

THE LIGHT OF *grace*

BIBLE STUDY



WEEK 1: HOPE
Zechariah



WEEK 2: PEACE
Isaiah



WEEK 3: JOY
Elizabeth



WEEK 4: LOVE
Mary

A 4-SESSION **BIBLE STUDY**
FOR ADVENT



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Introduction

*You then, my child, be strengthened
by the grace that is in Christ Jesus ...*

2 TIMOTHY 2:1

Since its introduction in 1773, the hymn “Amazing Grace” has been sung by millions all over the world. It is a song that has reminded us of the richness of God’s divine favor toward us. Even when we were lost and blind spiritually, God brought us back to him by sending his Son Jesus to be born among us and to save us through his sinless life, suffering, death and resurrection.

Jesus, who is the light of the world, is the light of grace for us this Advent season. His undeserved light upon us reveals the glory of his gracious gifts of hope, peace, joy and love. Those who experienced the light of grace in the time before Jesus’ birth were Zechariah, Isaiah, Elizabeth and Mary. Exploring the biblical accounts of the lives of these faithful people helps us to witness the grace of God at work in them then and prompts us to see the grace of God at work in our lives today.

So much grace is poured out for us through Jesus, that his message of grace flows out from us as we await the celebration of his birth. We are the light of the world, too, as we make his grace known to all around us this Advent season. Let this Bible study enlighten you and give your strength on your journey toward the manger.

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.*

Hope: Zechariah

And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.

PSALM 39:7



OPENING PRAYER

Dear God, you enlightened the world with amazing grace when you sent Jesus to be born in Bethlehem. Fill our hearts and minds with hope in him for our deliverance from evil and our salvation from sin. Let us not hesitate to be bearers of hope in Jesus to those who have no hope. Amen.

DISCUSSION

What is something (small or large) that you are hopeful for this Advent season?

INTRODUCTION

It might have seemed reasonable for Zechariah the priest to be hopeless. He and his wife did not have any children, and they were now “getting on in years” (Luke 1:17). Yet hope came to Zechariah when the angel Gabriel came to him while he was working in the Temple and told him he and his wife would have a son. Mired in hopelessness at the time, Zechariah did not believe at first, and Gabriel kept him from being able to speak until his child, John, was born. Hope tumbled out of Zechariah’s mouth when he was able to speak again and saw the hope alive in his son who would prepare the way for Jesus. This miraculous story reminds us that through God’s amazing grace, we, too, have hope for the future, no matter how hopeless things may look sometimes.

HOPE FOR ABRAHAM

In order to understand more fully Zechariah’s story in the New Testament book of Luke, we must go back to the Old Testament book of Genesis and look at the story of Abraham. He and his wife, Sarah, too, were childless and quite advanced in age. (Abraham was pushing 100.) Yet three men from God visited Abraham and said he would have a son. By God’s grace, Abraham went from hopeless to hopeful.

1. **Read Genesis 18:1-14.** How does Abraham respond to the arrival of God’s three messengers? How is his response different from Zechariah’s response to God’s messenger? (See Luke 1:12, 18). How do you think you would respond if you were Abraham or Zechariah in these circumstances?

2. **Read Hebrews 11:8-13.** Why did Abraham have hope in the future? Why is his hope so remarkable?
3. **Read Genesis 21:1-7.** What does Isaac represent to Abraham and Sarah? What does Isaac represent to the world?
4. **Read Genesis 15:5-6.** After Isaac was born, the promise of God recording in these verses came true. What came to pass through Abraham's offspring? What mighty nation came to be? What important individuals would eventually be born into the line of Abraham? (See Matthew 1:1-6, 17.)

HOPE AT THE TEMPLE

1. **Read Luke 1:5-7.** Why is it significant that the ancestry of both Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth is mentioned here? What does Zechariah have in common with Abraham? What might Zechariah and Elizabeth assume about their lives because of this? What made their current circumstances especially difficult?
2. **Read Luke 1:8-13.** What was Zechariah doing in the temple? Where does the angel Gabriel meet him? What emotions reveal Zechariah's hopelessness?
3. **Read Luke 1:14-17.** What wonderful things will come to pass through the life of John? What makes this description of John so hopeful? Do you know people with similar characteristics in your life today?
4. **Read Luke 1:18.** Why is this seemingly good news still hard for Zechariah to accept? Why is it hard for us to accept good news from God sometimes?
5. **Read Luke 1:19-20.** Gabriel's action to strike Zechariah speechless seems like a punishment for his unbelief, but how might it also have been a blessing in disguise?

6. **Read Luke 1:21-25.** What does Zechariah's rather calm return home while speechless reveal to us? What does Elizabeth's reaction to her pregnancy reveal to us about her and about the relationship between Zechariah and Elizabeth?

HOPE AT THE BIRTH OF JOHN

1. **Read Luke 1:57-58.** What does the presence of neighbors and relatives after the birth of John say to you?
2. **Read Luke 1:59-66.** The naming of John causes quite a stir. Why? Why are Zechariah and Elizabeth so confident in his name? Why is it meaningful that Zechariah can speak again after he writes down his son's name? Why does this incident frighten the people who were there?

A SONG OF HOPE

1. **Read Luke 1:67-79.** All the hope that Zechariah had stored up inside during his days of no voice came pouring out in a song the Church now calls the Benedictus (Latin for blessed, the first word sung). What specific acts of God does Zechariah praise? What hopes for the future does Zechariah speak over his son?
2. **Read Luke 1:46-55.** How is this song of Mary the same as or different from Zechariah's song?
3. **Read Matthew 3:1-12.** How does John the Baptist live out the words of his father's song of hope?

A VISION OF HOPE

1. **Read Isaiah 51:1-5.** The prophet Isaiah connects the dots for us from Abraham to the light that will shine, the light we now know is Jesus. What does Isaiah say is present in this light of grace?
2. What elements in this prophecy hint at the presence and role of John the Baptist in bringing this light to the people?
3. What makes this prophecy so hopeful?

A HOPE FOR US

1. **Read Romans 5:1-5.** What is the role of grace and faith in the building up of the hope we have?
2. What benefits ultimately come through suffering?
3. How are these benefits revealed in the life of Zechariah after the hardship he had in waiting for a child?
4. How have the benefits of suffering revealed themselves to you in your life?
5. How does suffering make our hope in Jesus stronger?

AMAZING GRACE

1. Sing or speak together this verse from “Amazing Grace”:

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

2. How is this verse similar to Zechariah’s song of hope?

RESPONSIVE READING..... PSALM 33:18-22

L *Truly the eye of the lord is on those who fear him,*

C **on those who hope in his steadfast love,**

L *to deliver their soul from death*

C **and to keep them alive in famine.**

L *Our soul waits for the lord;*

C **he is our help and shield.**

L *Our heart is glad in him*

C **because we trust in his holy name.**

L *let your steadfast love, o lord, be upon us,*

C **even as we hope in you.**

HYMN.....MY HOPE IS BUILT ON NOTHING LESS

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
No merit of my own I claim
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
In ev'ry high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

His oath, his covenant and blood
Support me in the raging flood;
When ev'ry earthly prop gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

When he shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in him be found,
Clothed in his righteousness alone,
Redeemed to stand before his throne!
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for the light of grace that shines with the gift of hope. Help us to look toward the future with great confidence and trust in you and your plan for us. Open our eyes this Advent to the hope we find in Scripture, prayer and worship that you are always with us, you prepare a place for us in heaven and you saved the world forever by being born in a manger Christmas Day. Amen.

SHINE THE LIGHT OF HOPE

Bring hope to those in need around you by delivering food and clothing to homeless shelters or other organizations that care for the needy.