

bb-TBC-47 the gospel according to Zacharias

Hello there, and welcome to another session of Broken Bread Bible Studies, with me Ron Bailey from Biblebase.com and Mike Coles from newliferadio.com

If you followed our 'biblebase advent calendar' this study will be familiar to you. Part of that series were several studies where we looked at the expectations of the individuals who comprised the cast of the Advent Story.

We called it... Zecharias' anticipation of the Saviour - Thur 23rd Dec

This is study No 12 in our 'biblebase advent calendar' where we will be doing a count-down to Christmas, and a few days beyond, with brief bible studies (15 minutes or so). You ought to be able to find these studies in all kinds of places; Biblebase Podcasts, at Biblebase.com, Facebook group - FoBB, as a biblebase blog post, and especially at newliferadio.co.uk with Mike Coles...

The gospel record according to Luke begins with the story of an unknown priest and his wife

▼ Luke 1:5–7 NKJV

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. (Luke 1:5–7 NKJV)

Just a few lines that hint at a lifetime of heartache. They lived in a society that often looked on childlessness as a curse from God, and behind the curse there lay the suspicion of some dark sin. Young brides lived in expectation that they would become the mother of the Messiah.

The priest and his wife had a startling testimony. It is recorded that they were both righteous before God

walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. My English Bible has a full stop/period here, but I think a comma might capture the scene better. In their private and public life they were a faithful and godly couple, and/but they had no child because Elizabeth was barren.

No doubt, in the early years of their marriage they hoped and prayed and hoped. No doubt, well-intentioned neighbours tried to console her; “don’t worry dear, it will be all right, just you wait and see...” And she did wait and it slowly dawned on the godly couple that Elizabeth was barren. No doubt, it dawned on the neighbours too.

Barren, what a bitter burden to carry in that culture.

So hope died, and probably prayer too. Too late now. ***They were both well advanced in years.***

Have you prayed long for some definite blessing from God, and now the thought comes, ‘it’s too late now’. But there is not a hint of bitterness in this story... they were righteous before God, and continued to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. They left their unanswered questions with God and continued... **to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless.**

Linking the Old and the New Testaments together

The Old Testament scriptures had been completed 400 years before Luke Ch 1.

The book of Malachi begins with a groan and ends with a promise.

▼ Malachi 1:1–11 ASV

The burden of the word of Jehovah to Israel by Malachi.

I have loved you, saith Jehovah. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob’s brother, saith Jehovah: yet I loved Jacob; but Esau I hated, and made his mountains a desolation, and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness. Whereas Edom saith, We are beaten down, but we will return and build the waste places; thus saith Jehovah of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and men shall call them The border of wickedness, and The people against

whom Jehovah hath indignation for ever. And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, Jehovah be magnified beyond the border of Israel.

A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if then I am a father, where is mine honor? and if I am a master, where is my fear? saith Jehovah of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar. And ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of Jehovah is contemptible. And when ye offer the blind for sacrifice, it is no evil! and when ye offer the lame and sick, it is no evil! Present it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee? or will he accept thy person? saith Jehovah of hosts. And now, I pray you, entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he accept any of your persons? saith Jehovah of hosts.

Oh that there were one among you that would shut the doors, that ye might not kindle *fire on* mine altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, saith Jehovah of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense *shall be* offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name *shall be* great among the Gentiles, saith Jehovah of hosts. (Malachi 1:1–11 ASV)

▼ Malachi 2:7–8 ASV

For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for **he is the messenger of**

Jehovah of hosts.

But ye are turned aside out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble in the law; **ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi**, saith Jehovah of hosts. (Malachi 2:7–8 ASV)

▼ Malachi 3:1 ASV

Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to his temple; **and the messenger of the covenant, whom ye desire, behold, he cometh**, saith Jehovah of hosts. (Malachi 3:1 ASV)

▼ Malachi 4:4–6 NKJV

“Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, *With the statutes and judgments.*

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”

(Malachi 4:4–6 NKJV)

That was the last time that God had ‘risen up early and sent a messenger’.

Did God have nothing else to say?

Was it too late for the nation to fulfil its destiny?

No word about the Messiah for 400 years...

▼ Luke 1:8–12 NKJV

So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. (Luke 1:8–12 NKJV)

▼ Luke 1:13–17 NKJV

But the angel said to him, “**Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard;** and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong

drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. **And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children," and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.**" (Luke 1:13–17 NKJV)

God's interrupted conversations...

- as far as Zacharias and Elizabeth were concerned this conversation had ended decades ago.
- but now when ***They were both well advanced in years. God returns to the conversation.***
- to an onlooker it would have seemed that the Malachi conversation between God and his people had ended centuries ago, ***now God returns to that conversation.***

Just because God is silent it doesn't mean the conversation has ended.

▼ 2Peter 3:8 NKJV

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (2Peter 3:8 NKJV)

9 months later

- Zacharias' unbelief
 - Mary's faith
- ▼ (Luke 1:59–60 NKJV)

So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." (Luke 1:59–60 NKJV)

Again time has moved on and we are at the celebration of the son promised to Zachariah. For the whole of Elizabeth's pregnancy Zechariah had remained dumb. At the child's circumcision those who attended were convinced that the

obvious name for the child was Zacharias, after his father the old priest. But Elizabeth was adamant. He was to be called John, the gift. The attendees remonstrated with Elizabeth but Zacharias settled the discussion by taking a wax tablet and

inscribing 'John is his name!' As they looked on, Zacharias' dumbness was released and his liberated tongue burst out in praise to God.

Everyone was in expectation. What did this miracle indicate? Surely the child was destined for some significant task. Zacharias experiences a filling of the Holy Spirit and bursts into prophecy.

▼ Luke 1:67–79 NKJV

Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:67–79 NKJV)

The prophecy has two parts.

The first refers not to John but to the one for whom John will serve as messenger. John's role was always to be second to his kinsman Jesus. This prophecy is very full in its scope. I like to call the first part of it 'The Gospel according to Zacharias.' We will divide it into its many topics.

1. The Davidic dynasty returns

▼ Luke 1:68–69 NKJV

“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, (Luke 1:68–69 NKJV)

The horn of the Davidic dynasty had lain broken for almost six centuries. For some the hope had not died but the golden days of David and Solomon had long passed from the minds of the people. They had been under the feet of the Gentiles in one form or another for those six centuries. There was the brief respite of the Maccabees. Seven battles in seven years and the hope faded again. Its lingering memory is refreshed annually only among the Jewish community in the celebration of Hanukkah.

The voice of the prophets had been silent too. No canonical prophet, no authoritative word from God since the times of Malachi some 400 years earlier. Malachi reveals God's continuing disappointment with the nation even following the remnant's return from Babylon.

▼ Mal 11–2 ASV

The burden of the word of Jehovah to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, saith Jehovah. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? (Mal 11–2 ASV)

Oh that there were one among you that would shut the doors, that ye might not kindle fire on mine altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, saith Jehovah of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. (Mal 1:10 ASV)

But as his prophecy and the Old Covenant scriptures come to their end there are final promises and a final warning. Malachi is a book that has its focus on messengers. Malachi means my *messenger*. Malachi rebukes the priests for failing to fulfil their role as God's messengers. Then in the last chapter he promises two messengers: the Messenger of the Covenant and the messenger of the Messenger. The Messenger of the Covenant is Christ, the messenger of the Messenger is John Baptist, Zacharias' and Elizabeth's son.

▼ Mal 31 ASV

Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to his temple; even (margin) the messenger of the covenant, whom ye desire, behold, he cometh, saith Jehovah of hosts.
(Mal 31 ASV)

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Jehovah come. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers; lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.
(Mal 45–6 ASV)

And there is the final warning. The last word of the Old Covenant scripture – a curse.

2. A Powerful Salvation

But now Zacharias' prophecy begins with an assertion that God has re-established the Davidic dynasty...

...And provided one who will be the bringer of a powerful salvation.

▼ Luke1:69 NKJV

And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, (Luke1:69 NKJV)

The horn is the symbol of power in the Old Testament. I love this introduction. In all the wonder and the glory of the gospel it is easy to forget that it is much more

than a pleasing tune and comforting words. Paul's testimony to the power of the gospel is part of his own experience and part of what he called 'my gospel'.

▼ Rom 1:16–17 NKJV

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (Rom 1:16–17 NKJV)

The gospel is 'God's power', *dunamis*, enabling power. It comes to deliver men and women from their bondages and to set them free. The promises of God for conquest of the land had never been fully realised during the time of Joshua and the Judges but David defeated all his enemies and the land was completely under his authority.

Zacharias is declaring that the Seed of David has come to bring a powerful deliverance for God's people.

3. God vindicates the Prophets

▼ Luke 1:70 NKJV

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, (Luke 1:70 NKJV)

The prophecy is a new beginning but it has an ancient provenance. The prophecies of the Seed of the woman, and the Seed of Abraham, and the Seed of Judah, and the Seed of David all find their *terminus ad quem*, their destination, in the person of the Messiah.

4. Salvation from our enemies

The gospel according to Zacharias reveals the nature of this powerful salvation.

▼ Luke 1:71 NKJV

That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us... (Luke 1:71 NKJV)

It is wonderful that we should be forgiven our sins and that the record of them should be blotted out, but as members of the human race we have enemies – and one enemy in particular. Christ comes to break the grip of him who hates us.

The gospel does not only square the records and make it possible for God to declare us to be just/righteous in his sight, it comes to break the death-grip in which we are held. He came...

To be of sin the double cure
To cleanse me from its guilt and power.

5. The Fulfillment of the Promise to the fathers, the Oath sworn to Abraham

We are back to that unique Oath that God swore to Abraham. An oath did not bind God any more than his simple word would. God cannot lie. But he swore that oath in order to ‘encourage’ us to put our trust in Him.

▼ (Luke 1:72–73 NKJV)

To perform the mercy promised to our fathers
And to remember His holy covenant,
The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: (Luke 1:72–73 NKJV)

6. To be ‘servants without fear’

This has echoes of the promise of God to Moses that the people who were delivered would be the people who served him. They would become his own special people.

▼ (Luke 1:74 NKJV)

To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear, (Luke 1:74 NKJV)

When the people of Israel were delivered their enemies’ corpses were seen dead in the waters of the Red Sea. They would never have to fear them again. They would never have to worry about a knock on the door in the middle of the night from the Egyptian overlords. They would never need, ever again, to look over their shoulder in fear.

7. In holiness and righteousness before Him

▼ Luke 1:75–76 NKJV

In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. (Luke 1:75–76 NKJV)

They would serve him in holiness and righteousness. Righteousness and holiness are not exactly the same thing.

- Righteousness has to do with a right standing before God. It points to our unrighteous acts, our sins. Its has to do with the quantity or number of our sins, the score.
- Holiness is something different. It has to do with nature and life itself. The gospel according to Zacharias has to do with lives, lives free from guilt and a life that is free to obey him.

8. All the days of our life

Most believers have this hope. They look forward to an existence beyond this life where, to quote an old hymn...

Then we shall be where we would be;
Then we shall be what we should be;
Things which are not now, nor could be,
Then we shall be what we should be;
Then shall be our own.

That's all well and good and a source of hope and comfort, but the gospel according to Zacharias does not have the future in view but rather the present. This is not heaven when we die but *all the days of our life*. This is God's will being done 'on earth as it is in heaven'

What a gospel this is! We are 'in trust with the gospel' (1 Thes. 24). What gospel? This gospel! What wonderful good-news. Little wonder that Paul was unashamed in his proclamation.

▼ Rom 1:15–17 NKJV

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” (Rom 1:15–17 NKJV)