



Week 2: Zechariah's Song

The guide follows the usual format: three questions followed by prayer. There are additional questions at the end in italics to further help guide discussion.

Read all of Luke 1 again and focus your attention especially on Luke 1:67-80.

In addition to the normal guide (below) that you follow, here are a few questions and thoughts to help guide your time:

- *Throughout the first couple chapters of his Gospel, Luke frequently mentions how the people were filled with awe and were praising God (Mary, Zechariah, people around them, the shepherds, those who heard the shepherds' news, the angels, etc). Why is Luke emphasizing this? What does this tell us about the kind of reaction we should have as we read this and as we celebrate Christmas?*
- *This "hymn" of Zechariah is often called the Benedictus ("praise be" are the first words of the prophecy/song). What is the focus of Zechariah's praise?*
- *Luke places a special emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the book of Luke. How do we witness the Holy Spirit working in this chapter? The Gospel of Luke is an account of the ministry of Jesus and we witness the Holy Spirit all throughout it. Then the book of Acts (a sequel to Luke which records the birth and growth of the church) is filled with references to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. What might some of the implications of this emphasis be? I will give you one: we are radically dependent on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fills Zechariah to speak these words. Throughout the books of Luke and Acts, the Holy Spirit opens people's eyes, grants people faith and repentance, empowers people to act and speak for God and more. How are we often guilty of neglecting or overlooking the work of the Holy Spirit?*
- *Before Zechariah spoke, he endured a season of silence. How does it appear that Zechariah used that season? Was it profitable for him? We live in a world of constant noise and distraction. Rarely do we enjoy silence and solitude. Rarely do we take time to really reflect. How is this true of you? How could you build more times of silence of solitude into your schedule?*
- *Zechariah says that God has visited. What does that mean? What does the Bible teach about how God visits us in the story of Christmas?*

- *Zechariah says that God has redeemed us. What is the meaning of redemption? Read the following: In Israel's tribal society, redemption was the act of a patriarch who put his own resources on the line to ransom a family member who had been driven to the margins of society by poverty, who had been seized by an enemy against whom he had no defense, who found themselves enslaved by the consequences of a faithless life. Redemption was the means by which a lost family member was restored to a place of security within the kinship circle. This was a patriarch's responsibility, this was the safety net of Israel's society, and this is the backdrop for the epic story that we as Christians find ourselves in. Can you hear the metaphor of Scripture? Yahweh is presenting himself as the patriarch of the clan who has announced his intent to redeem his lost family members. Not only has he agreed to pay whatever ransom is required, but he has sent the most cherished member of his household to accomplish his intent—his firstborn son. His goal? To restore the lost family members to the his household so that where he is they may be also. What does it mean that God redeems us (look here in this passage for clues and also look at Ephesians 1:7-8, Galatians 3:13, Hebrews 9:15, Is 44:22, 1 Peter 1:18-19, Colossians 1:13-14, Matthew 20:28)? What are the implications of redemption for how we live? Think about what we see in Zechariah here and also what we see in these other passages we just read.*
- *What is the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus and how is this a fulfillment of God's promises? Look at Exodus 23:20, Isaiah 40:3, and Malachi 3:1.*
- *Zechariah's song is praising God for who He is and what He has done. Spend a few minutes praising God in the same way: who is God? What makes Him so great? What are the great things He has done?*

Questions to ask for interpreting and applying Scripture:

What does the text say? In this section we are seeking to make as many observations as we can. I encourage you to mark up the text above you (underline, circle, draw lines connecting verses/words, write short comments, etc).

- Summarize the context...what was said in the preceding verses? How does this fit within Paul's thought process?
- What are key words/phrases in the passage?
 - What are the repeated words/phrases? Why are they significant?
 - What are important connecting words and how do they help us understand Paul's point?
 - What themes or ideas are being emphasized?
 - What does this passage say about God? Man? Sin?
 - What questions do you have?

What does the text mean?

- Describe Paul's main point in a sentence or couple sentences. What is the big/main idea?
- What are some of the subpoints? Summarize Paul's thought process and some of his supporting points.
- What other passages could be helpful in understanding this text better?

How do I/we apply this passage?

- What are we to think/feel/do?

- What sins does this passage expose in you/us?

Pray

- What is there to praise God for from this passage?
- What sin(s) is there to confess?
- What is there to ask God for?