

A Historical Study On The Book Of Luke
Teaching #5: How Did Zechariah and Elizabeth Become Righteous Before God?
Luke 1:5-6

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*In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. **6Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly.***

What does it mean that Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly?

We will examine this later in the study. But for now, let's examine the word **righteous**.

The words **righteous** and **righteousness** are used in the Bible about 522 times combined. They are two of the most important words in the Bible because the Bible is clear that only the righteous will be saved from the judgment to come.

According to the Bible,

- The righteous will experience **eternal life**.
- The unrighteous will experience **judgment**.

The Jewish people were very familiar with words *righteous* and *righteousness*. Based upon the Jewish Scriptures, it was their core belief the righteous would be saved and experience eternal life, and the unrighteous, the ungodly and wicked, would experience judgment.

Since their understanding of righteous and righteousness was developed in the Jewish Scriptures, let's look at what the Jewish Scriptures say about these two words.

Let's start with **Noah**.

We first see the salvation of the righteous and the judgment of the unrighteous in **Genesis 6:10-13**, which reads,

*Noah was a **righteous** man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. **10**Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. **11**Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. **12**God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. **13**So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.*

God's judgment was because of the violence upon the earth. It is important we do not view God's judgment as an unloving God. God's judgment is established in his love. The earth had become a very evil place, and God, in his loving judgment, removed the evil and the evil ones from the earth.

Isn't this what people want in their cities, neighborhoods, and communities – the removal of evil and evil ones who make where they live an unsafe place? In the same way, God wanted an earth that is safe; therefore, he removed all the evil and evils ones from the earth, leaving a safe place for Noah and his family.

Prior to executing judgment during the days of Noah, God provided salvation for all through Noah and the ark. However, people mocked Noah and refused salvation; therefore, they forfeited salvation that could have been theirs by refusing to accept God's offer of salvation.

Genesis 7:1

*The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you **righteous** in this generation.*

The righteousness of Noah was based upon his belief in God and what God said, much like Abraham was credited righteousness because he believed God (Genesis 15:6). We will examine this later in the study.

Today, Jesus is the ark of our salvation. There is still one final judgment to come, when God removes all sin and sinners from the earth (Matthew 13, 2 Peter 3, Revelation 20) and creates the new heavens and earth, where there is no more mourning, death, tears, hurt, and heartache (2 Peter 3, Revelation 21).

God has provided salvation (righteousness) for all people through Jesus (see Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Hebrews). Those who trust in Jesus will escape judgment and experience eternal life. Those who turn away from Jesus in unbelief, will experience judgment.

Remember, we are looking at how the Jewish people's understanding of righteous and righteousness developed in the Jewish Scriptures. Based upon these scriptures, the righteous would be saved and the unrighteous would undergo judgment.

Let's look at **Abraham and Sodom and Gomorrah**, relating to the salvation of the righteous and the judgment upon the unrighteous.

Genesis 18:23-25

*Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous [in judgment] with the wicked? **24**What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? **25**Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"*

In Abraham's conversation with God, God said if he found ten righteous people he would not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. However, ten righteous people were not found. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.

The Biblical themes of righteous and righteousness continued to develop with the giving of the law.

Moses says in **Deuteronomy 4:5-8**,

*See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. **6**Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” **7**What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? **8**And **what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws** as this body of laws I am setting before you today?*

Deuteronomy 6:25

*“And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our **righteousness.**”*

Deuteronomy 24:13

*Return their cloak by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in it. Then they will thank you, and it will be regarded as **a righteous act** in the sight of the LORD your God.*

Unfortunately, the people of Israel rebelled to the law, and the judgment for disobeying the law came upon them. One of these judgments was other nations would occupy their land.

This initially happened when Babylon (modern day Iraq), under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, invaded Israel and destroyed Jerusalem and the wall around it (2 Chronicles 36:15-21).

In response to this, and in preparation to rebuild the wall, Nehemiah prayed to God,

Nehemiah 9:33

*In all that has happened to us [the nation of Israel], you [God] have remained **righteous**; you have acted faithfully, **while we acted wickedly.***

As we continue through the Scriptures, Job said,

Job 25:14 (see also 15:14 – the word righteous is used about 11 times in Job)

*How then can a mortal be **righteous** before God?*

The book of Psalms continues the theme of the words *righteous* and *righteousness* by contrasting the judgment to come upon the unrighteous, the ungodly, and sinner, but **not** upon the righteous.

In Psalms, the words **righteous** and **righteousness** are used a combined time of around **122**.

Psalm 1:4-6

*Not so the wicked! For they are like chaff driven off by the wind. Therefore, **the wicked will not stand in the judgment**, nor sinners in the assembly of the **righteous**. For the LORD guards the path of the righteous, but the way of **the wicked will perish.** (Psalm 1:4-6 Berean Study Bible)*

Psalm 28:3

Do not drag me away with the **wicked**, with those who do evil, who speak cordially with their neighbors but harbor malice in their hearts.

Psalm 37:12-13

The **wicked** plot against the **righteous** and gnash their teeth at them; but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming.

Psalm 37:20

But **the wicked will perish**: Though the Lord's enemies are like the flowers of the field, **they will be consumed**, they will go up in smoke.

Psalm 37:28-29

Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed; the offspring of **the wicked will perish**. **The righteous will inherit the land [earth] and dwell in it forever**. Psalm 37:28-29

Psalm 37:34

He will exalt you [the righteous ones] to inherit the land [earth]; when **the wicked are destroyed**, you will see it.

Psalm 37:38-40

But **all sinners will be destroyed**; there will be **no future for the wicked**. The **salvation of the righteous** comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.

Psalm 58:9-11

...**the wicked will be swept away**...**11**Then people will say, "Surely **the righteous still are rewarded**; surely there is a God who judges the earth.

Psalm 69:28

May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the **righteous**.

We see in the book of Psalms the law is the standard of righteousness. The Jewish people understood that if they were to enter eternal life and escape the judgment upon the wicked, obedience to the law was required.

Psalm 119:7

I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn **your righteous laws**.

Psalm 119:62

At midnight I rise to give you thanks for **your righteous laws**.

Psalm 119:106

I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws.

Note: See also Psalm 119:137-138, 144, 160, 164, and 172.

Psalm 140:3 states the righteous will live in God's presence.

Psalm 140:3

Surely the righteous will praise your name, and the upright will live in your presence.

But Psalm 143:2 states,

Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.

And this is the problem for humanity...but not for God.

In love, God, through Jesus, took upon himself the sinfulness of all and experienced death (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

This is grace.

He now offers all people righteousness and eternal life, which are received through faith in Jesus.

Paul explains this fully in Romans.

Let's continue to examine the words righteous and righteousness.

The book of Proverbs continues the theme of *righteous* and *righteousness*, using these two words around 70 times combined.

Proverbs 11:4

Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath [the destruction of the wicked from the earth when they perish – see Psalm 1:6; John 3:16; Hebrews 3-4], but righteousness delivers from death [see the book of Romans].

Proverbs 11:19

Truly the righteous attain life, but whoever pursues evil finds death.

Proverbs 11:22

Be sure of this: The wicked will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will go free.

Proverbs 11:23

The desire of the righteous ends only in good, but the hope of the wicked only in wrath.

Proverbs 11:31

If **the righteous** receive their due on earth, how much more **the ungodly and the sinner!**

Ecclesiastes 3:17

I said to myself, "God will bring into judgment both **the righteous and the wicked**, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed."

Daniel 12:2-3

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. **3**Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to **righteousness**, like the stars for ever and ever.

Note: Jesus was referring to Daniel 12:2-3 in John 11 in his conversation with Martha. Also, in his conversations with many others concerning eternal life, Daniel 12:2-3 was one of the parts of the Jewish Scriptures he was referencing.

Malachi 3:18

And you will again see the distinction between **the righteous and the wicked**, between those who serve God and those who do not.

Jesus, who understood the Jewish Scriptures fully, said in **Matthew 13:41-50**,

The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil [the judgment and wrath to come]. **42**They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth [Revelation 20]. **43**Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father...**The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous** [on the day of judgment and wrath] **50**and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth [Revelation 20].

At the end of the age, just prior to the establishment of the new heavens and earth, the wicked will be thrown into and consumed or perish in the lake of fire, while the righteous will live forever on the new earth (See 2 Peter 3).

We read about this in Revelation 20-22.

We only looked at a few of the uses of the words *righteous* and *righteousness* in the Jewish Scriptures; but remember, these two words are used about **522** times combined in the Bible.

This brings us back to Luke 1:5-6.

Luke 1:5-6

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. **6**Both of them were **righteous** in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly.

Luke writes that Zechariah and Elizabeth were both *righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly*.

With our current understanding of righteous and righteousness in the Scriptures and by examining a few more scriptures, let's look at four possibilities of how they were righteous in the sight of God.

Four Possibilities To Consider

Possibility #1: Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God in that they externally, faithfully, and consistently observed the requirements of the law, such as the days, diets, duties, washings, sacrifices, Sabbaths, festivals, and tithes as prescribed in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.

They were blameless in that they did not fail to observe any of the requirements of the law of Moses. They were at all the feasts and festivals, they observed all the Sabbaths, they gave their tithes, they observed all the days, they followed the food laws, among all the other requirements.

However, this righteousness is not the righteous that saves but is that God saw them doing what was right, and it was right to observe the law. Yet this did not achieve for them internal and eternal righteousness needed for salvation. This was an external righteousness, meaning they externally observed the law, but they recognized observing the law did not result in internal and eternal righteousness.

The external observation of the law concerning external righteousness is what Paul wrote about in **Philippians 3:4-9**.

*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh [earning righteousness through the works of the law], I have more: **5**circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; **6**as for zeal, persecuting the church; **as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. 7**But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. **8**What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ **9**and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in ^a Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

Righteousness based upon the law meant that Paul externally observed the law of Moses faithfully and consistently, meaning he observed the days, diets, duties, washings, sacrifices, Sabbaths, festivals, and tithes prescribed in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. However, he realized later that his observance of the law did not bring internal cleansing from sins and internal and eternal righteousness.

Zechariah and Elizabeth probably realized this also. They knew external observation of the law did not result in internal righteousness, but their internal righteousness was through belief not through observance of the law.

We will examine this later.

So we are seeking to understand what Luke 1:6 means when it says Zechariah and Elizabeth were both *righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly*.

We are looking at four possibilities of what this could mean.

Possibility #2: Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God because they observed all the Lord's commands and decrees without fault; as a result, they were declared righteous by God.

According to the Scriptures, righteousness gained through obedience to the law is **not** a possibility.

Psalms 143:2 states,

*Do not bring your servant into judgment, for **no one living is righteous before you [in your sight]**.*

Proverbs 20:9

Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am cleansed from my sin"?

Ecclesiastes 7:20

*Indeed, **there is no one on earth who is righteous**, no one who does what is right and never sins.*

Romans 3:10

*What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. **10**As it is written [in the Jewish Scriptures – Psalm 143:2; Ecclesiastes 7:20]: "There is no one righteous, not even one..."*

Romans 3:19-20

*Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. **20**Therefore **no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law**; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

Galatians 2:20

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

We see in the verses above that no one is righteous and no one will be declared righteousness in God's sight by observing the law, rather the law reveals the sinfulness of everyone who is under the law.

The law in Romans is referring to the moral law.

- The moral law in the form of the Ten Commandments was written on **stone** for the Jews.
- The moral law was written on the **hearts** of the Gentiles (Romans 2:15). This is the internal knowledge of good and evil resulting from the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden.

Since they Jews had the law written on stone and Gentiles had the law written on their hearts, Paul could emphatically state in Roman 3:20 *that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world [Jew and Gentile] held accountable to God.*

The Jews and Gentiles understood morality, yet all Jews and all Gentiles have acted immorally in their desires and deeds, and, therefore, are accountable to God for their sins.

We also see in the previous verses that if anyone could be declared righteousness in God's sight by observing the law, then Jesus' death was not needed; therefore, his death on the cross would have been a waste of time and blood.

Jesus' death on the cross is proof no one can gain righteousness by observing the law.

The message of the cross is that Jesus took our full sinfulness at the cross and he freely offers us his righteousness as a gift of grace that is received by faith in Jesus (Romans 3:21-25; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

With the understanding of the above verses, Zechariah and Elizabeth were **not** righteous in God's sight because they observed the law.

This leads to possibility number three.

Possibility #3: Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God because they believed in God, **plus** they observed all the Lord's commands and decrees without fault.

One of the issues following the ascension of Jesus was the belief that faith in Jesus plus obedience to the law was required for righteousness. This resulted in many discussions among the leaders about if the Gentiles were required to obey the law **and** place their faith in Jesus for righteousness.

The leaders met in Jerusalem to discuss the matter, ultimately deciding that **only** faith in Jesus is required for righteousness.

This meeting is written about by Luke in **Acts 15**.

They ultimately concluded,

"...it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus [all that Jesus did at the cross in taking our sinfulness and death, then offering us his righteousness and eternal life as a gift] that we [the Jews] are saved [declared righteous by God], just as they [Gentiles] are [by faith in Jesus not works of the law]." (Acts 15:11)

Peter stated in **Acts 15:9-11**,

*...he [God] purified their [Gentiles] hearts by **faith**. Now then, why do you [leaders saying that faith in Jesus plus obedience to the law was required for salvation/righteousness] try to test God [God says righteousness is by faith in Jesus apart from the law] by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke [the law of Moses] that neither we [the current generation of Jews in AD 50] nor our ancestors [previous generations of Jews, the Jews of the Jewish Scriptures] have been able to bear? No! [it's not by faith in Jesus **plus** obedience to the law] We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus [what Jesus did for us in dying for our sins on the cross] that we [the Jews] are saved, just as they [Gentiles] are."*

The reason Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians (around AD 50) was to correct the false teaching that belief in Jesus **plus** following the law of Moses was required for righteousness.

Those in Galatia previously responded to Paul's message of grace (in AD 46 – see Acts **13:13-14:1-28**), which is forgiveness and justification are received by faith in Jesus **apart** from the law of Moses (Acts 13:38-39). However, leaders during this time persuaded those in Galatia that righteousness was through faith in Jesus **plus** obedience to the law (Galatians **1:6-9; 4:17; 5:7-10**).

Ironically, Paul wrote his letter after the meeting in Acts 15, pointing out that those at the meeting were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel (righteousness by faith apart from the law) agreed upon at the meeting. You can read about this in Galatians 2. Those not acting in line with the truth included Peter, Barnabas, and James, as seen in Galatians 2:11-21.

To listen or watch my teachings on this event, [CLICK HERE](#) (**Galatians #8 and The Galatians Project #3**)

You may also be interested in my commentary on Galatians: [CLICK HERE](#).

In Galatians 1, Paul identifies the problem concerning those in Galatia who deserted grace and returned to the law for righteousness because of the pressure put on them by their leaders.

In Galatians 2, Paul reveals how James, Peter, Barnabas, and others failed to act in line with the truth of the gospel that righteousness is received by faith without having to follow the law of Moses.

In **Galatians 3**, Paul emphasis that righteousness is by faith apart from the law, and that all who rely in the law for righteousness are under the curse of the law.

In **Galatians 4**, Paul states that Jesus freed those under the law from the law so the Spirit of Jesus could live in their hearts and so they could know God as Abba, Father.

In **Galatians 5**, Paul exhorts his readers to not let anyone put the yoke of the law upon them, now that Jesus had freed them from the law.

Paul makes it very clear in Galatians that righteousness is **not** a combination of works of the law and faith in Jesus.

Consequently, Zechariah and Elizabeth were **not** righteous in God's sight because they believed in Jesus plus obeyed the law.

NOTE: Some may reply that James seems to indicate that justification (righteousness) is a combination of faith and the law. I address this in a booklet I wrote: [Paul and James, Were They Really In Agreement?](#)

This leads us to possibility number four.

Possibility #4: Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God because they knew there are none who are righteous, as stated in the Jewish Scriptures, and that only through belief is one declared righteous by God.

In **Romans 4** and **Galatians 3**, Paul defends that righteousness is by faith/belief apart from the law. He uses Abraham as an example that righteousness is through belief and not through the law.

Paul states Abraham was declared righteous by God when he believed, which was before the law was given and before Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice.

Romans 4:2-3

*If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. **3**What does Scripture [Genesis 15:6] say? “Abraham **believed** God, and it was credited to him as **righteousness**.”*

Genesis 15:6 is when God promised Abraham that he and Sarah would have a child in their old age. Even though Abraham did not understand how this could be, [Abraham tried to work it out with Eliezer and Hagar] he believed God. Upon this belief, God declared Abraham righteous – innocent of all sins and blameless in his sight.

God’s declaration of righteousness for Abraham was **apart** from any works by Abraham.

Paul continues to write in **Romans 4:4-5**,

*Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. **5**However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.*

Not only was Abraham declared righteous because he believed, but all who believe in Jesus will be declared righteous by God.

Paul writes in **Romans 4:24-25**,

*The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him [Abraham] alone, **24**but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. **25**He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

Paul makes the same point about Abraham in **Galatians 3:8-11**.

*So also Abraham “**believed** God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” [Genesis 15:6]...Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by **faith**, and announced the gospel [righteousness by faith] in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” [Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18] **9**So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of **faith** [Genesis 15:6]. **10**For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” [Deuteronomy 27:26] **11**Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by **faith**.” [Habakkuk 2:4]*

Paul’s purpose in writing Romans and Galatians was to explain that the righteousness required to escape judgment comes through belief in Jesus and **not** through the works of the law.

Jesus tells a story in **Luke 18:9-14** about a prideful, self-righteous Pharisee seeking righteousness through the works of the law and a humble, sinful tax collector who admitted his unrighteousness.

Jesus says,

*“To some who were **confident of their own righteousness** [the Pharisees and teachers of the law] and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: **10**“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11**The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. **12**I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ **13**“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me [spare me from the judgment I deserve for my sins], a sinner.’ **14**“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home **justified before God**. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

In this story, there are two people: the self-righteous man and the unrighteous tax collector.

Only one went home justified, meaning righteous before God. This was the tax collector.

The tax collector went home justified before God because he admitted his sinful condition and his inability to gain righteousness through works of the law. He knew he was a lawbreaker; and therefore did not possess the righteousness necessary to escape judgment and experience eternal life.

It was through the awareness of his sinful condition that he asked for God’s mercy. In this awareness and request of God for mercy from the judgment to come, the tax-collector was declared righteous by God; thus, sparing him from judgment and securing for him eternal life.

It was the tax collector’s belief in the mercy of God toward sinners that justified him. Belief for the tax collector is seen in the acknowledgment of his sinfulness and trusting in the mercy of God for righteousness.

God’s mercy toward lawbreakers is written about by Jeremiah in Lamentations 3:23 after Israel had broken God’s law repeatedly.

So this takes us back to Luke 1:5-6 where we asked at the beginning of the study:

What does it mean that Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly?

Let’s read the Luke 1:5-6 again,

Luke 1:5-6

*In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. **6Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly** [they faithfully and continually observed the days, diets, duties, tithes, regulations, festivals, Sabbaths, and sacrifices as required by the law of Moses – everything contained in Leviticus and Deuteronomy associated with the law].*

According to the scriptures, the only possible way Zechariah and Elizabeth could be justified (innocent of sin, declared righteous by God) in God's sight is just like the tax collector: the awareness of their sinful condition before God and acknowledging their need for the mercy of God. With this awareness and dependence upon God for his mercy in their sinful state, they became righteous in God's sight, just as they tax collector.

In Zechariah's prayer contained in **Luke 1:68-79**, he uses the word ***mercy*** two times.

The fact Zechariah and Elizabeth were observing the law was proof they were aware of their sinful, unrighteous condition before God and were in need of the mercy of God, unlike the self-righteous Pharisee who practiced certain parts of the law, thinking he gained righteousness through these practices.

Zechariah and Elizabeth saw the law as a temporary provision for the forgiveness of their sins, while the Pharisees and teachers of the law mistakenly saw the law as the means to gain eternal righteousness.

The law was the standard for righteousness, as we saw this Deuteronomy 4, 6, and Psalms 119. If someone could obey the law, they would be righteous. However, no one could obey the law; therefore, the law provided the sacrifices necessary to temporarily cover one's sinfulness.

Leviticus makes this clear. The word ***sin*** is used **76** times in Leviticus, referring to the sins of people and the sacrifices associated with each sin. In this way, the law revealed the sinfulness of humanity.

So the law established the standard of righteousness, while also providing the sacrifices necessary when the righteous standard of the law was transgressed.

Zechariah and Elizabeth learned from the Jewish Scriptures, specifically Isaiah 53, the Christ would be the Lamb of God, the final sacrifice for sins by dying for the sins of the world.

They taught this to John, who said,

"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

According to Isaiah 53, the Lamb of God would justify many, meaning he would make many people internally and eternally righteous in the sight of God.

When Zechariah and Elizabeth observed the animal sacrifices by the law for their sins, they knew the Lamb of God to come would be the real sacrifice for their sins, providing permanent forgiveness of sins (see also Luke 1:76-79) and making them righteous before God. They knew the Christ would establish the new testament as prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34), bringing final forgiveness of sins.

The law was not given by God to be observed so that one could gain righteousness. The law was given by God to reveal the sinful condition of humanity (Romans **3:19-20**; **5:20**; **7:7-24**) and to provide temporary covering for sins until Jesus, the Lamb of God, came and took the sinfulness of humanity upon himself, providing eternal forgiveness and righteousness.

Until Jesus came, humble people would observe the sacrifices required by the law, not for the purpose of gaining righteousness but as a provision for their unrighteousness. However, prideful, self-righteous people, such as the Pharisees, did **not** make sacrifices for their sins because they thought they had no sin.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were not internally righteous before God because they merited righteousness by observing the law; rather, by observing the law, especially the sacrifices for sins, they were declaring their sinful condition before God and need for the mercy of God. It was their belief in the God of mercy toward sinners that resulted in their being righteous in the sight of God.

Yet in contrast, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law saw the law as the means to gain righteousness by hitting the standard of righteousness. They did **not** offer sacrifices for their sins because they did not think they had sinned. They did not see their sinful condition. Instead, they became self-righteous, proudly thinking they had **not** transgressed the law.

During the ministry of Jesus, Jesus used the law to expose the sinfulness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, such as in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

In Romans 7:7-25, the law educated the man about sin, increased the sin in his heart (see Romans 5:20), exposed the sin in his heart, and sentenced him to death for his sin. Through the law, this man became aware of his sin and his need for Jesus. This is what the law was designed to do (Romans 3:19-25).

The law showed Zechariah and Elizabeth the sin in their hearts. They knew they had sinned and fallen short of the law's righteous standard (Romans 3:23), which is why they observed the law blamelessly in following the requirements of the law when making sacrifices for their sins.

They were not righteous because they followed the law blamelessly; rather, they followed the law blamelessly because they were unrighteous, making the required sacrifices for the temporary forgiveness of sins. By following the law blamelessly, Zechariah and Elizabeth were admitting they were sinners and were in need of the required sacrifices to cover their sins.

As a priest under the law of Moses, Zechariah sacrificed many animals for his own sins and the sins of people (see Leviticus and Hebrews).

In Romans, Paul writes about how the law makes people aware of their sinful condition. He shows how everyone falls short of the glory of God, meaning the righteousness of God. He also states that Jesus became the sacrifice for our sins, and, by believing in him, we receive the gift of righteousness.

Paul writes in **Romans 3:19-24**,

*Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **20**For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. **21**But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (which is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed – **22**namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ [in dying for our sins] for all who **believe**. For there is no distinction [all are sinners], **23**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God [the*

righteousness of God revealed in the law]. **24***But they are justified* [declared innocent of all sins, righteous in God's sight] *freely by his grace through the redemption* [payment for our sins] *that is in Christ Jesus*.

No matter who a person is...

No matter what a person has done...

Righteousness is available is a gift to all people and is received by faith in Jesus.

Just as Noah, Abraham, Zechariah, and Elizabeth were declared righteous by God through belief, those who believe in Jesus are declared righteous by God.

If you have never trusted in Jesus for righteousness, today you can. It is as simple as saying, "Jesus, I believe you took my sinfulness, my unrighteousness upon yourself at the cross. I believe you rose from the dead. Today I receive your forgiveness and righteousness."

Thank you for being a part of this Bible study.

All verses are NIV unless otherwise noted.

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Thanks for being a part of this Bible study!

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