

John the Baptist: Messenger of Mercy

A Lay Commentary on Luke 1:57-80

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Introduction

When Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the Temple (1:5-25), he told Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son even though she was past her childbearing years. In addition, they would be required to name him John. Zechariah returned home and Elizabeth got pregnant. That story closes with Elizabeth acknowledging, “The Lord has done this for me. In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.” Luke also told us that Elizabeth remained in seclusion for the first five months of her pregnancy. The next story (1:26-38) began in the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy when Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she will conceive Jesus without a biological father through a miracle of God. Gabriel also informed Mary that Elizabeth was pregnant. Mary hurried off to visit Elizabeth, who lived some 60-100 miles away. The story of their meeting ended with Luke relating, “Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and returned home.” Adding up the periods mentioned brings us to the end of her nine-month pregnancy and the beginning of the present story.

57

**When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby,
she gave birth to a son.**

Remember in those days that they did not have a way of determining the sex of a baby until it was born, so they still had to trust that Gabriel’s promise would come true that it would be a boy. After nine months of waiting and trusting, here is the physical confirmation of Gabriel’s promise.

58

**Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy,
and they shared her joy.**

In that culture, one’s community was a lot more important than it usually is to us. They did not appear to have the individualistic orientation we do. As products of the American melting pot, you and I often do things simply because we want to do them. In fact, our culture gives us the freedom to express ourselves as individuals and even demands us to act on our own much of the time. In that culture, people made decisions and acted as a community. People had very little freedom to express themselves individually. Many of the situations related in the Gospels include a gathering of people or even a crowd as a powerful influence on the main characters in the situation. In the earlier story of Gabriel appearing to Zechariah in the Temple, Luke remembers to include the group of worshippers gathered outside, and he relates their participation in and reaction to what God did in Zechariah’s life (1:10, 21-22).

It is conceivable that if Elizabeth lived in our culture she could bear, name and raise John in total secrecy, but not in that culture. Luke is here introducing the community that a reader familiar

with this culture will expect to bear a heavy influence on Elizabeth and Zechariah. The neighbors and relatives will, I'm sure, continue to play a major role in their lives all through his childhood. Maybe that is one of the reasons John lived in the wilderness later—to be led by God to say and do what God was calling him to. We'll come back to the influence her neighbors and relatives wanted to exert on them.

heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy,

Mary highlighted God's mercy as a central theme of her Song (1:50, 54). Zechariah will include it as a central theme in his Song (1:72, 78), and Luke will continue to highlight it throughout his Gospel. In Elizabeth's case, God showed his mercy to her by miraculously providing a son for her past her childbearing years, thereby lifting her social disgrace (1:25). However, on a larger scale, God showed His mercy to Israel by providing, through her, the messenger that would tell the people of Israel their long awaited Messiah is finally here.

and they shared her joy.

This suggests the beginning of the fulfillment of Gabriel's prophecy to Zechariah about John, "He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord." (1:14)

59

**On the eighth day
they came to circumcise the child,**

Jewish law required the parents to circumcise a newborn boy on the eighth day of his life. They circumcised a baby boy in order to commit him to a covenant relationship with God and identify him with the covenant community. God instituted the practice of "brit milah" (Covenant of Circumcision) when He made His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:10-14).

Leviticus 12 specifies what a woman is to do after she gives birth to a son:

- She is religiously unclean or impure for seven days after childbirth.
- On the eighth day, the boy is to be circumcised.
- The woman must wait thirty three days to be purified from her bleeding.
- After this purification period, she is to bring a lamb to the priest to sacrifice.

59b - 61

**and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah,
but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."
They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."**

"They," of course, refers to the group of neighbors and relatives. The book of Ruth (4:17) shows an example of the women's role in naming a child. In the OT, the mother gives the name to the child twenty-eight times, while the father gives the name eighteen times.¹ Therefore, they were within the social customs to attempt to name the child. They wanted to name him Zechariah after his father. Against this group pressure, Elizabeth wanted to obey the angel Gabriel who told

Zechariah in the Temple to name the son John. Her emphatic reply literally means “No, no way! But rather, he is to be called John.”

John is from the Hebrew name, Johanan, which means “God has been gracious.” This is a fitting name for a son miraculously given to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age. It is also fitting because he will be the messenger for the Messiah who will save His people by His grace. A new age is arriving where grace will abound. To name him something different heightens everyone’s curiosity. What else will be different about the son they were longing for? The unusual nature of this child will not end with the miraculous conception.

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Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.

That they made signs to Zechariah implies that Gabriel took away his hearing along with his speech. They defer to Zechariah to state his desire. As the father, he probably had the final say.

63

**He asked for a writing tablet,
and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.”**

By naming him John, Zechariah displayed his obedience to Gabriel’s instructions.

64

**Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed,
and he began to speak, praising God.**

Luke uses the word immediately several times in this Gospel and in Acts to show God’s decisive, efficient and effective way of acting when He chooses. (see: 4:39; 5:25; 8:44, 47, 55; 13:13; 18:43; Acts 3:7; 16:26) In 1:20, Gabriel told Zechariah, “And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time.” Fulfilling Gabriel’s prophecy, God heals Zechariah immediately upon his act of obedience. He utters the prophecy contained in verses 68 – 79. First, though he must finish his “orderly account.” (1:3) We’ll study Zechariah’s Song after Luke finishes the narration of what happened on this unusual day.

65

**The neighbors were all filled with awe,
and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.**

That Luke now only specifies neighbors may imply that Zechariah and Elizabeth already told the relatives what they were going to name the boy. Luke has to leave out details in order to keep the narrative flowing. The emphasis is not on who told who and when but on the reaction of awe and the spreading of the news to the people of the hill country. This kind of awe characterizes people’s reactions to Jesus’ miracles elsewhere in Luke and Acts. As a result, they praise God (Luke 5:26; Acts 19:17).

Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?”

For the Lord’s hand was with him.

The purpose of verses 57-65 is to set the stage for this all-important question. Luke inserts the editorial aside, “For the Lord’s hand was with him.” He exercises self-control by not inserting many of these personal comments. This is one of the rare ones, and he uses it not only to end the narration of what happened but more importantly to strengthen the significance of the question that was on everyone’s minds and lips. At any normal child’s birth, it is natural to wonder what kind of person the child will turn out to be and what the child is going to accomplish in life. However, this is an unusual child in that the Lord has an most unusual plan for his life. Fortunately, for these neighbors and relatives (and for us) God reveals ahead of time how this child’s life is especially significant to His divine plan. First, Gabriel told Zechariah in the Temple that he would be the messenger to the Messiah predicted five hundred years earlier by Malachi. In the following verses, Zechariah, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, will extend more revelation about John. About thirty years later, when John is preaching his message of repentance the people will be “wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.” (Luke 3:15)

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

This continues to be an exciting time in Israel’s history. When the Holy Spirit filled certain people in OT times God often revealed His divine point of view through them. However, for hundreds of years the Jews had been scattered and weak. God did not speak through prophets or lead through godly rulers. Finally, His Spirit is starting to move, revealing that God is working out His plan of salvation again. OT prophet Joel had predicted (Joel 2:28-29):

In the last days, God says,
 I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
 Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
 your young men will see visions,
 your old men will dream dreams.
 Even on my servants, both men and women,
 I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
 and they will prophesy.

When the Holy Spirit came upon the Disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2) Peter explained that it was a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. What is more, this fulfillment began some thirty years earlier surrounding the births of John and Jesus. The Holy Spirit filled John at his conception, came upon Mary to create in her an embryo without a biological father, filled Elizabeth to reveal to her that Mary was carrying the Messiah in her womb, and now the Holy Spirit fills Zechariah and reveals the following revelation about what God is doing.

Now that Luke has finished the narration of the story he inserts the prophecy by Zechariah in which he reveals the significance of this unusual child. This, like most prophecies, takes the form of a poem. A poem can often express a depth and breadth of meaning that prose cannot. Poetic language and structure is very conducive to summing up the sweeping plans and actions of God as well as the exalted nature of His being.

The Song as a whole is a declarative psalm of praise and comes in two parts. The first part is a benediction; the second is a prophecy.

Zechariah's Song, Part 1: The Benediction

68

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

This psalm (song) is about what God is doing, the focus is on Him and His choice to act on behalf of His people. The past tense is a device that prophecy uses to affirm that we can be so certain it will come true that we can say it is already accomplished. God will most definitely visit His people to redeem them. We can count on it.

The basic meaning of redeem is to set free. Wilhelm Mundle describes it well:

Whenever men by their own fault or through some superior power have come under the control of someone else, and have lost their freedom to implement their will and decisions, and when their own resources are inadequate to deal with that other power, they can regain their freedom only by the intervention of a third party.²

The first part of Zechariah's Song, the Benediction, will focus on the physical/political kind of salvation that Israel is longing for. The second part, Zechariah's prophecy about John will focus on a different, spiritual kind of salvation—the forgiveness of sins. After we study both of these sections we will attempt to resolve the apparent conflict the two present us.

69 - 75

**He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),**

In the ancient Near East a "horn" was a symbol of strength.³ Think of how a bull's horn or a ram's horn symbolizes the strength of the animal when they use it as a powerful and dangerous weapon. Psalm 18:1, 2 then add this idea of strength to the idea of salvation. David writes,

I love you, O Lord, my strength.
The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.
He is my shield and the horn of my salvation,
my stronghold.

I call to the Lord,
who is worthy of praise,
and I am saved from my enemies.

Therefore, God is David's strong, immovable, and impenetrable salvation. Then in Psalm 132, the Psalmist is writing about God's promise to David about raising up the Messiah, the eternal king, from David's future ancestral line. (see also 2 Samuel 7:11-16) Then in verse 17 he writes, "Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one." Finally, Zechariah puts these two pieces together when he says, "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." Therefore, he is saying that God has now raised up this Messiah, a strong savior from the line of David."

Notice that Zechariah says "for us." Who is he referring to? His immediate audience is the group of neighbors and relatives that came to circumcise and name the baby. They needed to understand the significance of these extraordinary events: Gabriel appearing to Zechariah and Mary, Elizabeth and Mary's visit and, on this day, the naming of John and Zechariah's release from being unable to hear and speak. "Us" also refers to the people throughout the hill country of Judah who would hear the news as it spread. Finally, it refers to all the people of Israel.

71

(He has raised up a) salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—

Zechariah specifies that this salvation is from Israel's enemies.

72

***(He has raised up a salvation)
to show mercy to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:***

This is the second time Luke reminds us why these unusual events are happening to these people. The first is in Mary's song (1:55). God is fulfilling His promise to Abraham. This is not a new story. It is a continuation of an old, old story. (see Genesis 12:2,7; 13:14; 15:5,6; 17:1-8; **18:18; 22:17, 18**) The reason God is acting now is that He promised Abraham He would, and He has not forgotten His promise, that is, the covenant He made with Abraham. God's mercy toward all of humanity motivated Him to make this covenant with Abraham. These words echo Psalm 105:8, 9)

Luke 6:36 shows that mercy is one of Jesus' central teachings: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." The Greek words that the NIV translates "to show mercy" literally mean, "to do, or perform mercy." God is acting out His merciful nature in providing the strong Davidic savior who will deliver His people as well as people from every nation. To emphasize the central role of God's mercy, the word mercy appears in almost the exact middle of this section.⁴ Mercy will appear in the middle of the next section for the same reason. The Gospel authors describe Jesus' response to people several times as compassionate (see commentary on verse 78 below).

**to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.**

Mere deliverance from enemies and the establishment of the nation God promised Abraham is not the final goal. God's goal is to move His people into a safe position where they can serve him without fearing what enemies will say or do to them. He desires their service to be characterized by holiness and righteousness forever with no interruptions to fight off enemies who want to take their land and possessions from them. The language in this passage about deliverance reminds us of the greatest deliverance Israel ever experienced—the Exodus. God told Moses to tell Pharaoh to “Let my people go, so that they may worship me...” (Exodus 7:16) This is God's final goal for His people: That they dwell in permanent peaceful community where they are serving God through holy and righteous lives.

Before they can be delivered, God's people must become holy and righteous before God. Just as a priest like Zechariah must be spiritually cleansed before He can enter the presence of God, His people must also be cleansed of their unrighteousness before they can live in that permanent state. Just as a vessel that is consecrated for service must be purified first, the people of God must also be purified before they can serve in holiness and righteousness—but how? Zechariah addresses this need for spiritual cleansing as the second kind of salvation in this Song, that is, the forgiveness of sins. Zechariah addresses John in the first person and his role in the spiritual cleansing.

Zechariah's Song, Part 2: The Prophecy

76a

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

It is important to note how from the beginning of the Gospel of Luke the focus has shifted back and forth between the individual main characters and the corporate people of God. God blesses and uses the individuals to bless the people as a whole, while the history of the people's experience with God interprets the significance of the events experienced by the individuals. For example, Mary begins her Song with her attention focused on how God blessed her individually but then expands her view to what God is doing to act mercifully toward His people. The narrative lens zooms back in to focus on Zechariah, Elizabeth and their neighbors and relatives. Zechariah begins his Song taking in the wide view of God working to deliver His people, but now he zooms back in to focus attention on John and his individual role in that grand scheme. Mary's Song begins with the role that she as an individual plays and ends with the people of God; Zechariah's Song begins with the focus on the people of God and ends with the role John the individual plays. The two balance each other beautifully and perhaps even symbolically.

Zechariah could have just as easily left out “my child.” Indeed, up to this point John has only been referred to indirectly as “the baby” (1:41, 44) or “the child” (1:59, 62) or “this child” (1:66). Zechariah now addresses him directly, affectionately and probably proudly!

Gabriel told Mary that Jesus “will be called Son of the Most High” (1:32). Now Zechariah affirms that John will be “a prophet of the Most High.” These descriptive titles remind us of Isaiah’s prophecies (Isaiah 1:26; 58:12; 60:14; 62:4) To be chosen to be God’s prophet is a very high honor, and God chose John to be the prophet with the highest honor of any prophet has ever been chosen for.

76b

**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,**

The second clause gives the end goal God has in mind. He wants to forgive His people of their sins. He is coming in order to accomplish that, but the people must be prepared first. God chose John to be the prophet that Isaiah predicted would prepare the way for the Lord’s coming (Isaiah 40:1-30):

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling:

“In the desert prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God...”

This is the same prophet Malachi predicts (Malachi 3:1):

God says,

“See, I will send my messenger,
who will prepare the way before me.
Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking
will come to his temple;
the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire,
will come,”
says the Lord Almighty.

This teaches that the Messiah will actually be the Lord God Almighty Himself and He will come to His temple. First, though, He will send a messenger to prepare the way before Him. In the ancient world, the roads were terrible, so when a king would travel to another city they would often send a work crew ahead of him to repair the road to make it smooth for the king’s carriage. In the Messiah’s case however, a messenger will tell the people to prepare spiritually for the Messiah’s arrival. The Messiah will then come to the temple to worship God and offer a sacrifice. In Jesus’ case, of course, he would offer Himself as the sacrifice.

77

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

Knowledge of salvation is another way of saying “the experience of salvation.” Therefore, the experience of salvation must come through the forgiveness of sins. This makes sense since we must know that God forgave our sins before we can experience our salvation in any way. In the first part of Zechariah’s Song, he reveals that God wants to deliver (save) Israel physically/politically. That is one kind of salvation. Here Zechariah introduces the second kind of salvation, a spiritual salvation—the forgiveness of sins. Zechariah is not saying that John will forgive people of their sins. John is the messenger to prepare the people for God’s forgiveness. This appears to be the permanent forgiveness that Jeremiah refers to (Jeremiah 31:34):

“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”

78

because of the tender mercy of our God,

In the Greek text, tender mercy is in the middle of this prophecy that includes verses 76 – 78, making God’s mercy the central and most important idea as it was in the previous section of the Song. In fact, the word for tender is in the exact middle. Twenty-six words come before it and twenty-six words come after it. The word can also be translated “compassionate.” The Gospel authors use the verb form of the word several times when describing how Jesus responded to people in need.

Matthew 9:36/ Mark 6:34

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 14:14

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Other examples are:

- Matthew 15:32/ Mark 8:2, “I have compassion for these people
- Matthew 18:27, “The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.”
- Matthew 20:34, “Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes.”
- Mark 1:41, “Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.”
- Mark 9:22, “But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”
- Luke 7:13, “When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her ...”
- Luke 10:33, “But a Samaritan ... took pity on him.”
- Luke 15:20, “his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.”

God's mercy motivates Him to provide relief from both physical and spiritual suffering. (v. 72).

by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

This relief will come in the form of the Messiah. Zechariah uses the imagery of a rising sun or dawn, combining several images from the Old Testament: a luminary, illumination and a sunrise were all applied to the Messiah.

Numbers 24:17a applied the imagery of a luminary to the Messiah:

I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near.
A star will come out of Jacob;
a scepter will rise out of Israel.

Isaiah (60:1-3) applied the imagery of illumination to the Messiah:

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.
nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Malachi (4:2) applied the imagery of a sunrise to the Messiah:

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

Exodus 13:21 uses "light" as a metaphor for God's presence:

By day the Lord went ahead of them ... by night in a pillar of fire to give them light...

Psalms 27:1 uses light as a metaphor for salvation:

The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?

In Luke 2:32, Simeon will call Jesus:

a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.

Finally, Jesus will refer to Himself as the bright Morning Star in Revelation 22:16.

We can see from all of this that the rising sun is “The Rising Sun” or “Dawn,” or “Sunrise” (NASB)

This Rising Sun will come to us from heaven “because of the tender mercy of our God.”

79

to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death,

Zechariah uses Isaiah’s imagery of light as deliverance.

Isaiah 9:2

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light:
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.

Isaiah 42:6, 7

... I will keep You (Messiah) and will make you to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,
to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

The wording of Psalm 107:10-15 uses similar imagery.

Isaiah presents the utter helplessness and despair of those who are oppressed by the unjust in
Isaiah 59:8-10:

The way of peace they do not know;
there is no justice in their paths.
They have turned them into crooked roads;
no one who walks in them will know peace.
So justice is far from us,
and righteousness does not reach us.
We look for light,
 but all is darkness;
for brightness,
 but we walk in deep shadows.
Like the blind we grope along the wall,
 feeling our way like men without eyes.
At midday we stumble as if it were twilight;
 among the strong,
we are like the dead.

From these passages in Isaiah and Psalm 107, we may conclude that the phrase “to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death” also summarizes in a parallel manner “to rescue us from the hand our enemies.” (vs. 74)

to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

People need the Light not only to guide them away from an imprisonment from war but also away from potential war and imprisonment. These words echo Psalm 119:105:

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a lamp for my path.

As a conclusion to this second section, they also summarize and restate in a parallel manner the concluding words of the first section: “to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”

Prophetic language does not intend to describe specifically how God is going to work or give the details of His plans. If God laid it all out it would give too much information to the enemy and it would overwhelm our minds and hearts. Instead, through prophetic imagery we can get a glimpse of His compassionate character and His unstoppable abilities which are the very things we need to know about Him in order to place our trust in Him.

80

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

The job of a good author is to use the beginning of the story to introduce the major characters and their world and make the reader curious about what can possibly happen to them. What obstacles and challenges will they encounter and how will they respond to them. These prophecies at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke are visionary. They are breathtaking in their scope and significance not only to Israel but to all of humanity. God made these promises of redemption, salvation and restoration for the past two millennia and is claiming through these prophecies to be finally accomplishing them. But how?

As I stated earlier, Zechariah’s Benediction in verses 68-75 focuses on the physical/political kind of salvation (redemption/deliverance), and then his prophecy about John focuses on a different spiritual kind of salvation (forgiveness of sins).

The powerful and oppressive Roman Empire now rules Israel, and the people of Israel long for deliverance. They are looking for a strong deliverer. Many people rejected Jesus because he did not fulfill their expectations of that strong deliverer. There is a clear example of this in Luke 24:21. After Jesus was crucified two of his disciples were walking on a road, and He began to walk along with them and ask them questions. They did not recognize him and spoke with Him very frankly. The Disciples expressed their disappointment by saying “we had hoped that he was

the one who was going to redeem Israel.” (Luke 24:21) Zechariah, too, seems to have this physical and political freedom and restoration in mind, since he also talks about “salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us (vs. 71). However, he will also talk about salvation as “salvation through the forgiveness of their sins (vs. 77).”

Therefore, some have seen “two conflicting images of salvation, the one social and political, the other spiritual.”⁵ The best way to resolve the tension is to see that:

forgiveness of sins and restoration as a people were both woven into the tapestry of divine redemption. For Luke, the reconciliation of God’s people and deliverance from enemies are both part of one divine movement. For him, visions of salvation cannot be categorized as social or religious or political, for the epoch of peace is characterized by all of these.⁶

Here in lies one of the reasons the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Many of the OT prophecies contain this mixture of images of salvation as well. In light of the fact that Zechariah was speaking God’s perspective through the influence of the Holy Spirit we may rightfully ask, “What happened? Didn’t God and Jesus fail to fulfill this and other prophecies? If both images of salvation go together and He did not deliver Israel then He did not fulfill His promise. Was Zechariah mistaken?

This is not an easy issue to resolve, but one way to resolve the tension is to conclude that the two kinds of salvation were decoupled when the Jews rejected Jesus. By far, the more important kind of salvation is the spiritual one—the forgiveness of sins. Jesus constantly pointed out to the Jewish leaders of His day that they were so self-righteous they didn’t see the need for God’s forgiveness. They were blind to their need of spiritual salvation and were preoccupied with only the desire for physical/political deliverance from the Romans and the Greco-Roman culture. Since they rejected Jesus’ offer of spiritual salvation they lost their opportunity for political salvation. However, out of His mercy toward those who acknowledged their need for forgiveness, God decoupled the two kinds of salvation and provided spiritual salvation. Now spiritual salvation is available to anyone regardless of his or her political fate. Finally, in a future time, somehow God will save Israel both spiritually and politically. (Romans 11:25-29)

Application

How can you and I show/do God’s mercy in new ways?

Endnotes

¹ Green, Joel. *The Gospel of Luke*. Eerdmans. p. 109.

² Mundle, Wilhelm. "Redemption" *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 177.

³ Nolland, John. *Word Biblical Commentary Luke 1-9:20*. p. 86.

⁴ Thirty-six words come before mercy and thirty-seven come after it. This is the case only if we exclude the parenthetical statement "as he said through his holy prophets of long ago." It is possible that Luke inserted this to instruct his readers about the historical background of this content.

⁵ Green, p. 114.

⁶ Green, p. 115.