to God for Grace and Mercy, and who confessed their sin and who recognized their inability to keep the Law and who pleaded for Mercy and begged for Grace and who asked for forgiveness and were forgiven and saved.

There's always been a penitent remnant- even today. And we have to know that *everybody* who was saved- even under the Old Covenant- was saved the very same way we are saved today- by Grace through Faith in the finished Work of Christ alone- just like we are- not because they kept the Law- because nobody keeps the Law except Jesus.

But as a nation- the nation of Israel continues to be in an unfulfilled condition. And they have never yet received the fulfillment of the Davidic or the Abrahamic Covenants because- as a nation- they have never repented and believed. So right now- to this day- they are still cursed by their inability to keep the Law.

That is why I keep telling you that there is only one religion in the Bible. It is not true to think that there is one religion in the Old Testament and another religion in the New- that is not true. We have to see that all throughout history- even under the Law- even before the Law- there have been individuals who have believed God, seen their sin, cried out for mercy and who have been forgiven on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ- even though they lived before Jesus was born.

That's why the Bible calls Jesus- the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. God applied the virtue of His death, the substitution of His death for sinners, to sinners even before He was born as well as sinners since His death. So there's always been a faithful remnant- who all came to God the very same way.

And there is that remnant of Jews today. There are in many congregations all over the world right now- many Jewish people who have seen their sinfulness, who have repented of their sins, and who have come to God, and asked for Mercy and who have put their trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior. But as a nation- Israel has not repented and the barrier of disobedience is still there. They're still trying to earn their right to Abrahamic and Davidic fulfillment rather

than realize they can't earn it, and fall on their face and cry out for forgiveness and beg for Grace provided through Jesus Christ alone.

So you can take all the Promises to Abraham and take all the Promises to David, and you can take all the threats that came through Moses, and all the threats of cursing and terrible devastation to those who disobey, and add up all the Promises, and add up all the threats, and dump them on people, and they can't change one single heart. They will not overwhelm the law or power of sin that is inside people to rebel against God.

But we have to understand that there's nothing in the Davidic Covenant that can save one single sinner. There's nothing in the Abrahamic Covenant that can save one single sinner. There's nothing in the Mosaic Covenant that can save one single sinner- so there has to be *another* Covenant that has the Power to change the human heart and overpower the Law of sin at work within us- and Sovereignly save the sinful soul and that's why God gave the New Covenant because all the Threats and all the Promises of the other Covenants cannot break the power of sin that is at work within us, they cannot forgive sin, and they cannot create a new heart.

So here in **Luke 1:77** Zacharias introduces us to the New Covenant. And what is the characteristic of the New Covenant?

77 To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins,

78 Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,

79 TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace.

Now this is not a *theoretical* knowledge of Salvation but it is an actual experience of Salvation that comes by the forgiveness of sins. Now we read that New Covenant material in the Old Testament two weeks ago, **Deuteronomy 29** and **30**, particularly **Deuteronomy 30:6** and it says,

Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.

So here's how the New Covenant works- God Sovereignly gives you a new heart. And we also saw how that the New Covenant involves the forgiveness of all sin. And we went to **Jeremiah 31:31-34** and we went to **Ezekiel 36:25-27**, and what did we find? The New Covenant is this, God promises a new heart and a new spirit. And God promises to write His Law on your heart and God promises to forgive all your trespasses and God promises to plant His Holy Spirit in you. Those are all New Covenant Promises- and that is precisely what every sinner needs.

That is exactly what *we* need- and Israel will never experience those Promises to David and Israel will never experience the Promises to Abraham being fulfilled until they come to the Promise of God in the New Covenant- the Promise of forgiveness, and until they put their trust in God for forgiveness by virtue of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ in their place.

Now the New Covenant is what John Baptist- Zacharias' son, preached. Look at **Luke 3:3**- this is just kind of a preview of what we're going to see a little bit later in our journey. But in **Luke 3** we get a snapshot of what John Baptist preached. John didn't come preaching Davidic Promises being fulfilled- no, that would come automatically if they had believed. And John didn't come preaching Abrahamic Covenant fulfillment either- but this is what John Baptist preached in **Luke 3:3**,

And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;

So John Baptist was a New Covenant preacher. He was not preaching the Mosaic Law that can't save anyone. And he was not preaching that the Davidic or the Abrahamic Promises were going to come to pass no matter what- no John was preaching the message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

In fact, down in **Luke 3:7**- we find that some of the Jewish people didn't like John's message. And so, he says to them,

7 ... You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

9 Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

John said- “You're not going to have any blessing promised to Abraham unless you come to repentance and the forgiveness of sin in the New Covenant. It's not going to happen.” So we can see that many of the Jews were hanging on somehow to the fact that because they were born Jews- that God was mandated to fulfill Promises to David and to Abraham no matter what they did.

And John came saying the way to Davidic blessing, and the way to Abrahamic fulfillment is through New Covenant forgiveness.

Now remember, dear friends, that the New Covenant was ratified by the death of Jesus Christ. And the only reason that God can forgive our sin is because Jesus paid its full penalty- not simply because you repented. That's why Jesus took the cup that night **Luke 22:20** and said,

“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”

So what makes the New Covenant possible, that is to say why God can fulfill the promise of forgiveness, is because Jesus has paid the full price for our sin. Jesus died for your sins- fully satisfying the Justice of God. He paid the penalty, He took our sentence, He was executed for us- therefore God can forgive those who come to Him penitently and ask for it.

So what is the New Covenant? It is a Promise by God- unilaterally made by God- irrevocably made by God- it is an eternal Promise by God by which He will Sovereignly change a sinners' hearts and forgive their sins. And He will do it for *anyone* who comes in faith to Him- and some day for the whole nation of Israel.

Now originally- the Promise was made to Israel. It was the New Covenant given to the nation Israel. But actually the New Covenant is *personal*. The Davidic Covenant is *universal*- it's the Kingdom all over the world. The Abrahamic Covenant is *national*- it's their land full of blessing. But the New Covenant is *personal*- it has to occur in an individual heart.

And someday that will happen- and all Israel will be saved. Some day they will look on Him whom they've pierced, and mourn for Him as an only Son- that's the Messiah, and a fountain of cleansing will be open to them and they'll be washed from their sins.

That's what God promised through the prophet Zechariah. And this is the New Covenant. The writer of **Hebrews** says it's a New Covenant and he says that the New Covenant is a superior Covenant, made on superior Promises, brought forth by a superior Sacrifice made by a superior High Priest- because the New Covenant is the only Covenant that can forgive sin. And it's the only Covenant that can deal with disobedience. And it's the only Covenant that can change the human heart. And it's the only Covenant that can make sinners right with God.

So what comes in the New Covenant? Grace, a new heart, a new spirit, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of all sin, and eternal fellowship with God- that's the New Covenant. And that's exactly what Zacharias understood. He understood exactly what was going on- that this coming of the Messiah brings the fulfillment of the Salvation that is actually experienced by the forgiveness of sins. So the New Covenant is a *personal* Covenant.

And therefore- this New Covenant Salvation can't come by the accumulation of human merit or human goodness. And it can't come by human effort or works. And it can't come by religious activity. This Salvation through the New Covenant comes only by God's Grace active in justifying the ungodly, as Paul said in **Romans**.

Only when God Sovereignly chooses them and Sovereignly gives them a new heart and Sovereignly gives them His Spirit and gives them eyes to see and ears to hear can sinners repent of their sin, and only then can sinners recognize they have violated the Law of God, only then can they come to God in penitence and ask Him for Forgiveness and through this marvelous Grace and Mercy- their sins will be forgiven.

And only because of what God Sovereignly does in the sinner first will the Promise of all the blessings to Abraham and David be fulfilled. And that's available to any sinner today anytime- just like God made it available to every Jew. New Covenant Salvation is available to any sinner at any moment. It is available to you right now today. It is available to you no matter who you are and no matter what you've done. But nobody will ever receive this Salvation unless God shows Mercy to

them first by Sovereignly giving them a new heart and by Sovereignly forgiving their sin.

Romans 11 says, "Someday all Israel will be saved." But until that time, Gentiles can receive New Covenant Salvation which is the forgiveness of all their sins, a new heart, the law of God written in them, a new spirit, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, redemption, forgiveness and grace. What a blessing! There's nothing like it.

But *why* would God do all this? Look at **Luke 1:78**. Zacharias understood that what the Old Testament said about God was that the motive for everything was not obedience- but the tender Mercy of our God. Read that with me- **Luke 1:78**:

Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,

So Salvation does not come by way of human morality through obedience- it comes because of God's Mercy. That's all you can say. What is God's tender Mercy? It's splanchna eleos, and I use those words because splanchna means: *something in the core of your being- sometimes translated as "bowels"*. It's something down deep inside of you. And eleos literally means: *merciful*. So the tender Mercy of our God is the deep-down Mercy of God that affects the very core of our being.

So God would have been perfectly justified to just turn His back on impenitent wicked sinners and left them cursed- but He didn't- because there's a deep seated desire that God has for doing good; there's a deep seated Mercy in God; a deep seated Compassion that causes God to show favor to undeserving wicked sinners. It's a glorious Attribute, by the way, and it's celebrated all throughout the Old Testament, most notably maybe in **Exodus 33**, when Moses said, *"I want to see You, God, I want to see You, I want to know what You're like."* And God says, *"Okay, get over there in that rock and I'll let My glory pass by and you'll see My mercy."* When Moses wanted to see God's Glory- God showed Moses His Mercy. That's what God is like.

He's a God Who shows this Mercy to thousands. He is a God known as a pardoning God. The prophet said, *"Who is a pardoning God like You?"* God is motivated by Mercy and Loving-kindness. **"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."** Down deep in the very

Nature of God- in the essential fabric of His Being there is a Compassion and a Tender-Heartedness and a Goodness that He longs to extend to hopeless, helpless sinners in the midst of their miserable fallen rebellious condition. That's God's Own Personal Attribute that is the Force behind the New Covenant.

And Zacharias knew about this. He saw it and understood it. He understood the Mercy of God- the Tender Mercy of God. The word "tender" is that splanchna, that deeply felt Mercy of God. And that God because of that deeply felt Mercy desired to forgive sins. But that's not all. Zacharias understood more than that.

We saw last week in **Jeremiah 31**, and we saw it in **Ezekiel 36**, those two passages that describe the New Covenant, we saw the issue of the forgiveness of sin laid out. That's part of the New Covenant. But I want you to look, this morning, at **Luke 1:78& 79** because I want you to see the next statement and how critical that is to the New Covenant as well.

In these two verses- Zacharias adds another dimension to the New Covenant- and again this isn't whimsical, this isn't off the cuff- this is right out of the richness of his grasp of New Covenant teaching in the Old Testament. Here Zacharias defines the New Covenant further as that:

Luke 1:78b-79

**78 ... With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,
79 TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH,
To guide our feet into the way of peace."**

Now why did Zacharias pick that metaphor? Because that's explicitly New Covenant language right out of the Old Testament- and I'll show you that.

Let's look closely at it. As Zacharias further describes this great fulfillment that the Messiah will bring to the New Covenant, he describes it as the fulfillment as the Dayspring from on high visiting us. The word "dayspring" literally in the Hebrew is "day or sun rising." It doesn't identify the body that rises, whether it's the sun or the morning star or the glow of dawn that precedes the sun as it's just below the horizon. He simply is talking about the rising...we could even say the first light or the dawning. So Zacharias is saying that the New

Covenant is the dawning from on high. Now where is on high? Where's that? Where's on high? Heaven. Now in the morning the sun rises, of course, from the sky, and so there's a clear metaphorical connection, but he's talking about there's going to come a great light from Heaven- not the sun and not the morning star and not even the glow of dawn that precedes the sun and not the first light of the day physically. But Zacharias is saying here that there is coming from on high another Sun, a Sunrise, a Dayspring- Who will shine on those who will sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

And Zacharias is quoting right out of **Isaiah 9**. And he's referring to the first light of Sunrise that breaks the spiritual darkness of the sinful, lost world. And he's speaking about the dawning of the Heavenly Son, the "S-o-n", the Son of the Most High, the Savior- Who is the Divine Light- Who will break into the world's deep darkness and end the soul's night.

Now this old priest knew that verse in the last chapter of the last part of our Old Testament- the last prophet, Malachi, gave the last words, and the last words of hope and promise that he gave were these- 400 years earlier- **Malachi 4:2**, you can see it, it's in the last little six-verse chapter of your Old Testament. And what did Malachi say? He said,

But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings...

Malachi said, *"Get ready, folks, get ready, the Sun of righteousness...s-u-n...the Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in His beams, get ready the Sun of righteousness will come."* And it's been 400 years since then, at least, and the Sun of righteousness hadn't arisen and it was darker than it had ever been. So where was the Sun of righteousness?

Well, when Zacharias heard that his son was the forerunner to the Messiah and that Mary was pregnant with the Messiah, and when he knew the Messiah was coming- he rejoices and says that the Sunrise from on high shall visit us. So he knew exactly what this was. Zacharias knew that this was the fulfillment of **Malachi 4:2** and he rejoiced!

So Zacharias knew all this. He knew that this was New Covenant fulfillment, forgiveness, mercy, the Sunrise bringing light to the darkness, all of that came right out of those New Covenant that are found in the Old Testament.

So this is the New Covenant. What an immense, rich, profound insight we get from this rejoicing by Zacharias- Forgiveness, a new heart, a new spirit, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, the knowledge of God, the law of God implanted, light shattering the darkness, and peace in place of turmoil, peace forever...all that Zacharias anticipated would come in the Messiah, all would come in the Messiah.

So You and I when we believe Christ and receive New Covenant Salvation- we receive blessings now that are like those that will come through Abrahamic fulfillment, and we receive the rule and the sovereign reign of Christ in our lives personally like will come in the Davidic and earthly Kingdom of Christ.

And so the curtain falls on John in **Luke 1:80** and all it says about his life from eight days until the time he launched his ministry is,

And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

John lived in the desert around the Jordan area, the hill country of the Jordan area, the hill country of Judea, until the day of his public appearance to Israel. And we'll get to that day later when we go through **Luke 3**. Meanwhile we go back to the birth of Jesus next time. And even though it's not Christmas- next Sunday, Lord willing- we're going to begin to study the birth of Jesus Christ.

Let's come and pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.