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THE VERY GREATEST PROPHET

– *LUKE 1:57-80* – JANUARY 14. –

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people." – V. 68.

OF JOHN THE BAPTIST Jesus declared, "Verily I say unto you, of those born of women there hath not risen a greater Prophet than John the Baptist; and yet I say unto you that the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he." (Luke 7:28.) These words are valuable as showing us that John was the last of the Prophets announcing the coming of Messiah and the beginning of the great work of selecting from amongst sinners a loyal class, to be associates with the Redeemer in His Messianic Kingdom and glory. John could not be of the Kingdom class. His grand work terminated before the Redeemer's sacrifice was finished – before Pentecostal blessings came accepting some as joint-heirs with Christ in His Kingdom. John himself seemed to understand this, for he declared, "He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom," but I am the Bridegroom's friend and rejoice to hear His voice. – John 3:29.

JOHN – "THE FAVOR OF GOD"

In harmony with the message of the Angel Gabriel, John the Baptist was born. On his eighth day he was circumcised and named. The family relatives urged the name of his father, but the father and mother named him John, and immediately Zacharias' dumbness departed. His faith had been helped. He had triumphed over all doubts and manifested this by giving the name mentioned by Gabriel. The name John has a beautiful signification – "The favor of God."

As a man John was peculiar in that he had no other aim or object in life than to be God's messenger – to proclaim His Anointed One and to prepare the people for the trying experiences and character-test

which Malachi had declared would come with the revelation of Messiah, who would "sit as a Refiner, to purify the sons of Levi, that they might offer to God an acceptable sacrifice." So it was that John in his ministry declared, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." Believe the good news. Repent, reform. Get ready for a share in that Kingdom.

The trials came in a way not expected. Messiah was not born an heir to earthly wealth or name or fame, and His experiences as well as His teachings were different from any that the Doctors of the Law had anticipated. The opposition of sinners and Jesus' opposition to the errors and hypocrisies of His time produced a *burning* which had a refining effect upon some and made of them antitypical Levites, consecrated people, many of whom became antitypical priests, presenting their bodies living sacrifices, walking in the footsteps of the Redeemer.

THE PROPHECY OF ZACHARIAS

St. Peter distinctly tells us respecting the Old Testament Prophets, that "Holy men of old spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." He intimates that frequently they uttered deeper and broader truths than they themselves comprehended – truths which only the future would fully reveal. This is true of the prophecy of Zacharias, in this lesson. Verses 68-70 constitute the first division of this prophecy; praise to God, the Fountain of every good and perfect gift, comes first. To Him all honor and praise are to be given for the fulfilment of His gracious promises of old, "for He hath visited and brought redemption to His people; He hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David," in harmony with the promises. Here, after the usual manner of prophecies, the thing about to be accomplished is spoken of as though it had been done.

As John the Baptist was born but six months before Jesus, it follows that the begetting of Jesus had already taken place at the time of this prophecy. The Holy Spirit spoke of the things begun, but not yet accomplished, as though finished: "He hath visited and brought

redemption for His people." This word *redemption* applies not only to the redeeming work accomplished by Jesus in the consecration of His life at baptism and down to the completion of His sacrifice at Calvary, but it is comprehensive enough to take in the entire work of reclaiming humanity.

A small section of our race, the "elect," is being reclaimed during this Gospel Age; but the Scriptures assure us that the Messianic reign of a thousand years will all be for the purpose of redeeming or bringing back from the power of sin and death Adam and so many of his children as shall be willing to accept the Divine favor, when [R4940 : page 459] brought to their knowledge. The import, therefore, of this first strophe or section of the poetic prophecy is, The Lord be praised that the time has come beginning the great blessing which He long ago promised.

DELIVERANCE FROM ENEMIES

The second section or strophe of this prophetic poem runs from verse 71 to 75. It relates to the deliverance of God's people from the power of their enemies. One important thought here is that none but God's people will ever be delivered from the enemies here referred to. However, there have been many in the past, as there are at present, enemies through wicked works – not because of intentional wickedness, but because blinded by the god of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the weaknesses of their fallen flesh, etc.

During Messiah's reign of a thousand years, when all the blind eyes will be opened and all the deaf ears will be unstopped, and when the knowledge of the glory of God's character will be clearly revealed and the horribleness of sin be fully manifested – then many, now led captive by Satan at his will, will bow the knee to Emmanuel and confess to the glory of God. In other words, as Jesus said, His consecrated followers are His "little flock" of the present time. But during His glorious reign He will gather another flock. As He said,

"Other sheep I have which are not of this fold – them also I must bring, that there may be one fold and one Shepherd." – John 10:16.

"One fold and one Shepherd" does not signify that all of the sheep will be of the same nature. On the contrary, the Apostle tells us that God's Plan is ultimately to "gather together under one Head (Shepherd) all things, both in heaven and in earth." (Ephesians 1:10.) Of these "all things" the Church, the Bride, will be chief, on the plane of divine nature. The Great Company, cherubim and angels will follow in order, and redeemed and restored mankind in human perfection will be the lowest order in the Divine fold.

St. Paul tells us about the enemies from whom ultimately all of God's people shall be delivered. Satan is an enemy. He shall be bound for a thousand years and ultimately shall be destroyed. Sin is an enemy, which will be stamped out in its various phases during Messiah's Kingdom. And we read, "The last enemy that shall be [R4941 : page 459] destroyed is death" – and with it will go the tomb. Adamic death will be no more. None will be under its power. The resurrection power will release all. Only those who sin wilfully, deliberately, will die the Second Death, which is not an enemy.

THE PREPARATORY WORK

The third section or strophe of this prophetic poem tells us of a work to be accomplished before the grand consummation of the destruction of all enemies and the lifting up of all accounted worthy to be sons of God. This is recorded in verses 76-79. It tells how John the Baptist would be the forerunner of the Lord's special Servant, Jesus, to pave the way for His great work. That great work would be to give the knowledge of salvation to thousands who were already God's people, to show them the "high calling" of this present Age. Thus in God's tender mercy the Church sees and is enlightened by the "Morning Star" or "Day Star" before the Sun of Righteousness arises to scatter the darkness of mankind during Messiah's reign. This lesser light of the present time shines into the hearts of believers with

sanctifying power and sets them afire with zeal for the Truth. They in turn shine forth upon those who are sitting in the shadow of death. This "Day Star" guides the feet of the saints in the way of peace, even while still in the time of trouble and before the New Dispensation is ushered in.

