

Zechariah's Prophecy

Jerrica silenced the beeping sound by fastening her seatbelt. Her mind was jam-packed with problems, thoughts, and feelings. Her job. Her finances. Her boyfriend. Her mother. Her sister.

Though Jerrica was exhausted physically and emotionally from the previous weeks, she had pushed herself to get up and go to church this morning. She hadn't been sleeping well the past few days and had awakened this morning at 5 a.m.

Jerrica had a 40-minute commute to church and was running ahead of schedule, so she didn't have to speed. She reached toward the radio button, then hesitated and dropped her hand. Maybe what she needed was silence. Maybe that would quiet her racing thoughts.

As she drove, Jerrica found herself silently talking to God. Mostly, she listened to the Holy Spirit and let the peace of God envelop her. It was nice.

By the time she got to church, she was no longer agitated or tired. She got out of her car with a smile on her face. She was ready for the Word of God.

"Praise the Lord," Sheri said. "You ready for church this morning?"

"Yes, I am," Jerrica said, her smile widening.

1. *What is your most memorable Christmas experience, and why?*

2. *In what ways does Christmas inspire you to express God's mercy to others?*

3. *Why is Jesus' birth meaningful to you?*

Zechariah's Praise to God

Luke 1:67–75 KJV

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,

75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

Luke 1:67–75 NIV

⁶⁷His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁶⁸"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

⁶⁹He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David

⁷⁰(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

⁷¹salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—

⁷²to show mercy to our ancestors

and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

⁷⁴to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,

and to enable us to serve him without fear

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Zechariah praises God because He has turned His face toward His people. Zechariah trusts God's redemptive purposes for His people. Gabriel told Zechariah what

John's role would be: he would be filled with the Spirit to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17).

Zechariah thanks God for raising up "a horn of salvation" through David's line (v. 69). First-century Jews knew that the coming king would be a descendant of King David. God would transform the broken world through this Messiah, who would be just and completely different from ruthless tyrants like Herod (compare Matt. 2:16). Zechariah has these promises in mind when he refers to God's "horn of salvation" (v. 69). A "horn" symbolizes the power of a beast of burden, like an ox with strong horns.

Zechariah praises God for keeping a promise made "long ago," sent through "holy prophets" (v. 70). God had promised to provide redemption through the Messiah. Zechariah sees the birth of his son as the beginning of the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

Zechariah is glad that God promised "salvation from our enemies" (v. 71). Because the Jews suffered at the hands of foreign rulers—most recently, the Romans—they were anxious to be free. They wanted relief from their oppressors and vindication for the wrong that had been done. Yet, the salvation God promised was not a political deliverance. Through Jesus, God would defeat the powers of Satan, sin, and death. For the time being, living in God's kingdom means anticipating the reign of peace and justice that Christ will bring.

Zechariah is thankful for God's "mercy" and steadfast love (v. 72). People can do nothing of their own power to make themselves worthy of salvation. But God is still faithful to "his holy covenant." Even when people are not faithful to God, He shows faithfulness to them. This is in keeping with the "oath he swore" to Abraham (v. 73; see Gen. 12:1–3; 22:16–18). God would soon fulfill His covenant promise to Abraham, in and through Jesus.

Zechariah is satisfied that God shall "rescue" His people "from the hand of [their] enemies" to serve Him (v. 74). Israel's service before God "without fear" is marked by "holiness and righteousness," which reflects the ministry

of repentance that Zechariah's son will bring (v. 75).

4. *How does Zechariah's prophecy reveal God's faithfulness and mercy to His people?*

5. *What is the significance of God's covenant with Abraham and its connection to Jesus' coming?*

6. *What does Zechariah say will be part of the Messiah's coming kingdom?*

Zechariah's Prophecy about John

Luke 1:76–80 KJV

76 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;

77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

Luke 1:76–80 NIV

⁷⁶And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;

for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

⁷⁷to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God,

by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

⁷⁹to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

⁸⁰And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Zechariah returns his attention to his son, John, who would be a "prophet" to prepare the way for the Lord

(v. 76). John will tell Israel that a redeemer had arrived: Jesus of Nazareth. Like a servant clearing a path for a king, he would prepare the way for Jesus.

John is like part of the construction crew that builds a straight road for the king, through mountains and valleys (compare Isa. 40:3–4). The people needed “knowledge of salvation,” for they required God’s help to transform their hearts (Luke 1:77; see Jer. 31:34). John would cause people to face their sin and to ask God’s forgiveness.

John’s ministry would also display the “tender mercy of our God” (v. 78). Zechariah’s witnessed this mercy. Even though he experienced doubt that God would give him a son, God did not revoke His plan. God’s design was not thwarted by Zechariah’s unbelief, and God even restored his speech at the perfect moment so that he might prophesy of God’s favor and mercy. God’s steadfast love is like the dawning of a new day, when darkness is forgotten. Like a “rising sun,” the Father’s mercy brings light to people “living in darkness and in the shadow of death” (v. 79).

Zechariah praised God. He knew that God was about to do something special. John’s ministry would help people be ready to follow Jesus. Verse 80 adds a postscript about Zechariah’s son: he “became strong in spirit.” John shared his parents’ faith and hope in God. He lived in seclusion in the barren wilderness of the Jordan Valley, west of the Dead Sea. This isolation may have been part of his preparation for ministry, just as Israel came through the wilderness before arriving in Canaan. While in wilderness, the “word of God” shall come to him and send him to begin to baptize people who repent of their sins (see Luke 3:1–3).

7. *How does Zechariah’s prophecy emphasize the importance of John’s ministry?*

8. *What is the purpose of John’s role to prepare the way for Jesus?*

9. *What impact will John’s ministry have on the people of his day?*

Waiting for God

I had just boarded a flight when I heard the unwelcome news that the “luggage netting” needed repair before my plane could fly. The pilot promised that a little waiting was not in vain, that a replacement was on the way. Eventually, the crew announced that passengers could walk back into the terminal, and a flood of people left in a hurry. But not half an hour later, the plane was fixed, and it took longer than that to round everyone up, especially those who had given up waiting and left the plane.

It reminds me that people who are asked to wait on God are prone to despair. Believers find it challenging to confront this attitude, especially when so much suffering runs rampant in this world. Nevertheless, there is light. That light comes from God, who fulfilled countless promises by sending Jesus. The Messiah arrived, and He brought us the hope of peace and salvation. Our hope in God’s faithfulness is not futile (like people on my plane feared) but secure in this fact: God is present and active in our lives.

Like Zechariah, we have a message that people need to hear. We glorify God for who He is and what He has done to redeem the lost (us), and we can offer hope to the hopeless and those who might give up waiting. Jesus has come! But we cannot be effective messengers if we have not allowed God to prepare our hearts. Our lives are full of distractions. We must strive to be focused on why we have placed our trust in Jesus. “The LORD’s unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him,” declares the psalmist. “Rejoice in the LORD and be glad!” (Ps. 32:10–11).

10. *Why might the world’s representation of Christmas cause people to feel discouraged?*

11. *How is the Holy Spirit preparing your heart for Christmas?*

12. *How does sharing your faith with others help you to celebrate Christmas?*

Insights about His Birth

Zechariah was blessed with a son even though his wife, Elizabeth, had been barren. This son had a remarkable calling; John would be the one to prepare the way for the Messiah. God is actively preparing our hearts for the message of Christ.

► *This week, pray for God to prepare your heart to hear the Christmas message in a new way. You may wish to use the space below to write out your prayer for this season.*

KEY VERSES

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 KJV

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. —Luke 1:76–77 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of December 9 through December 15

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 89:1–4, 27–37—God's Covenant of Love.
- Tue.** Luke 1:5–17—God Has Heard Your Prayer.
- Wed.** Luke 1:18–22—A Message of Promise and Grace.
- Thu.** Psalm 84—The Lord God Is a Sun and Shield.
- Fri.** Malachi 4—The Herald of God's Coming.
- Sat.** Luke 1:57–66—A Child of Wonder.
- Sun.** Luke 1:67–80—Praises to the God who Saves.