

# EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS. ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

*And Many Explanatory Notes.*

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,  
VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

*Author of "Home Truths," etc.*

ST. LUKE. VOL. I.

LONDON:  
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET.  
CAVENDISH SQUARE

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE I. 67–80

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, 68 Blessed <i>be</i> the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, 69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; 70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: 71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; 72 To perform the mercy <i>promised</i> to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; 73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, 74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our ene-	mies, might serve him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. 76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; 77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, 78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, 79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and <i>in</i> the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. 80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his chewing unto Israel.
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ANOTHER hymn of praise demands our attention in these verses. We have read the thanksgiving of Mary, the mother of our Lord. Let us now read the thanksgiving of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. We have heard what praises the first advent of Christ drew from the Virgin of the house of David. Let us now hear what praise it draws from an aged priest.

We should notice, firstly, *the deep thankfulness of a Jewish believer's heart, in the prospect of Messiah's appearing*. Praise is the first word that falls from the mouth of Zacharias as soon as his dumbness is removed, and his speech restored. He begins with the same expression with which St. Paul begins several of his epistles: "Blessed be the Lord."

At this period of the world we can hardly understand the depth of this good man's feelings. We must imagine ourselves in his position. We must fancy ourselves seeing the fulfilment of the oldest promise in the Old Testament,—the promise of a Saviour, and beholding the accomplishment of this promise brought near to our own door. We must try to realize what a dim and imperfect view men had of the Gospel before Christ actually appeared, and the shadows and types passed away. Then perhaps we may have some idea of the feelings of Zacharias when he cried out, "Blessed be the Lord."

It may be feared that Christians have very low and inadequate conceptions of their amazing privileges in living under the full light of the Gospel. We have probably a very faint idea of the comparative dimness and twilight of the Jewish dispensation. We have a very feeble notion of what a church must have been before the incarnation of Christ. Let us open our eyes to the extent of our obligations. Let us learn from the example of Zacharias, to be

more thankful.

We should notice, secondly, in this hymn of praise, *how much stress Zacharias lays on God's fulfilment of His promises*. He declares that God has "visited and redeemed his people," speaking of it in the manner of the prophets as a thing already accomplished, because sure to take place. He goes on to proclaim the instrument of this redemption,—“a horn of salvation,”—a strong Saviour of the house of David. And then he adds that all this is done, “as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophet,—to perform the mercy promised,—to remember His holy covenant,—and the oath which He sware to our father Abraham.”

It is clear that the souls of Old Testament believers fed much on God's promises. They were obliged to walk by faith far more than we are. They knew nothing of the great facts which we know about Christ's life, and death, and resurrection. They looked forward to redemption as a thing hoped for, but not yet seen,—and their only warrant for their hope was God's covenanted word. Their faith may well put us to shame.—So far from disparaging Old Testament believers, as some are disposed to do, we ought to marvel that they were what they were.

Let us learn to rest on promises and embrace them as Zacharias did. Let us not doubt that every word of God about His people concerning things future, shall as surely be fulfilled as every word about them has been fulfilled concerning things past. Their safety is secured by promise. The world, the flesh, and the devil, shall never prevail against any believer.—Their acquittal at the last day is secured by promise. They shall not come into condemnation, but shall be presented spotless before the Father's throne.—Their final glory is secured by promise. Their Saviour shall come again the second time, as surely as He came the first,—to gather His saints together and to give them a crown of righteousness.—Let us be persuaded of these promises. Let us embrace them and not let them go. They will never fail us. God's word is never broken. He is not a man that He should lie. We have a seal on every promise which Zacharias never saw. We have the seal of Christ's blood to assure us, that what God has promised God will perform.

We should notice, thirdly, in this hymn, *what clear views of Christ's kingdom Zacharias possessed*. He speaks of being “saved and delivered from the hands of enemies,” as if he had in view a temporal kingdom and a temporal deliverer from Gentile power. But he does not stop here. He declares that the kingdom of Messiah, is a kingdom in which His people are to “serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him.” This kingdom, He proclaimed, was drawing nigh. Prophets had long foretold that it would one day be set up. In the birth of his son John the Baptist, and the near approach of Christ, Zacharias saw this kingdom close at hand.

The foundation of this kingdom of Messiah was laid by the preaching of

the Gospel. From that time the Lord Jesus has been continually gathering out subjects from an evil world. The full completion of the kingdom is an event yet to come. The saints of the Most High shall one day have entire dominion. The little stone of the Gospel-kingdom shall yet fill the whole earth. But whether in its incomplete or complete state, the subjects of the kingdom are always of one character. They “serve God without fear.” They serve God “in holiness and righteousness.”

Let us give all diligence to belong to this kingdom. Small as it seem now, it will be great and glorious one day. The men and women who have served God in “holiness and righteousness” shall one day see all things put under them. Every enemy shall be subdued, and they shall reign for ever in that new heaven and earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

We should notice, finally, *what clear views of doctrine Zacharias enjoyed*. He ends his hymn of praise by addressing his infant son John the Baptist. He foretells that he shall “go before the face” of Messiah, and “give knowledge of the salvation” that He is about to bring in,—a salvation which is all of grace and mercy,—a salvation of which the leading privileges are “remission of sins,” “light,” and “peace.”

Let us end the chapter by examining what we know of these three glorious privileges. Do we know anything of pardon? Have we turned from darkness to light? Have we tasted peace with God? These, after all, are the realities of Christianity. These are the things, without which church-membership and sacraments save no one’s soul. Let us never rest till we are experimentally acquainted with them.—Mercy and grace have provided them. Mercy and grace will give them to all who call on Christ’s name.—Let us never rest till the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that our sins are forgiven us,—that we have passed from darkness to light, and that we are actually walking in the narrow way, the way of peace.

#### NOTES. LUKE I. 67-80.

69.—[*An horn of salvation.*] Henry Venn remarks, “The horn of an animal is its weapon for defence and vengeance, its ornament and beauty too. It is used therefore in the prophetic style, to denote the power of the strongest empires. In the same sense we are to understand it here. By this image the exceeding greatness of the Redeemer’s strength, and the never-ceasing exertion of it in behalf of His church are signified.”—*Venn on the prophecy of Zacharias*.

70.—[*He spake by the mouth of his holy prophets.*] Let us note that it is expressly said that “God spake” by the prophets. When we read their words, we read the words of God. Burgon gives the following apt quotation from Hooker:—“They neither spake nor wrote any word of their own, but uttered syllable by syllable as the Spirit put it into their mouths; no otherwise than as the harp or the lute doth give a sound according to the discretion of his hands that holdeth and striketh it with skill.”

71, 74.—[*Our enemies.*] We are left to gather from other sources, who are meant by these “enemies.” It is highly improbable that the expression is to be taken only in a spiritual sense, and that Zacharias only means that Christ delivers His believing people from the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is far more probable that the prophecy of Zacharias, speaking, as he did, when filled with the Holy Ghost, looks far forward into all time, and includes both the second and the first advents of Jesus Christ. In this view the expression “enemies” includes not only the spiritual enemies from whom Jesus delivers His people now, but the literal enemies from whom He will deliver His redeemed Church, and the scattered tribes of Israel, at His future second appearing.

78.—[*Dayspring.*] This must mean Christ Himself. He is called in Malachi, “the Sun of righteousness,” and in Peter, “the day-star,” and in Revelation, “the bright and morning star.” (Mal. iv. 2. 2 Peter i. 19. Rev. xxii. 16.) All are figurative expressions, teaching the same grand truth, that “Christ is the light of the world.” (John viii. 12.)