

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Luke 1:57-58, 67-79

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, December 15, 2013

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, December 15, 2013**, is from **Luke 1:57-58, 67-79** (verse 80 is also included below). **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the *International Bible Lesson Commentary* website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught and in *The Oklahoman* newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Luke 1:57-58

(Luke 1:57) Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.

Luke's gospel strongly suggests that Mary stayed with Elizabeth until after the birth of John the Baptist, because

Mary stayed with Elizabeth three months (see Luke 1:56). Mary would have told Elizabeth and Zechariah about the angel's visit to her. Elizabeth would have learned from Zechariah about the angel's visit to him, because Zechariah could write even though he was unable to speak. Elizabeth would have told Zechariah's story to Mary. It seems natural that Mary would have waited with Elizabeth and Zechariah to rejoice with them at John's birth and to help Elizabeth after his birth.

(Luke 1:58) Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

After John was born, the neighbors in the village and Elizabeth's relatives rejoiced with her. They knew the child was special because Zechariah had returned from the temple unable to speak, because he had doubted the words of the angel who appeared to him, and Elizabeth who had been unable to conceive a child had become pregnant with their first child in their old age. They knew that John's birth indicated that God had shown mercy to Elizabeth. They would soon learn that John's birth showed God's mercy to them as well. They rejoiced with her because God had given her a child, and she had joined other famous women that God had so blessed (for example, Sarah and Hannah).

Luke 1:67-80

(Luke 1:67) Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

Elizabeth named her child John. When her neighbors and family objected because no one in their family had the name John, Zechariah wrote and confirmed his name is John, which means “God’s gracious gift” or “Yahweh is gracious.” Immediately after John declared the name of their child, God opened Zechariah’s mouth so he could speak and the Holy Spirit filled him with power and wisdom to speak about the future that God planned for his son and the future God planned for the Messiah who was to come. Zechariah declared God’s intentions and not simply his aspirations for his son.

(Luke 1:68) “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

Zechariah declared that the God of Israel should be blessed; that is, honored and respected with praise and obedience to bring God happiness, because of what God intended to do through his son, John. The God of Israel is distinguished from the Greek and Roman gods or idols, who according to pagan religions had fathered children in immoral ways. Through what John would do in preparing people to meet the Messiah, God’s people would be

redeemed or freed, which required that a price be paid (in this case, the death of Jesus the Messiah). God's actions in John's birth looked forward to what God would do in the future and John was a sign of God's favor. Even though about thirty years would pass before John would begin his ministry, Zechariah's prophecy looked forward to the successful completion of John's work and the completed redeeming work of the Messiah.

(Luke 1:69) He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David,

The Holy Spirit moved Zechariah to turn his listeners' thoughts away from John's birth to the fact that God had already sent or "raised up" the Messiah (who was in Mary's womb by that time, though the Holy Spirit would not have endangered Mary's life and the life of the Messiah by announcing this fact at that time). The Messiah, the servant of God and the descendant of King David, had come into the world with the conception of God's Son in the virgin Mary. Today, we know many facts from the Scriptures that Zechariah's listeners would not have known; that a mighty Savior resided in Mary's womb and He would die as a sacrifice for sins. They should have learned that they would need to wait many years for John to grow up and begin his ministry of pointing people to their mighty Savior. Perhaps Simeon and Anna, who spent much time in the temple, had heard about Zechariah's

prophecy, which might have made them look even more expectantly to see Jesus, as God has promised Simeon he would do before he died.

(Luke 1:70) as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

Zechariah and Elizabeth were of the tribe of Levi, a part of a house of priests and prophets. The prophets had foretold that the Messiah would be born of the house of King David. As a servant of God, David sought to do God's will (though imperfect and sinful at times). Zechariah declared that John's birth indicated that the people's expectations about the Messiah had been fulfilled and would be fulfilled even more in the future after the Messiah began His work. Many prophets throughout the Old Testament, not just one or two prophets, testified about the way the Messiah would be born and what He would do when He came into the world. These many prophecies were fulfilled as a whole in Jesus Christ when He came, though He will fulfill all of the prophecies about Him when He returns to visibly rule and reign over all the earth.

(Luke 1:71) that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

The future promised by the prophets included the expectation that the Messiah would save His people from their enemies (the Romans and oppression, for examples)

and from the hand of those who hated them (some Gentiles, the devil, and evil spirits, for examples). With His first coming, Jesus came and saved those who followed Him (those who followed Him then and those who have followed Him over the centuries). He has also saved His followers from their spiritual enemies and sin. When Jesus comes again, He will save believers from their physical or mental enemies, and from the disease, destruction, and death we face in a fallen world. Those who trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will be saved in all ways from all enemies forever.

(Luke 1:72) Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant,

God had promised their ancestors that their children and all the nations of the world would be blessed (shown mercy and the way of salvation) through a redeemer. When God sent the Messiah, God gave people the opportunity to experience the mercy of God, not because they deserved God's mercy, but because God is merciful and God remembers His promises. By revealing a series of truths through generations of prophets for more than 1500 years, God revealed the facts about what He would do through the Messiah, and how He would show mercy through the Messiah, but people would not understand these facts

until after Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.

(Luke 1:73) the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us

God made a covenant or contract with His people when He made a covenant with Abraham, their most important and respected ancestor. God confirmed that covenant through Isaac and Jacob when He appeared to them. God confirmed His covenant promises through Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament. The oath or promise of God would be fulfilled through God's Son, who would establish a new covenant in His blood, as God promised through Jeremiah: "The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jeremiah 31:31). Luke recorded: "And he [Jesus] did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood'" (Luke 22:20).

(Luke 1:74) that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear,

During the lifetime of John the Baptist and Jesus, the Jews were enslaved and their nation was occupied by the Romans. Though the Romans had given the Jews their hard fought for right to worship God according to their laws and traditions, the Jews still feared the Romans and

still had to obey the Romans when they wanted to serve God. The Messiah would someday free God's people from fearing those who hate God and His followers. Jesus came as the Messiah not only to open the pathway to heaven, but also to empower and lead His followers to serve God without fear.

(Luke 1:75) in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

The Holy Spirit inspired Zechariah to proclaim that God's Messiah would free His people to live holy and righteous – the intention of those who are truly God's children. Jesus did not come to free believers so they could live according to their own sinful desires or habits; so they could do whatever they wanted; so they could sin as much as they wanted with the assurance that God would forgive them (that would be foolishness). Jesus came to free God's people to do what God wants in holiness and righteousness, to love God, their neighbor, and themselves in holy and moral ways.

(Luke 1:76) And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

Zechariah now pronounced a blessing upon his son, John. John would be the prophet of the Most High, not the Son of the Most High or the Messiah. Jesus would be the Son

of the Most High. John would go before the Messiah and prepare the way for the Messiah in specific ways in fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3 – “A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’”

(Luke 1:77) to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

John the prophet would prepare the way for Jesus by preaching the truth, and he would do so with the power and wisdom that the Holy Spirit within him gave him. He would point people to the Way of Salvation, who was the Messiah and “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). John would preach repentance and forgiveness so people could prepare themselves and become able to understand the teachings of Jesus with hearts prepared to obey Jesus when He taught them. There is a relationship between heartfelt “repentance for” and “forgiveness of” sins and our ability to understand deeper and greater truths about God that increase our faith, love, and willingness to obey God at all times. After people accepted and acted upon the truths John preached (the knowledge of salvation), they would be prepared to accept and act upon Jesus’ teachings when He came and preached with authority. They could follow Jesus with the certain knowledge that God had forgiven them for their

sins and had given them a new beginning as children of God.

(Luke 1:78) By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,

Mercy and grace, forgiveness and good news, characterize the message of God as the Holy Spirit filled Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah when they spoke at different times as described by Luke. Zechariah's prophecy continued to point to the future. He foretold that Jesus the Messiah would come as the dawn from on high. As people expect the dawn to break in the morning, with the sunrise giving them new light for a new day of opportunities, so the Messiah would break into the world giving people light and truth for a new way of living in the Kingdom of God. The dawn or new beginning of a new period in history was about to break upon the world from on high – from God – not from creation. From the day of this new dawn in Jesus Christ, human history has been divided between before and after the coming of Jesus. Since the coming of Jesus Christ, countries and cultures have either flourished or foundered in accordance with their obeying Jesus as Lord or turning from Jesus as Lord according to the Scriptures.

(Luke 1:79) to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

The people of God sat in darkness, a spiritual darkness of sin and of human and religious traditions that their leaders imposed upon them. Their way was the way of death, not only physical death, but spiritual death – the death of righteousness and holiness and therefore peace. The Messiah would teach truths that would lead to His death, but His way is the way of peace with God for His followers. Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, still offers light and the way of peace to all who sit in darkness or under the shadow of death. He can guide our feet in the way of peace in a world at war.

(Luke 1:80) The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

John's development is summed up in this verse (and Luke will tell us no more about John until he begins to preach in the wilderness). The Holy Spirit in John helped him grow strong in spirit until he appeared publicly to Israel, and the Holy Spirit probably also helped him grow during his public ministry up to and after he baptized Jesus the Messiah in the wilderness.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. In what way did God show mercy to Elizabeth?

2. What evidence does Luke give that Zechariah was probably deaf as well as mute, unable to speak?
3. Why did Zechariah give a prophecy about his son, John, and the Messiah who was yet to be born?
4. How does God want you to serve Him?
5. How does Zechariah say John will prepare people to meet the Lord? Can believers do this today? Give a reason for your answer.

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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