

The Past Tense Future of the People of God

Introduction

The Text

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, ⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high 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.”

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. (Luk 1:67–80)

The Outline

- A. We come now to Zechariah’s hymn of praise, and we will make our way through it noting:
 - (1) Our Future and Past Tense Redemption (vv. 67-69);
 - (2) Its Historical Basis (vv. 70-73a);
 - and (3) Its Eternal Goal (vv. 73b-79).

(1) Our Future and Past Tense Redemption (vv. 67-69)

The Synergy of God’s Spirit and Word

- A. Given the state of many churches in our day, it seems worth noting up front something we might otherwise gloss right over: the Spirit of God always leads us towards the Word of God and the Word of God always leads us towards the Spirit of God.
 - 1. Whereas many try to pin the 2 against one another (hyper-charismatic/hyper-scholastic), in God’s economy they always work together. We “*worship the Father in Spirit and truth*” (Joh 4:23); or as Paul puts it, we “*take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (Eph 6:17).
 - a. The relationship between God’s Spirit and God’s Word is not hostile but synergetic—the 2 work together to form something greater than the sum of their parts.

- B. In our text, Zechariah is “filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 67). And what is the result? As we’ll soon observe, the Spirit leads Zechariah to see God’s current activity along the lines of His ancient words. This hymn is infused with OT quotations and allusions, of which we’ll only touch the surface.
 - 1. But the implication is plain: God’s Spirit and God’s Word have been inseparable partners from the first day of creation, through redemption, and on into the consummation. And they are partners in this room today.

Visited, Redeemed, Raised

- A. So the Spirit fills Zechariah and he prophesies. And in this prophetic hymn, he begins by describing God’s gracious activity, highlighting 3 actions in particular: (1) God has “visited” His people; (2) “redeemed” His people; (3) and “raised up a horn of salvation” for His people.
 - 1. The basic sense of these 3 is that God has come; He has set free; and He has done it through the Davidic Messiah (the horn symbolizes the strength of a fighting animal, and connects us back to Psa 132:17 which anticipates the Messiah sprouting like a horn for David who will bring deliverance for God’s people).
- B. Now, this is obviously wonderful news but there’s a curious detail that you might have started to pick up on: these 3 things describe something that God is going to do in the future, and yet they are spoken of here as if they’ve already happened in the past?!
 - 1. “Visited...redeemed...raised up”?! Christ isn’t even born yet! Shouldn’t it be: He “will visit”; He “will redeem”; He “will raise up”? Isn’t that truer to history? This is future tense, don’t make it past tense. Zechariah you’re getting ahead of God here.
- C. But Zechariah, filled by the Spirit, is highlighting a precious truth for the children of God: what God plans to do, what God promises to do...is already done! The future tense is made past tense because of the unshakeable stability of God’s plan and promise, His will and word.
 - 1. This is why Paul in Rom 8:30b can say of Christians: “...those whom he justified he also glorified [past tense!].” Is anyone in this room justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ? Yes. Is anyone in this room glorified? Is anyone without spot or wrinkle inside and out? Is anyone shining like the sun? No.
 - a. Even Paul, just a few verses earlier (v. 25), says we’re “hoping” for this glory we cannot see, we’re “waiting” for this glory with patience.
 - i. And yet this future tense reality is declared in the past tense by faith. If He’s planning to do it, if He’s promised to do it, it is already done!
- D. This is one of the great works of the Spirit of God in the heart of a believer. And while it is the work of the Spirit, it is also the great call of every Christian to fight for this kind of faith,

to labor to embrace God's promise so fully that the future tense is turned to past tense. It is only when the future is turned to past that we will we know God's power and peace in the present.

1. Are you there? It seems many Christians, including myself, see the future that God has promised us as so future that it has little bearing on the present. O sure He's going to do something great way off out there, but I'm left back here, trying to survive in Silicon Valley with hungry kids, a broken marriage, an angry boss, or whatever it might be.
 - a. God gives His Spirit to help us turn the future to past in our hearts, that the peace and the joy of that day, might come streaming back into this day!

(2) Its Historical Basis (vv. 70-73a)

4 Broad Lines and 2 Lofty Figures

- A. So Zechariah begins with this focus on a future and past tense redemption. With the mention of David at the end of v. 69 he turns us towards the historical basis for this redemption in vv. 70-73a.
 1. Zechariah is moved by the Holy Spirit to recount the deep root system of God's redemptive activity. He sees 4 broad lines of OT revelation converging at this point: "prophecy", "promise", "covenant", and "oath." But he narrows from these onto 2 OT figures in particular: David (as already mentioned) and, down in v. 73, Abraham.
- B. Now these 2, because of their lofty stature in covenant history, continue to show up in Luk 1-2, and I don't feel the need to address it in full every time. But, the language of vv. 73-74 connects us back to a specific context in God's dealings with Abraham that I feel would be especially helpful to revisit.
- C. The linguistic overlap occurs particularly between vv. 73-74 of our text and Gen 22:16-17, but I want us to read the whole story to get the context: "¹After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"⁸ Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹² He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

¹⁵ And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, [here comes the oath alluded to in our text] “By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” (Gen 22:1–18)

1. This oath represents the climax of God’s dealings with Abraham. It advances every previous promise and covenant to a place of irreversible assurance.

a. Speaking of this the author of Hebrews writes: “¹⁷ When God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us” (6:17–18).

i. “I will bless you, multiply your offspring, deliver you from your enemies, and mediate blessing to all the nations.”

2. But note the context in which this oath is made: the almost sacrifice of a beloved only son, and the sacrifice of a substitute in his place. The sworn oath of blessing and deliverance alluded to in v. 73 of our text, is made in the context of and only son sacrifice and a substitutionary sacrifice—both of which are brought together and fulfilled in the Messiah’s person and work on the cross.

(3) Its Eternal Goal (vv. 73b-79)

A. Coming back into our text, this background clearly hints at the fact that the Messiah, the beloved only Son of God, in order to work this future and past tense redemption for us is going to have to die in our place.

A Deliverance Deeper than Rome

A. As we move into vv. 73b-79 and consider the eternal goal of this Messianic redemption, it is debatable what Zechariah himself thought he meant by the words he was speaking in the

Holy Spirit at this point. Throughout this gospel you have these individuals speaking in the Spirit at a higher level than they yet comprehend in themselves.

- B. It is certainly possible, even probable, that Zechariah, had he lived long enough, would have been confused by the way his words here correlated with the reality that unfolded in Jesus' life and ministry.
 - 1. This talk of redemption, salvation, deliverance from enemies and all who hate us, by one from the house of David all could easily traffic in the common expectations of his day: namely, that the Messiah would be a political figure bringing a political redemption—redemption, salvation, deliverance from Roman oppression.
- C. I say that such confusion is probable because even his son John gets confused by what this Messiah is doing. "I went before you, I prepared your way, for this? A prison cell and a death sentence?... 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" (Luk 7:19). Suffering has a way of stimulating doubt does it not?
 - 1. And it's no different at the end of this gospel. Even with the apostles, when the women come proclaiming that He is risen, "these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (24:11).
 - a. The logic behind their unbelief follows that of the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus: "We had hoped that He was the One to redeem Israel' (24:21). But He was crucified. That's not redemption...at least not the redemption we were looking for."
- D. Here's where the backstory of Gen 22 comes in to help. This redemption prophesied, promised, covenanted, sworn, it is going to come through a substitute, a sacrifice, even a beloved only Son. God is aiming for a deliverance deeper than Rome here.
 - 1. I know some of us are in really hard spots. Everything in us cries out: "It's Rome! The problem is Rome! Save me from the physical, from the circumstantial, from what is plaguing me right now! It's my health, my bank account, my marriage. I need redemption there!"
 - a. God says, "I know that stuff is real and it really hurts, and I'm going to deal with it in time—I will wipe away every tear from your eyes (Rev 21:4). But to get there, I've got to go deeper now. Let Me take care of the cancer, let Me attack the tumor, not just the symptoms."
 - i. His plan is holistic, he will redeem both soul and body, but it moves in stages from the spiritual towards the physical.

Satan, Sin, and Death

- A. Disguised a bit beneath some of the nationalistic, earthy language of these vv. is an indication that this Messiah has come to enter into combat with the 3 most basic, ancient opponents of the people of God: Satan, sin, and death.

1. They appear in our text in that order, and with good reason. For this is the proper historical unfolding of the human dilemma: Satan deceived; Adam sinned; death spread to all.
 - a. They are each inherently connected. If this Messiah is going to redeem us, He's going to have to deal with all this!

- B. In our text we see that He delivers us from our enemies, particularly this arch-enemy, Satan (v. 74); He forgives us of our sins (v. 77); and He brings light and life to those sitting "in the shadow of death" (v. 79). Satan, sin, and death.

- C. And we watch this play out in the rest of Luke's gospel:
 1. That he has come to deal with Satan, consider the bee line He makes for the combat field the moment His public ministry begins. He's baptized and filled with the Spirit (ch. 3), and then immediately heads for the wilderness to take on Satan (ch. 4).
 - a. He's not come to make war on Caesar, but the spiritual forces of evil behind Rome, Greece, Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, and even Israel herself, and all of mankind.

 2. That He has come to deal with sin, consider what He says to the paralytic that is lowered down from the roof by his friends in hopes that Jesus might heal him: "When [Jesus] saw their faith, He said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you'" (5:20).
 - a. "We wanted You to heal his body, what are You talking about sins?" "O I will heal his body, only I've come to deal with problems deeper than your skin. I've come to deal with your sin!"

 3. That He has come to finally put death to death, consider the scene on the day of His resurrection, when He appears to His disciples and says: "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (24:39). "This is My body, only now it is (as Paul would say:) "imperishable" (1 Cor 15:42). "We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again" (Rom 6:9).

Their Undoing at the Cross

- A. Christ would deal with all 3 of these ancient foes at one and the same time, on the cross.
 1. On the cross this beloved only Son, the promised offspring of Abraham, has wood bound to His back by His Father, He walks up Calvary's hill, and when the knife is raised over His head, God is silent, there is no voice halting the sacrifice, the blade falls, and He dies as a substitute in our place! God has finally provided the Lamb, the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world!

- a. And what seemed to be, in this hour of darkness, the triumph of Satan, sin, and death, truly was their undoing!
 - i. For as any good physician knows, if you are going to deal with the cancer, it will do you no good to poke at the person's skin. No! You must sink your scalpel into the tumor itself, you have to operate on the source.

(1) So too, Jesus, gives Himself over to Satan, sin, and death.
He Himself sinks deep into the tumor.

- B. But 3 days later, He rises with it in His hand! Here's how we are delivered from our enemies. Here's how we are forgiven of our sins. Here's how though some of us may even be put to death for our faith, in the end, "not a hair of our heads will perish" (~Luk 21:18)!

Revelation 12

- A. There's this scene in Rev 12 (which I think is referring to Christ's victory at the cross) that brings all of this together for us so powerfully: "⁷ Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (vv. 7–11).

1. Satan, the accuser of God's people, has been thrown down out of the heavenly courtroom!
2. He cannot press charges against me anymore, because the sentence of death my sins deserve has already been served for me by Jesus: We "conquer him by the blood of the Lamb."
3. And even if Satan hounds us "unto death," all he's really done in the end is hound us quicker unto glory.
 - a. For the martyrs in Rev wake up where? In God's presence, with robes washed white, where "the Lamb...will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (7:11, 17).

- B. O I know that there may be chaos right now in your life, enemies loose on all sides, your health is disintegrating, your marriage is a daily battle, your kids are sick and in a desperate way, your bank account is drying up, your boss is a tyrant, you're sins feel so heavy upon you that you could just fall to the floor right now.

1. Hear me, hear Zechariah: God has visited, and He has redeemed, through the Horn, the Davidic Messiah, He has raised up. “He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12).
 - a. O may God grant us the power by the Spirit of the Risen Christ to turn the future tense of this redemption into the past tense by faith, and may we live in the ever-brightening light of the “Sunrise from on high” (v. 78)!