

# *Catching the Vision*

Throughout the advent season which we have just celebrated, a number of themes presented themselves through music, greeting cards, the spoken word in churches and other forms of communication. Some had very little if nothing at all to do with the Bible message like Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer or I Saw Mommy kissing Santa Claus. Others echoed quite strongly the words of scripture: Glory to God in the Highest, Peace on earth goodwill toward men, Joy to the World and Glory to the Newborn King just to single out a few.

Yet many of these, while helping us to celebrate the season, fail to present this momentous event, the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the keystone of the complete plan and purpose that God has with this earth and mankind on it. We

have been focusing on this plan and purpose as we have been working our way through the series of lessons called Catching the Vision.

This vision can only be seen by looking at the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. As we look at Capturing the Vision we scan the entire period of time from creation to the establishment of a divinely ordered kingdom here on this earth. We are focusing on those things that are most important to grasping an understanding of who God is, why He created us and what is to be our ultimate salvation from death and destruction.

In this issue we are going to look at the announcement of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, concerning the things John

would preach about the coming Lord Jesus, especially the connection that Jesus would have to the house of David or the Royal line of David.

We are then going to take a close look at how this royal son born in Bethlehem would deal with sin and come to rely on his Father as he, like us, needed to be perfected and God's way of doing this was such that Jesus would be made perfect through suffering. Not an easy subject to grasp. Please read *The Royal Son – Made Perfect through Suffering*

Finally, we are going to look at how in Jesus all will be made alive. Please read these articles and give them some serious thought. The Christmas music you heard will become so much more meaningful if you do.

## ***The Announcement: He Has Sent Us a Mighty Savior from the Royal Line of His Servant David***

The Bible is a message from God to us. He is the all-powerful creator of heaven and earth. He is the source of all life. With purpose and vision he made this creation and the story of the Bible tells us the working out of that purpose and vision. The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the present time, though, the creation is subject to the consequences of people's rebellion against their Creator. The Bible tells us over and over again that human hearts are faithless, idolatrous, and deceitful. Hearts need to be changed and so we see God working through his vision by working with individuals who are willing to search for him and have a desire for a changed heart.

Abraham was one of those individuals who, when commanded by God to leave his father's house, obeyed in faith. His faithful obedience was rewarded with promises of blessings, many children, and eternal inheritance of the land that he walked on. Even more than these blessings though, because he believed God, his obedient belief was counted as righteousness. In Abraham's line, King David, a man after God's own heart, was also promised that his kingdom would become an everlasting kingdom and that one of his descendants would rule on his throne in Jerusalem forever.

The descendants of Israel, Abraham's grandson, were chosen by God to be a special, holy nation.

They were to be a nation that showed to the rest of the world the glory and power of the one true God. To them was given the law, the prophets, the inspired holy scriptures, and the opportunity to inherit the same land and blessings that were promised to Abraham. They were not faithful and so were exiled from the land. In the end, though, it has been promised that they will have a change of heart. It is then that they will receive the promises along with all peoples on earth that turn to God.

From Genesis when we meet Abraham, to the middle of Acts when the gospel message begins to be shared with the Gentiles, the

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## *The Announcement: He Has Sent Us a Mighty Savior from the Royal Line of His Servant David (Continued)*

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Bible is about the chosen descendants of Abraham, the children of Israel. It is through Israel that God has given us the holy writings of the prophets and poets. As the New Testament opens, after many years of suffering, captivities, oppression and dispersion, the people of Israel wanted the promises made to Abraham and David to be fulfilled and David's kingdom to be restored. They were waiting for the promised son of David, the Messiah. It was at this time that an angel was sent to a Levite, one of the priests who served in the temple, to give him a message that he and his wife would have a son. He did not believe the angel and so was struck mute. When he finally was able to speak after the birth of his son, he was moved by the power of God to speak these words:

Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:

**“Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people.**

**He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, just as he promised through his**

**holy prophets long ago.** Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us. **He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant—the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham.** We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live.

“And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. **You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins.** Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace.” Luke 1:67-79 (NLT)

Inspired by the Holy Spirit Zechariah announced that God is working out his purpose and vision through the coming Royal Son. The promises and covenant to Abraham and to David are confirmed. The royal Son will save his people from their enemies and people will find forgiveness of

sins through repentance. Zechariah's son, John prepared the people to hear the message of Jesus. He called for repentance—a change of heart—so that forgiveness of sin could be received:

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”—

“a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'”

**And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Mark 1:1-8 NIV

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## *The Royal Son-Made Perfect through Suffering*

Joseph, espoused husband of Mary, was also visited by an angel who announced to him that Mary's child would save his people from their sins:

But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. **And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.**" Matthew 1:19-21 (NKJV)

The people of Israel were looking for salvation from their enemies and this was promised to them. However, what they did not recognize was that their suffering was a result of their faithlessness and disobedience. They were separated from their God:

**Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.**

**But your iniquities have separated you from your**

**God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.** For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things. Isaiah 59:1-3 (NIV)

The promise remains but the real enemy—sin and rebellion must be conquered, must be overcome. Then, God's purpose and vision will be completed.

Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.

All the makers of idols will be put to shame and disgraced; they will go off into disgrace together. But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting.

For this is what the LORD says — he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited. Isaiah 45:15-18 (NIV)

First John, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, came to prepare the

way for the promised Messiah. His message was simple: **"Repent for the kingdom of God is near."**

Then Jesus came and preached the same message:

At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea. Luke 4:42-44 (NIV)

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1:14-15 (NIV)

As the prophets of old taught and preached, salvation comes, not by conquering armies but by conquering sin. The heart must be changed from rebellion to faithful obedience, from love of self to love of God. Jesus came and showed us the way. He showed

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### **INTRODUCING THE BIBLE**

Karam Ram is a Bible reader living in England and with the help of a few friends around the world, answers two questions:

1. Why do people read the Bible?
2. Why are some people actually willing to suffer in order to read it?

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## *The Royal Son-Made Perfect through Suffering (Continued)*

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us a life completely dedicated to obeying and loving God. In everything, in every decision and choice, in every moment of life, he chose to love his Father. We are told that he was tempted in every way that we are. He had to be made perfect through suffering. We are told that he was like us:

In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. **But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death**, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, **should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering**. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congrega-

tion I will sing your praises."

And again, **"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same**, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. **Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren**, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted**, He is able to aid those who are tempted. Hebrews 2:8-18 (NKJV)

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, **but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin**. Let us

therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16 (NKJV)

So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest...

who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, **though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him...** Hebrews 5:5-11 (NKJV)

Jesus was made like us. He was tempted to disobey and do his own will. He learned obedience by his sufferings. It was not easy or natural for him but in his total commitment to his Father, he overcame sin. He conquered it completely. The New Testament

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## *The Royal Son-Made Perfect through Suffering (Continued)*

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records at least two times when Jesus was sorely tempted. Once was in the wilderness after 40 days of hunger. The other time was in the Garden of Gethsemane:

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." **He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,"** he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. **"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you**

**will."**

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? **Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."**

Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" Mark 14:32-42 (NIV)

There was a battle going on inside of Jesus. He knew what was coming. He wanted there to be some other way to complete God's purpose without going to the cross. His will was in conflict with his Father's will to the point that he felt overwhelmed. As you read through the gospel records, many times it is recorded that Jesus went off to pray in a solitary place or on a mountain. Luke, especially, points out how Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray. Just as in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus turned to his Father for help in overcoming temptation and sin.

Jesus was not perfect when he was born. He had to be perfected. It was through the suffering of temptation that he was made perfect. In his complete obedience to his Father, sin was conquered. Death no longer reigned.



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*Ps 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. KJV*

## *In Christ All Will Be Made Alive*

When we look at Jesus and his crucifixion, what do we see? What do we learn from the cross? Shortly before his crucifixion Jesus tells us what we need to learn:

I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world **must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.** John 14:29-31 (NIV)

Jesus is the promised Messiah. He is the promised seed of Abraham and the promised royal son of David but in order to bring about the purpose and vision of God, sin had to be conquered. In his life he did this. What we must learn is that Jesus in all things loved his Father and obeyed him completely—even when his own will and desire was in conflict.

Because of Jesus' perfect obedience, the grave could not hold him. Because of his perfect obedience, even to the point of suffering a terrible death, God has exalted him to the highest place at own right hand.

This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.** David said about him:

"I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shak-

en.

Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

"Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. **But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.** Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. Acts 2:22-34 (NIV)

The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead — whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. Acts 5:30-32 (NIV)

And being found in appearance as a man, **he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross! Therefore, God ex-**

**alted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,** in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:8-11 (NIV)

Jesus conquered sin, the real enemy, and therefore, conquered death. God raised him from the dead to live forever--the first of the sons of God--Jesus is the firstfruits of the renewed and glorious creation:

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. **For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.** For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 1 Corinthians 15:20-24 (NIV)

How does Jesus' obedience help us? By his obedience how does he save us from our sin. Paul gives us a clue:

And what a difference between our sin and God's generous gift of forgiveness. For this one man, Adam, brought death to many through his sin. But this other man, Jesus Christ, brought forgiveness to many through God's bountiful gift. And the result of

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## *In Christ All Will Be Made Alive (Continued)*

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God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but we have the free gift of being accepted by God, even though we are guilty of many sins. The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over us, but all who receive God's wonderful, gracious gift of righteousness will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.

Yes, Adam's one sin brought condemnation upon everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness makes all people right in God's sight and gives them life. Because one person disobeyed God, many people became sinners. **But because one other person obeyed God, many people will be made right in God's sight.** Romans 5:15-19 (NLT)

Through his perfect obedience Jesus brings us God's forgiveness, mercy and grace. Sin is conquered in Jesus. Adam's sin brought death. Jesus' perfect obedience brought life to himself and to all who belong to him.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished

on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. Ephesians 1:3-10 (NIV)

The cross of Jesus was not the wooden cross that he was hung on. The cross of Jesus was the daily struggle with temptation. Sin and rebellion had to be overcome. Jesus, in his love for his Father, in his complete and total obedience, through the power of his Father given in answer to his prayers, conquered sin and death. Jesus has shown us the way. In Jesus we can receive forgiveness from God and help in time of need. In Jesus, we too are conquerors.

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## Daily Bible Readings for January, February and March

*Read the Entire Bible in One Year*

Day	JANUARY		FEBRUARY		MARCH	
	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa
1	Gen 1,2	Matt 1	Exo 11,12	Matt 28	Lev 23, 24	Acts 24
2	Gen 3,4	Matt 2	Exo 13,14	Psalm 9, 10	Lev 25, 26	Acts 25
3	Gen 5,6	Matt 3	Exo 15,16	Psalm 11,12	Lev 27, Provb 7	Acts 26
4	Gen 7,8	Matt 4	Exo 17,18	Acts 1	Provb 8-10	Acts 27
5	Gen 9,10	Matt 5	Exo 19,20	Acts 2	Num 1,2	Acts 28
6	Gen 11,12	Matt 6	Exo 21,22	Acts 3	Num 3,4	Psalm 19,20
7	Gen 13,14	Matt 7	Exo 23,24	Acts 4	Num 5,6	Romans 1
8	Gen 15, 16	Psalm 1,2	Exo 25,26	Acts 5	Num 7,8	Romans 2
9	Gen 17,18	Matt 8	Exo 27,28	Acts 6	Num 9,10	Romans 3
10	Gen 19,20	Matt 9	Exo 29,30	Acts 7	Num 11,12	Romans 4
11	Gen 21, 22	Matt 10	Exo 31,32	Psalm 13, 14	Num 13,14	Romans 5
12	Gen 23,24	Matt 11	Exo 33,34	Acts 8	Num 15,16	Romans 6
13	Gen 25,26	Matt 12	Exo 35,36	Acts 9	Num 17,18	Romans 7
14	Gen 27,28	Matt 13	Exo 37,38	Acts 10	Num 19,20	Romans 8
15	Gen 29,30	Psalm 3,4	Exo 39,40	Acts 11,12	Num 21,22	Romans 9
16	Gen 31,32	Matt 14	Provb 3,4	Acts 13	Num 23,24	Romans 10
17	Gen 33,34	Matt 15	Provb 5,6	Psalm 15,16	Num 25,26	Romans 11
18	Gen 35,36	Matt 16	Lev 1,2	Acts 14	Num 27,28	Romans 12
19	Gen 37,38	Matt 17	Lev 3,4	Acts 15	Num 29,30	Romans 13
20	Gen 39,40	Matt 18	Lev 5,6	Acts 16	Num 31,32	Romans 14
21	Gen 41, 42	Matt 19	Lev 7,8	Acts 17	Num 33,34	Romans 15,16
22	Gen 43, 44	Psalm 5,6	Lev 9,10	Acts 18	Num 35,36	Psalm 21,22
23	Gen 45, 46	Matt 20	Lev 11,12	Psalm 17,18	Provb 11,12	Psalm 23-25
24	Gen 47, 48	Matt 21	Lev 13,14	Acts 19	Provb 13,14	Psalm 26-28
25	Gen 49, 50	Matt 22	Lev 15,16	Acts 20	Provb 15,16	Psalm 29,30
26	Provb 1,2	Matt 23	Lev 17,18	Acts 21	Deut 1,2	Mark 1
27	Exo 1,2	Matt 24	Lev 19,20	Acts 22	Deut 3,4	Mark 2
28	Exo 3,4	Matt 25	Lev 21,22	Acts 23	Deut 5,6	Mark 3
29	Exo 5,6	Psalm 7, 8			Deut 7,8	Mark 4
30	Exo 7, 8	Matt 26			Deut 9,10	Psalm 31,32
31	Exo 9,10	Matt 27			Deut 11,12	Mark 5

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