

Luke 1:79

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Analysis

Zechariah prophesies that Messiah will give 'light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.' The imagery combines Isaiah 9:2 (light to those in darkness) with Psalm 107:10-14 (shadow of death). Darkness represents sin, ignorance, and spiritual death; light represents revelation, truth, and life. The 'shadow of death' (Greek 'skia thanatou,' σκιά θανάτου) depicts humanity's desperate condition—not merely walking in darkness but sitting in death's shadow, helpless and hopeless. Christ's coming brings light that reveals truth, dispels darkness, and guides into peace (reconciliation with God).

Historical Context

This prophecy comes at the end of Zechariah's Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79), spoken when John was named and Zechariah's speech restored. The imagery would resonate deeply with first-century Jews suffering under Roman occupation—darkness and death's shadow were lived realities. However, Zechariah identifies spiritual darkness as humanity's deeper problem, needing divine light for rescue. Isaiah's prophecies of light coming to those in darkness (Isaiah 9:2, 42:6-7, 60:1-3) were understood as messianic promises. Jesus later identifies Himself as 'the light of the world' (John 8:12, 9:5), fulfilling this prophecy.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the imagery of light versus darkness and death's shadow describe humanity's spiritual condition apart from Christ?
2. What does the phrase 'guide our feet into the way of peace' teach about Christ's mission beyond mere rescue from darkness?

Interlinear Text

ἐπιφάναι	τοῖς	ἐν	σκότει	καὶ	σκιᾷ	θανάτου	
To give light	G3588	in	darkness	and	in the shadow	of death	
G2014		G1722	G4655	G2532	G4639	G2288	
καθημένοις	τοῦ	κατευθῆναι	τοὺς	πόδας	ἡμῶν	εἰς	ὁδὸν
to them that sit	G3588	to guide	G3588	feet	our	into	the way
G2521		G2720		G4228	G2257	G1519	G3598
εἰρήνης							
of peace							
G1515							

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 9:2 (Light): The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

Matthew 4:16 (Light): The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

Acts 26:18 (Light): To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Isaiah 42:7 (Darkness): To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

Ephesians 5:8 (Light): For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

John 12:46 (Light): I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

John 8:12 (Light): Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Psalms 107:14 (Darkness): He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder.

John 9:5 (Light): As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Psalms 107:10 (Darkness): Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron;