

**The Progressive Announcement of Salvation in Luke,
Revealing a Shift in Redemptive History**

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A distinct theme in the book of Luke is the subject of salvation. From beginning to end the salvific act of God is woven into the fabric of Luke's gospel. Although God's salvation is deftly illustrated throughout the New Testament, in the book of Luke there are pivotal announcements by key individuals that affirm Jesus Christ as Messiah and the giver of salvation. Zechariah's Song (1:67-80), Simeon's Announcement (2:25-34), John the Baptist's Proclamation (3: 1-9), and Jesus' self-disclosure as Savior (19:9) illustrative a shift in redemptive history. They mark the unfolding of the meaning of salvation itself, from a present reality of deliverance from enemies to a future, eschatological hope, including the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind.

Yet, the movement in Scripture from the physical aspects of deliverance towards a moral and spiritual salvation¹ is not unique to the New Testament. The idea of salvation has progressed through the unfolding of God's Word. According to Walter, the earlier parts of the Old Testament stress the physical aspects of salvation, the escape of God's chosen from the hands of their enemies. The later parts [through Psalms and the Prophets] emphasize salvation in terms of the qualities of blessedness [of God] that extends beyond the nation's confines.² And in the New Testament, salvation is often viewed as deliverance from socio-political circumstance. But, the salvation revealed is deliverance from judgment because of the sin within oneself. In each

¹ G. Walter, in I. Howard Marshall, *Luke, Historian & Theologian* (Downers' Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 94.

² I. Howard Marshall, *Luke, Historian & Theologian* (Downers' Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 94.

expectation, both in the Old and Testament, God is the ultimate Savior. But the New Testament is unique in that Jesus Christ is revealed, being man and God simultaneously, as the ultimate One to save humanity.

In Luke's Gospel, in particular, the salvation theme permeates the narrative both linguistically as well as illustratively. Marshall observes "that linguistically, Luke uses the term 'salvation' [σωτηρία and its derivatives] more frequently and in a more spiritual sense that stands out in comparison to the other Gospels."³ Although the theme of salvation [in Luke] is depicted in a variety of terminology and illustrations, the frequency and intentionality of its usage should not be overlooked. As E.M.B. Green claims, "It is astonishing, that in view of the frequency with which Luke uses salvation terminology, more attention has not been paid to it."⁴ Fitzmyer agrees there is "a striking frequency" with which the nouns and verbs referring to salvation have been used in Lucan writings.⁵ Moreover, Marshall contends that 'salvation' may be the key to unlocking the purpose of Luke-Acts⁶

Still, prior to analyzing the aforementioned Lucan texts it is important to grasp the historical backdrop to Luke's gospel. Luke himself stresses the importance of historicity by taking note of it at the beginning of his work (1:1-4). "[He] begins by referring to '*many who have written a narrative* (διήγησιν)." The term διήγησιν, which means 'a narration',⁷ was used frequently by Classical and Hellenistic writers of history, "making it impossible to miss the intention with which Luke proposes his account of the Christ-event."⁸ Moreover, Luke makes references to notable individuals and events, offering a historical context to his narrative. For

³ I. Howard Marshall, 92.

⁴ E.M. B. Green in Marshall, 93.

⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 173 as quoted in Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 181.

⁶ Marshall, 93.

⁷ http://concordances.org/greek/die_ge_sin_1335.htm

⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 173 as quoted in Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 176.

example, among others, he references King Herod (1:5), Tiberius Caesar's reign (3:1), and Herod the Tetrarch (3:5). The mention of King Herod's reign (37 BCE-4 CE)⁹ and Emperor Tiberius Caesar's reign (14-37 CE) are especially significant as they provide historical parameters to Luke's narrative. The narrative begins at the very end of King Herod's reign (approximately 4 CE), with the prophecy of John the Baptist's birth, and ends with the death and resurrection of Christ, occurring in the early 30s CE, toward the end of Tiberius' tenure. Jesus' entire adult life and ministry, as well as that of John the Baptist, occurred during the reign of Tiberius Caesar.¹⁰

In other words, the events described in Luke's gospel occurred during the Roman era of Second Temple Judaism, in an approximate 33-year period, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. "Since the destruction of the first temple and exile to Babylonia in 587 BCE, the Jews lived almost exclusively under foreign domination."¹¹ Zerubbabel in 516 BCE, completed a second Jewish temple during the period of the Babylonian Empire,¹² which marked the beginning of what is known as the Second Temple Period. By 63 BCE, Judea was dominated by the Roman Empire and by 6 CE, under direct Roman rule through procurators (also called governors).¹³ "Although Roman governors had a mixed history of tolerance and oppression, most exhibited a general insensitivity toward the Jews"¹⁴ and "met protest with ruthless and overwhelming force."¹⁵

⁹ Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 16.

¹⁰ William A. Simmons, *Peoples of the New Testament World* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 228.

¹¹ Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 16.

¹² Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 94.

¹³ Cohen, 17.

¹⁴ Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus*, 113.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Moreover, the weight of Roman taxation was severely oppressive, especially to the agrarian poor Israelite, which encompassed the vast majority of the Jewish population in Judea. According to Simmons, “the average Jewish farmer could have easily paid up to 35-40 percent of his annual income in taxes of some kind.”¹⁶ In short, without a nation of their own, existing under foreign domination with unreasonable tax demands, the Jews were socioeconomically and politically oppressed. It is under these circumstances that the Jews lived and worked and, citing the Law and the Prophets, awaited expectantly for a Messiah to save them.

According to Strauss, “The most widespread messianic hope was for the coming king from David’s line who would destroy Israel’s oppressors, reestablish her independence, and reign forever on David’s throne in justice and righteousness (2 Sam. 7; Isa. 9, 11; Jer. 23:5-6, Ps. 2, 89, 110)”¹⁷. Moreover, “A figure such as the “Son of Man” (Daniel 7:13) was increasingly seen as messianic, as the political situation in the Second Temple period compelled Jewish interpreters to search out Old Testament prophecies to expound the messianic concept.”¹⁸ And within Jewish apocryphal literature there are several references to a coming messiah “who will defeat Israel’s adversaries, restore the nation and priesthood, and rule on a universal scale (i.e. The Wisdom of Ben Sira 36:1-17, I Enoch 61:8)”¹⁹

Nevertheless the picture of the Messiah was not universal among first century Jews; he was not always assumed Davidic and the concept of salvation was not a unified idea. For many, salvation meant a military and socio-economic deliverance, for others it was more of an eschatological reality. There was even an expectation of final judgment, a resurrection, and an

¹⁶ Simmons, *Peoples of the New Testament World*, 100.

¹⁷ Strauss, 139.

¹⁸ Randall Price, 2.

¹⁹ Price, 3

eternal life.²⁰ Schwartz observes that in these matters, “there so many opinions in Jewish religious thought that it is not feasible to enter into them all at the present time.”²¹ The major schools of first century Judaic thought, for example, each had their own ideas about the Messiah and salvation in general. Several of these ideas of expressed in Luke’s works. The Pharisees, known for strictly adhering to the Torah, believed in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8), and “cultivated a strong hope in the coming of the [Davidic] Messiah who would deliver them from foreign oppression.”²² The Sadducees were more conservative theologically, and content with the order and stability of Roman rule.²³ They denied the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and rejected the notion of salvation and a Messiah altogether (Luke 10:27).²⁴ And the Samaritans (Luke 9:52, 10:33, 17:16) “were expecting not a Davidic Messiah but a Moses-like deliverer known as ‘Taheb’ (the “restorer” or “returning one”).²⁵

In addition, there were those who integrated dualism in their picture of the Messiah, and others who embraced his pre-existence of the Messiah. For example, the Essenes of the Qumran community had a dualistic theology.²⁶ “[They] looked for two messiahs, a military-political one from the line of David and a priestly messiah from the line of Aaron.”²⁷ And Cohen contends that, “Two Jewish texts of the first century CE [I Enoch 45-57, 4 Ezra 14] describe “the Chosen One” as a being who existed before the creation of the world, who sits on his glorious throne in heaven, and who shall judge both mortals and spirits in the end time.”²⁸

²⁰ Schwartz, 538.

²¹ Schwartz, 539.

²² Strauss, 133.

²³ Strauss, 131.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Strauss, 140.

²⁶ Cohen, 146.

²⁷ Strauss, 140.

²⁸ Cohen, 95.

It is within this religious-historical context that the characters of *Luke* exist. Yet, at pivotal junctures key individuals not only announce the salvation of God; they also illustrate messianic expectations progressing from a military deliverance to a future eschatological hope in Christ Jesus. The first pivotal announcement occurs early in *Luke*'s narrative with Zechariah's Song (1:67-80). It is often considered a hymn, commonly referred to as 'the Benedictus', and compared to Mary's Magnificat (1:46-55) earlier in Luke's narrative. The Benedictus is speculated to have been a latter addition to Luke's work. Although views concerning the hymn's origin vary, Stein contends, "In its present form the function of the Benedictus is clear. [It is a divinely inspired hymn] praising God for fulfilling his promises to his people, as well as describing the roles of John the Baptist and the Messiah."²⁹

It takes place during the time of King Herod (37 BCE – 4CE), most probably near the end of his tenure as previously stated. Zechariah, a Levite, was of the priestly division of Abijah (1:5). "During the Second Temple period, the twenty-four priestly divisions [1 Chron. 24:7-18] served in the temple at Jerusalem in a rotation system."³⁰ "The division of Abijah would have served at the end [of the Hebrew month] of Iyyar (mid-April to mid-May) and again at the end [of the Hebrew month] of Marheshvan (mid-October to mid-November)."³¹ When it is Zechariah's time to serve the temple (either in the spring or fall), he has a supernatural encounter; the angel Gabriel prophesies that Zechariah's wife will bear a son (1:11-20). Approximately nine months later at the birth of his son John, Zechariah praises God for Israel's salvation. He speaks of salvation as deliverance from Israel's enemies. But, he also prophesies about the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins, through which his son (later

²⁹ Robert H. Stein, *The New American Commentary, Vol. 24: Luke* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 97.

³⁰ Shmuel Safrai, "A Priest of the Division of Abijah" (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Perspective, 2004), <http://www.jerusalemerspective.com/Default.aspx?tabid=27&ArticleID=1847>, 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

called John the Baptist) will play an integral role. John will prepare the way for the coming Messiah, opening their hearts to the salvation yet to come. The scripture reads:

67. His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: 68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because *he has come [visited] and has redeemed his people.* 69 He has raised up *a horn of salvation* for us in the house of his servant David 70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), 71 *salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us...* 76. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, 77 *to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins...* 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Verses 68-71, in particular, call attention to the Judaic expectation of redemption and messianic salvation; that what has been expected has now come to pass. In verse 68, Zechariah's words "*he has visited and has redeemed his people*" (ἐπεσκέψατο καὶ ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν, v. 68) indicate a past event. According to Stein, "The past tenses (aorists) witness to the fact that the promised time of salvation has already come."³² Moreover, through the prophetic utterance, it is understood that "the work of John the Baptist and (the work) of Jesus are two parts of the same visitation."³³ The birth of John signifies the certainty of the Messiah's coming. Nolland makes the connection to the Hebrew Bible asserting that ἐπεσκέψατο, 'he has visited' (as in the LXX) represents the Hebrew בָּרַךְ , which is often used to denote God's gracious visitation bringing deliverance in various forms (i.e. Ps. 79, Ps. 105:4, Jer. 15:15).³⁴ God's has visited his people, as in the days of old.

In verses 69–70, *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)*, Zechariah praises God for the expected

³² Robert H. Stein, *The New American Commentary, Vol. 24: Luke* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 99.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 35: Luke 1-9:20* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 86.

Deliverer, and affirms the fulfillment of ancient prophecies. The phrase “horn of salvation for us” (κέρας σωτηρίας ἡμῶν) means ‘a mighty salvation’ or ‘a strong savior’.³⁵ The savior to come is strong and mighty. The same phraseology is found in 2 Samuel 22:23 and Psalm 18:2. Bock asserts the metaphor is intended to conjure an image of war. He states, “The image of the horn points to the strength of the one to come, since the metaphor looks back to the strong horns of an ox that can defeat opponents (Deut. 33:17). An image of battle is invoked, and the Son of David is the powerful one in the midst of the conflict.”³⁶ The coming savior is a military king. Evans, on the hand, argues that although Zachariah’s prophecy promises deliverance it contains “no overt elements of the militant messianism that was part of the popular view.”³⁷ His emphasis, made clear later in the passage, is on personal piety (v. 75), forgiveness of sins (v. 77), illumination (vv. 78-79), and peace (v. 79).³⁸ Still, one cannot ignore the similarities to Old Testament language, which include a tangible deliverance from enemies, as well as the Jews hope for a Savior as prophesied in the law and the prophets.

Within the same passage the phrase “*in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets long ago)*” (v.69) confirms that Zachariah is singing about the Messiah (or Anointed One) from the Davidic line, spoken of in the Hebrew Scriptures (Isaiah 16:1-5, Isaiah 9:7, Jeremiah 33:15). According to Bock, Zacharias’ anticipates a messianic redemption and is thanking God for it.³⁹ By the birth of his son, John the Baptist, the expectation of the coming Messiah will soon be fulfilled. John himself is not the Anointed One, but his role is significant and linked to the expected Savior.

³⁵ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 96.

³⁶ Darrell Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 75.

³⁷ Craig A. Evans, *New International Biblical Commentary: Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 32.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary, Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 76.

In verse 71, the initial role of the anticipated Messiah is expounded upon. It is for the “*salvation from [their] enemies and from the hand of all who hate [them]*”. However, the identification of ‘enemies’ and the intended meaning of ‘salvation’ are widely debated. Bock argues that Zechariah is speaking as a righteous Jew, longing for national vindication from Roman oppression.⁴⁰ Therefore, the ‘enemy’ is the Roman regime and ‘salvation’ refers to national Jewish liberation from political subjugation. However, Stein contends these words “are less as a political and nationalistic deliverance from enemies, [and more] as an Old Testament metaphorical description of personal salvation from sin.”⁴¹ Zechariah is, therefore, praising God for deliverance from personal sin.

Hobbs, on the other hand, takes both views. He affirms that Zachariah’s words of salvation convey a basic political connotation. However, the moral and spiritual element is present as well.⁴² Although at first glance it appears that Hobbs has declined in choosing one perspective over the other, his viewpoint seems the most reasonable. Taking into consideration Zechariah’s current context, the Messiah was highly anticipated among the Jews, and Israel’s national deliverance from their circumstance was a hope for many groups, even if the image of the Messiah varied. Zechariah’s words, “*salvation from enemies and from the hand of those who hate us*” (1:71), clearly refer to a tangible enemies outside of themselves, not the internal enemy of sin. To ignore the plainness of his statement is to ignore the reality of Jews’ daily condition of the time and the common hope that existed among them.

Nevertheless, there is a moral and spiritual element present in Zechariah’s prophecy, and a second meaning of salvation is revealed in verses 76-79. He speaks of a salvation yet to come

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Robert H. Stein, *The New American Commentary Vol. 24: Luke* (Nashville, TN, Broadman Press, 1992), 100.

⁴² Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 46.

through the forgiveness of sin; and his son John will play a transitional role in the revelation of this truth to his people. The verses read,

76. “And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him 77. to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins...78. because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79. to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death.”

The spiritual aspect of salvation that will occur is clearly expressed in the phrase “*to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins*” (v.77). God will work through the prophet John, who will be a precursor to the Messiah, and a transitional figure towards a new understanding of salvation. According to Bock, “The portrait of John is as a forerunner and prophet, a bridge between the old era and the new.”⁴³ John will be recognized as a prophet of God whose divine mission will be to announce the promised salvation, not as a political but a spiritual redemption consisting in the remission of sin.⁴⁴ Zechariah is no longer speaking of deliverance from the Roman Empire; the enemy is not an external military force, it exists within the individual. According to Stein, “The expression ‘through the forgiveness of sin’ defines salvation and reveals the Benedictus to refer to a spiritual rather than a political salvation.”⁴⁵

Moreover, The Messiah is “*the rising sun from heaven*” (v.78). He is the Giver of light and life, and will deliver the Jews from “*the darkness and shadow of death*” (79). The stark contrasts between light and darkness, death and life illustrate the severity of the Messiah’s deliverance. There is also an eschatological dimension to Zechariah’s prophecy of salvation. Their current state of being is equated to “*death*”, and the coming Messiah is characterized as “*the sun*” (ἀνατολή), which is a metaphor for light and life. The coming Messiah will save the

⁴³ Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary, Luke*, 77.

⁴⁴ Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1966), 35.

⁴⁵ Stein, 101.

Jews from their current state of spiritual death and lead them toward life and righteousness. According to Bock, “The Son, who serves as a bright morning light, comes from heaven and shines on those in darkness and death guiding them into the path of peace.”⁴⁶ And Nolland contends, “This forgiveness is a preliminary experience of the eschatologically bestowed mercy of God, preliminary to the full flowering of the same in the shining forth of the sun [the Messiah].”⁴⁷ Therefore, the meaning of Zechariah’s Song is multi-fold. He praises God for keeping his promise of salvation, as spoken of through the prophets of old. By the birth of his son John, God confirms that the Messiah has come, and that John will be forerunner to the Messiah’s appearance. Moreover, Zechariah thanks God for not only for delivering Israel from its’ enemies, but also for the salvation from sin. Zechariah’s announcement is pivotal as it reflects a shift in the knowledge of salvation - from a tangible deliverance from enemies towards an eschatological reality, a salvation from the wrath of God because of sin.

The second pivotal announcement regarding the Messiah’s salvation (σωτήριόν) is in Luke 2:25-32 by Simeon. Simeon was a “righteous” Jew awaiting the “consolation” of Israel. He entered the Temple, looked upon the infant Jesus, and pronounced the salvation of Israel. The Scripture reads:

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He *was waiting for the consolation of Israel*, and *the Holy Spirit* was upon him. 26 It had been revealed to him by *the Holy Spirit* that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 Moved by *the Spirit*, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 *For my eyes have seen your salvation*, 31 *which you have prepared in the sight of all people*, 32 *a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel...*"

⁴⁶ Bock, 77.

⁴⁷ Nolland, 89.

Simeon's song is also referred to as *Nunc Dimittis*, the Latin form of Simeon's opening words in verse 29, '*Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.*'⁴⁸ His words are similar to Mary (1:46-55) and Zechariah (1:67-79) in that he is offering prophetic utterances and praises unto God in song. Also, similar to the Magnificat and Benedictus, Simeon's Prophecy (1:29-32) is placed in the midst of narratives, and is surmised as being part of later stage of Luke's editing⁴⁹ But, Nolland contends that Simeon's words "are too well prepared for by vv. 25-26 to make it likely that it was a later insertion."⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Simeon's prophecy does have several parallels to Zechariah's prophecy (1:67-80). In both situations the salvation of Israel is proclaimed, the Messiah is announced, and God is acknowledged for remembering his promise to Israel. Still, Simeon's event differs from Zechariah's in that Simeon has "seen" the salvation of Israel by looking upon the Messiah himself, the babe Jesus.

Prior to Simeon's opening words, the stage is set in verses 2:25-27 with a brief description of the character and stance of Simeon. Simeon was righteous (v. 25), earlier applied to Zechariah and Elizabeth (v. 1:6) and later to Joseph of Arimathea (23:50).⁵¹ He was devout (εὐλαβής v.25), a term belonging to Hellenistic piety and used elsewhere in Lukan material (Acts 2:5; 8:2; 22:12).⁵² And the Holy Spirit was upon him, reminiscent of Old Testament language (Psalm 51:11, Isaiah 63:11) and similar to key individuals in the birth of John and Jesus Christ, Mary, v. 1:35, Elizabeth, v. 1:41, and Zechariah v. 1:67. The Holy Spirit is mentioned three times in Simeon's passage (vv. 2:25, 26, 27), which stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in Simeon's words and actions. He is moved to act and speak by God; they are not merely of his

⁴⁸ Erdman, 41.

⁴⁹ Nolland, 115

⁵⁰ Nolland, 119.

⁵¹ Nolland, 118

⁵² Ibid.

own accord. According to Nolland, “[Simeon’s] presence in the temple at that moment is divinely ordered.”⁵³ Moreover Simeon, as a devout Jew, was also expectantly waiting “*for the consolation of Israel* (v.26).” In the days when the nation of Israel was oppressed the faithful looked all the more intensely for the Deliverer [who would comfort them] and solve their problems.”⁵⁴

In other words, Simeon represents the testimony of a wise elder who has walked with God.”⁵⁵ Simeon was a righteous and devoted Jew; who would be a reliable witness of God’s work and the coming Messiah. “Although Stein alludes that this point was due more to Luke’s editing, Stein does concede the importance of revealing Simeon’s character in this scenario. According to Stein, “Luke wanted his readers to understand that Simeon was providing reliable testimony to the person and work of God’s Son.”⁵⁶ Simeon’s words are poignant, articulate, and strategically placed. Bock contends, “The locale of Simeon’s prophecy, the temple, is significant for Jewish readers [and the current Jewish context as well], for this prophet is testifying to Jesus in the midst of the nation’s most sacred locale.”⁵⁷

“Yet it is through the lips of Simeon, and in the sacred Temple, where the awaited Savior is identified not only for the Jews but the Gentiles as well. Verses 29-32 convey the crux of Simeon’s prophecy of salvation stating, “29. *Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30. For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32. a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.*”

⁵³ Nolland, 119.

⁵⁴ Morris, 104.

⁵⁵ Bock, 93.

⁵⁶ Stein, 115.

⁵⁷ Bock, 93.

In verse 29 the phrase “*as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace*” refers to God’s word to Simeon that he would see the salvation of Israel before his death (2:26). It speaks to the faithfulness of God in revealing a hope for Israel, as well as the faith of Simeon in believing God’s promise would come to pass. Simeon also lived in sight of the foreign oppression of Israel, and awaited their liberation as his fellowmen. According to Morris, “[Simeon] is ready to die peacefully now that he has God’s salvation (i.e. the Baby through whom God would in time bring salvation). His language is that used of the freeing slave and he may be thinking of death as his release from a long task.”⁵⁸ However, Erdman views Simeon’s words from a different perspective. As opposed to evoking images of freedom from bondage, Erdman argues the speech is full of beauty and accomplishment. He states, “It is the word of a faithful watchman who welcomes with joy the hour of his dismissal, for he has caught the vision of the coming One; now he is about to be sent away in the peace of an accomplished task, in the peace of a fulfilled hope...”⁵⁹. In either case, Simeon is thanking God for fulfilling his promise. Simeon can rest, now that God’s salvation has come.

In verse 30 “*For my eyes have seen your salvation...*” Simeon announces the salvation of God (τὸ σωτήριον σου) as a living tangible reality with the birth of Jesus, the revealed Messiah. According to Nolland, “Simeon has now seen God’s promised salvation in that his eyes, opened by the Spirit of God, have been enabled to recognize in this child the promised Messiah.”⁶⁰ Similar language of “having seen the salvation of God” is found in Psalm 98:3 and Isaiah 40:5.⁶¹ In those contexts “salvation” refers to the deliverance of Israel from its surrounding enemies. Psalm 98 praises God for the salvation that has already come. Isaiah 40 praises God for the

⁵⁸ Morris, 105.

⁵⁹ Erdman, 41.

⁶⁰ Nolland, 120.

⁶¹ Ibid.

salvation that will come in the future, and announces “A voice of one calling, “In the desert, prepare the way for the LORD...”, which is also spoken of in John the Baptist’s role in announcing the Messiah in Luke 3:4-6.

In verses 31 -32 Simeon affirms this event has occurred not only for his own joy, but it is to be witnessed in “*the sight of all people* (v. 31).” The witness of the Messiah is not only for Israel’s benefit, it is in view for all humanity to see, which includes both Jew and Gentile. It is a public display orchestrated by God, which shows that “this salvation is not for one nation but for all.”⁶² His words echo the Angel’s announcement to Mary (v. 1:10)⁶³ that the child Jesus’ shall be the universal Savior.⁶⁴ The revealed Messiah is “*a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel* (v. 32).” Moreover, “Jews and Gentiles are in parallel here and correspond to the pattern Luke develops in Acts where Jews and Gentiles are [co-beneficiaries] of the salvation offered in the name of Jesus (i.e. Acts 9:15, 14:1, 19:10).”⁶⁵ According to Stein, verse 32 is the clearest indication, thus far in the narrative of Luke, of the universal dimension of Jesus’ redemptive work.⁶⁶

Furthermore, the Christ is once again referred to as the “*light*” (v. 32), which reiterates his life-giving presence as the Messiah (1:78-79), but here he is one who will guide both Jew and Gentile to salvation. Although the idea of salvation here is not clearly eschatological, it is also far more than socio-political. The Gentiles, which would include the Romans who were not under political oppression, would also be given the benefit of salvation. (v. 32). The Messiah would not a respecter of persons (Acts. 10:34); and Simeon announces this point in the public eye of the Jewish Temple.

⁶² Morris, 105

⁶³ Hobbs, 55.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Nolland, 120.

⁶⁶ Stein, 117.

The next pivotal announcement of salvation (σωτήριο) is through the preaching of John the Baptist, the son of Zechariah in Luke 3:1-8. John has become “the first inspired prophet to break the silence of the centuries which had elapsed since the days of Malachi.”⁶⁷ As a forerunner to the Messiah, John is a transitional figure, who’s preaching clarifies the meaning of the expected deliverance of Israel. “The ministry of John the Baptist belongs to the immediate preparation for Jesus’ ministry.”⁶⁸ The scripture reads:

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar--when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene-- 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. 3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4 As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. 5 Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. 6 *And all mankind will see God's salvation.*' "

The context of John’s announcement is defined in Luke 3:1-2. In two lines of scripture a six-fold designation of time is provided, illustrating [the attempt at] exactness in dating the event.⁶⁹ First, John began his ministry “*in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar*” (v.1). The Emperor Tiberius succeeded Augustus in 14 CE, so that the year 28-29 CE is most likely in view.⁷⁰ Although, Stein questions the calendar used by Luke (i.e. Jewish, Syrian-Macedonian), he concedes the probability of 28 CE as the start of John’s office.⁷¹ Second, it took place “*when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea*” (v.1). Pilate ruled Judea from 26-36 CE,⁷² confirming the probable range of 28-29 CE.

⁶⁷ Erdman, 47.

⁶⁸ Nolland, 137.

⁶⁹ Erdman, 47.

⁷⁰ Nolland, 138.

⁷¹ Stein, 127.

⁷² Ibid.

The third and fourth points assert the timeframe of John the Baptist's preaching within the rule of King Herod's sons. "*Herod tetrarch of Galilee*" (v.1), also called Herod Antipas, was the younger son of King Herod the Great (37-4 BCE), client king of Judea under Roman rule. Herod Antipas received part of his father's realm at his death and ruled as tetrarch from 4 BCE until 39 CE.⁷³ Herod Antipas ruled part of Galilee. "*His brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis*, also called Herod Philip, was tetrarch from 4 BCE until 34 CE, who ruled several areas including Traconitis, Iturea, as well as the east shore of Galilee. He also credited with founded the city of Caesarea Philippi.⁷⁴ According to Fitzmyer, "The reference to Pilate and the two sons of Herod the Great is comprehensible [as] they are the contemporary Roman and civil rulers of the land to which John's preaching will first be known."⁷⁵ According to Nolland, "The political power structures provide more than remote background for Luke's story. John spoke out against Herod Antipas and was to be imprisoned and later executed by this tetrarch."⁷⁶

The fifth and sixth points also refer to notable rulers of the period. However, *Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene*" is not easily identifiable. According to Josephus a ruler named Lysanias died in 36 or 34 BC⁷⁷ several decades before the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. So, either Luke's use of him is mistaken or there is another Roman ruler named Lysanias in view. For example, "two fragmentary Greek inscriptions (CIG 4521, 4523) mention a 'Lysanias the tetrarch', one of which names still another Lysanias."⁷⁸ Therefore, it is possible that Luke is speaking of another Lysanias, which ruled Abilene, located immediately west of Damascus,⁷⁹ during John's ministry. And, "*during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas*" (v.1), the

⁷³ Fitzmyer, 457.

⁷⁴ *Encyclopedia Judaica Vol. 8* (Israel: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd), 1972.

⁷⁵ Fitzmyer, 458.

⁷⁶ Nolland, 140.

⁷⁷ Morris, 111

⁷⁸ Fitzmyer, 457

⁷⁹ Nolland, 140.

final point of the six-fold historical reference, brings forth the Jewish religious authority at the time. “It reflects a situation in which Annas, an earlier high priest (6-15 CE), and father-in-law of the current high priest Caiaphas (18-36 CE), retains much of the power and prestige of the high-priestly office (John 18:13, 24; Acts 4:6).”⁸⁰ John began his ministry in the complex setting of political Rome, political Israel, and religious Israel, of which each had a substantial stake in the affairs of the region.⁸¹

The core of John’s message is captured in Luke 3:3-8. The anticipated salvation of the Messiah is not assured. Being a child of Israel does not assure one’s participation, and furthermore there is a requirement of “*repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*” The passage reads:

Luke 3:3-8 He [John the Baptist] went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of *repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* 4. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. 5 Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. 6 *And all mankind will see God's salvation.*' "7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the *coming wrath?* 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that *out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.*

John’s statements evoke an eschatological connotation to salvation. It is open to not only the Jews but to the Gentiles as well. God can raise up anyone, including “stones”, as part of His chosen people for salvation. That which has been alluded to through Zechariah and Simeon, is now preached clearly through John. The life-less (or spiritually dead non-Jew) can take part in God’s redemption. Moreover, Bock asserts “The ethical thrust of Luke’s Gospel begins here. Ministering in the desert in fulfillment of the pattern of salvation indicated by Isaiah, John preaches a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” His ministry in the Jordan River

⁸⁰ Nolland, 140

⁸¹ Bock, 109

region is designed to get people ready for the arrival of God’s salvation by having hearts open to respond to the coming Messiah (1:15-17, 76-77).”⁸²

However, the critical point of “*repentance*” (v.3) is a familiar theme to Israel. The “*repentance for the forgiveness of sins*,” echoes Old Testament language (i.e. Isa. 59:20, Jer. 15:9, Ezek. 14:6, Ezek. 18:32), and “connects John the Baptist with the great prophets of Israel”⁸³. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the like called Israel to repent from their wicked ways, and to turn whole-heartedly back to God. Here John the Baptist does the same. According to Bock, “John preaches in the manner of the Old Testament prophets, seeking for a “turning of the heart. Though the Greek word for repentance (μετανοίας) means “a change of mind,” the concept of repentance has Old Testament roots in the idea of turning to God (1 Kings 8:47, 2 Kings, 23:25, Psa. 78: 34, Isaiah 6:10, Ezek. 3:19). To be prepared for God’s salvation, one’s heart must be opened to the message.”⁸⁴

Verses 4-6 are a restatement of Isaiah’s prophecy of the coming Lord (Isaiah 40:3). “*A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.*” However, in this context, John the Baptist is that “voice” (v.4) who is announcing the coming Messiah. He is the vehicle through which this message is declared. The prophecy spoken over him at birth, by his father Zechariah (1:67-79), has now come to pass. According to Morris, all four gospels apply Isaiah 40:3 to John the Baptist, preparing the way for the Lord.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Nolland, 141.

⁸⁴ Bock, 109.

But only in Luke does John offer a climax of “*all flesh that shall see the salvation of God*” (v.6).⁸⁵ Nolland argues that on the basis of the universalism and language of salvation, Luke may have extended the quotation of John in verse 6.⁸⁶ Still, the phrase *πᾶσα σὰρξ*, “all flesh or all mankind”, echoes the universalism of 2:32. The reiteration of Isaiah 40:3-6 marks a fulfillment of God’s promise of deliverance, which affirm “*all of humanity will witness God’s salvation.*” Although on the one hand, John’s words look back to the roots of Ancient Judaism, praising God’s faithfulness to his chosen people. On the other hand, they look ahead to the future. They embrace all of humanity to take part in that, which was once assumed only for Israel. Once again, the message of the Messiah’s salvation is not for the Jews alone. It is for all of mankind to see. There is universality to the coming salvation; it is available for all through repentance and the forgiveness of sins (v.3).

Yet, the “coming wrath” (v.7) in John’s message is not in the form of famine, natural disaster, or exile. There is an eschatological dimension to John’s words. Morris affirms the paragraph here is heavy with judgment, and stresses the divine hostility to all evil.⁸⁷ “The classical prophets made their appeal for repentance in relation to historical judgments of God in the political sphere or by means of natural disaster; [but] for John, the urgency of the appeal and the absoluteness of its claim is determined by its eschatological setting.”⁸⁸ Bock agrees that “the forgiveness of sins” is a present realization of the future eschatological forgiveness at the final judgment.⁸⁹ In other words, John’s ministry of salvation is not political. He is preparing the way for the Messiah; encouraging Israel to turn their hearts to God and be saved from God’s

⁸⁵ Morris, 113.

⁸⁶ Nolland, 138.

⁸⁷ Morris, 113.

⁸⁸ Nolland, 141.

⁸⁹ Stein, 129.

judgment because of sin. The meaning of salvation is clearly not from their Roman enemies; the salvation to come is from the judgment of God.

In verse 8, the phrase “*out of these stones God can raise up children of Abraham*” additionally declares that God’s chosen people are not limited to the people of Israel. He can “raise up” children for himself, and bring life out of what is considered dead. According to Stein, “The meaning of this picturesque language is clear. From lifeless stones God the Creator can create children for Abraham. [God] does not need physical offspring. Apart from repentance, one’s physical descent from Abraham is valueless.”⁹⁰ And, Hobbs argues “The relationship to God is no longer racial and corporate; it is to be spiritual and personal.”⁹¹ John reminds them that they stand before God as individuals.⁹² With these affirmations John once again testifies that not only the Jews are eligible for salvation, the door is open to all who repent before God, even the Gentiles who were considered by the Jews to be spiritually dead.

In the next pivotal announcement, Luke 19:9-10, Jesus declares that “salvation” has come to an unlikely candidate, Zacchaeus; and identifies himself as the Messiah, the Giver of salvation. Fitzmyer classes the episode “as a pronouncement story, with its climax in verse 9.”⁹³

In context the scripture reads,

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay

⁹⁰ Stein, 133.

⁹¹ Hobbs, 72.

⁹² Morris, 113

⁹³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke, X-XXIV* (New York: Doubleday, 1219.

back four times the amount." 9 *Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

The crux of the passage exists in the following words of Christ, *"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost (V. 9-10)."* Although the salvation theme permeates Luke's Gospel, and explicitly through the aforementioned announcements, only once in the book of Luke does Jesus verbalize that "salvation" (σωτηρία) has come to Israel (v. 9-10). Moreover, the Zacchaeus episode itself is unique to Luke.⁹⁴ Fitzmyer concurs that in this passage Jesus proclaims himself as the fulfillment of God's promise of a Messiah (Isaiah 61).⁹⁵ And, the proclamation of salvation is found on his lips only in Luke 19:9 when speaking to Zacchaeus.⁹⁶

The narrative describes Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus, a "chief tax collector", as Jesus passes through the Roman city of Jericho (19:1-2). Jericho was an important tax collecting point, and evidently Zacchaeus was a tax commissioner over other publicans.⁹⁷ Although Zacchaeus was Jewish, he made his living from the Roman tax system. He was a walking example of Hellenistic compromise, and a daily reminder of the oppressive rule under which the Jews lived. Clearly, Zacchaeus was very wealthy (19:2), and likely obtained his riches by cheating the poor (19:8). The Jews held tax collectors with such disdain they were paired with murderers and robbers.⁹⁸ Yet, Jesus reached out to Zacchaeus and affirmed his salvation in full view of the masses (v. 3,7). Jesus said to him *"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man,*

⁹⁴ Bock, 478.

⁹⁵ Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *Luke, The Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching*. New York: Paulist Press, 156. 1989.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Hobbs, 269.

⁹⁸ O. Michel in Bock, 478.

too, is a son of Abraham” (v.9). Jesus affirmed salvation to man in compromise with the oppressive Roman regime. The point is not affirmation of sin, but the beauty of God’s grace.

Moreover, Jesus acknowledged Zacchaeus as “*a child of Abraham*” (v.9). Although the Jews cast him among thieves and murderers, Jesus considered him worthy of the salvific act of God. Therefore, salvation was not only available to both Jews and Gentiles, but to the “seemingly unworthy” from both groups, the sinners in the eyes of man. “Zacchaeus is another “outsider” who has turned out to be an “insider” by God’s grace.”⁹⁹ Morris contends, “Jesus sought Zacchaeus, a man who was certainly among the lost. But Jesus did not leave him there. He saved him.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore Bock argues, “Jesus’ stay [at Zacchaeus’ house] (v.5) is a necessity because it pictures what his ministry is all about – to lead to God those whom others have given up on, to call those who, like the tax collector Levi, need to repent (5:31-32).¹⁰¹

Yet, it can be argued that Zacchaeus’ actions and words reflected a heart of repentance, which qualified him for salvation. His declaration of returning half his money to the poor (v.8), and paying back four times of what has been cheated (v.8), occurs *before* Jesus affirms his salvation not after the fact. Moreover, his lineage to Abraham is not the cause of salvation. As John the Baptist deftly expressed, salvation “*was with repentance for the forgiveness of sins*” (3:3), and that “*all mankind would see God’s salvation*”(3:6). The issue is the change in Zacchaeus’ heart as he encounters the Messiah, which according to Ellis, is an expression of a thank offering unto God.¹⁰² Zacchaeus is a “child of Abraham” because Christ has changed him, and his alms are a reflection of his changed heart.

⁹⁹ Bock, 180.

¹⁰⁰ Morris, 290.

¹⁰¹ Bock, 479.

¹⁰² E. Ellis, *Luke*, 221 in Bock, 479.

However, all do not share the aforementioned view on Zacchaeus' salvation. According to Fitzmyer, "The phrase '*He too is a 'son of Abraham'*' does not mean that Zacchaeus *has become* a child of Abraham in some spiritual sense (as in Pauline usage, Gal 3:7,29; Romans 4:16-17). Jesus seeks lodging from him because he is really an offspring of Abraham, a Jew, *with as much claim* to the salvation which Jesus brings as any other Israelite."¹⁰³ But, with all due respect to Fitzmyer, his perspective is shortsighted. It does not take into consideration the groundwork laid by Zechariah, John the Baptist and Simeon. Salvation was, and is not, a right or claim because of heritage. Jesus was "*seeking the lost*" (v.10), and because of Zacchaeus' sin as a chief tax collector, he qualified as such. Zacchaeus was despised, but Jesus reached out to him as he did with other outcasts (i.e. lepers, adulterers). And even as Jesus instructed his disciples to "go to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 10:6). Their salvation was clearly not a right; it was (and still is) a gift of God.

Additionally, Jesus self identifies himself as the Messiah, the Giver of salvation, "*For the Son of Man* came to seek and to save what was lost" (v.10) As stated earlier, in Second Temple Judaism, the title "Son of Man" often referred to the coming Messiah; and Jesus often referred to himself as such, especially in Luke (6:5, 22; 7:34; 9:22, 26,44).¹⁰⁴ Moreover, in this phrase Jesus is identifying the unique role of the "Son of Man", he came to "seek" and to "save" the lost. Only the Messiah could give salvation, and Jesus is that Savior of all.

In conclusion, the book of *Luke* illustrates a consistent theme of salvation. The subject is woven through from beginning to end. The announcements Zechariah, Simeon, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ himself affirm that salvation has come to pass. Moreover, they progressively

¹⁰³ Fitzmyer, 1221.

¹⁰⁴ Craig A. Evans, *New International Commentary, Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 282.

reveal a transition from an expectation of military and/or nationalistic deliverance toward eschatological hope available to all humanity.

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