

SPENDING TIME WITH THE PROPHETS

the book of Zechariah

Haggai & Zechariah: Contemporary Prophets With Different Focuses

Ezra records how when the people returned from captivity under the leadership of Zerubbabel, they soon set about rebuilding the temple (Ezra 3.8ff). However, their enemies succeeding in halting the work by making false accusations to the new king of Persia, Cambyses. No work was done on God's house for years, but two prophets encouraged the people to resume this great work: *"When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them."* (Ezra 5:1-2)

"The little book of Haggai is a straight forward message of encouragement to get busy, and God would respond with His blessings, but the little book of Zechariah is not that simple and straightforward. Zechariah's prophecies consist mostly of visions which he saw. His book definitely fits into the category of apocalyptic literature. The great lesson of Zechariah is that at this very time when a new physical temple was being built, God had a new spiritual edifice in mind. When the Jews returned from captivity, their thoughts were of resuming their normal way of life, rebuilding their city, their temple, and their nation. Through Zechariah God calls their attention to the infinitely greater spiritual kingdom and city and temple that He had in mind God wanted a holy people - in the Israelites, and in His people today. This new spiritual order is what He is describing in Zechariah." (Bob Waldron. *A Remnant Shall Return*)

The Message Of Zechariah

1. Introduction: call for the people to return to God (1.1-6)
2. Visions giving present comfort and promising future blessings (1.7-6.15)
 - a. Vision of the horsemen (1.7-17). The Lord is aware of what is happening on the earth, He will respond to the needs of His people.
 - b. Vision of 4 horns and 4 craftsmen (1.18-21). God's judgment on the nations who have scattered and oppressed His people (note how 4 stands for the nations in Isaiah 11.12; Jer. 49.36; Daniel 7.3,17; 11.4).
 - c. Vision of a man with a measuring line (2.1-13). The glorious future of God's people is described as Jerusalem is measured. God will protect this Jerusalem and dwell in her midst. God's people are called to escape from Babylon (representing this world of evil) so they can dwell with Him.
 - d. Vision of the high priest being cleansed (3.1-10). "As high priest, Joshua represented the people. They were to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19.6). The

nation as well as the priesthood had been brought to the verge of destruction. As a stick burning in the fire, they had been pulled out. Joshua's purification is the purification of the nation as well as the purification of the priesthood that serves the nation. But Joshua and his fellow priests are a sign, a type of God's servant who is coming, the Branch (see Isaiah 11.1; Jer. 23.5). This prophecy looks to the Messianic day when men would dwell in peace and security in Zion." (Waldron)

- e. Vision of the lampstand and olive trees (4.1-14). A difficult passage to understand, but the key is vs. 6-7. Zerubbabel will succeed because God's Spirit will be with him. The temple would shed the light of God abroad, thus it is the lampstand. The two olive trees are the anointed ones (kings 1Samuel 10.1; 16.13) and priests (Exodus 30.30; 40.14-15), but as we will see these two offices will be combined into one (6.12-14).
 - f. Vision of the flying scroll (5.1-4). God will not tolerate evil.
 - g. Vision of wickedness in an ephah (5.5-11). Wickedness is sent away from God's people, for He will not tolerate it. However, wickedness is still found in the world (represented by the land of Shinar).
 - h. Vision of 4 chariots (6.1-8). Compare with the vision of the 4 horsemen (1.7-17). God knows what is going on in the world and executes judgment.
 - i. Vision of Joshua crowned with a double crown (6.9-15). "Vs. 13 shows that the priest would be a king, the two offices combined into one. Therefore the crowns were somehow to be made into one, hence a double crown symbolizing the joining of the two anointed offices of priest and king. Joshua, the present high priest, merely symbolized the new arrangement that would come to be. Joshua did not become king upon his throne. The one prophesied is the Branch, identified as the Messiah in other passages (see Isa 11.1; Jer 23.5). He shall build the true temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, the divine glory (John 1.18). He shall be king and priest, and through His counsel as both king and priest there would be peace for His people. The double crown was to be kept in the temple as a memorial of the fact that they who are far away shall come and build in the temple of the Lord. These are the Gentiles, who at this time were "far off," but in Christ they would be made "nigh" and would "grow into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2.17-22)." (Waldron)
3. Questions about fasting; God's answer (7.1-8.23)
- a. Should we fast? (7.1-7) Note: 2 years have passed since the visions that began in 1.7. The people had fasted in the fifth month, commemorating the destruction of the temple (2Kings 25.8-9) and in the seventh month, commemorating the assassination of Gedaliah (Jeremiah 41.1-2). "People usually cry because they feel like crying, because they are sad. To ask if one needs to cry is the epitome of ritualism." (Waldron)
 - b. Hear the former prophets (7.8-14). Devastation had come on the people because of disobedience.
 - c. God's covenant renewed with His people (8.1-8).
 - d. Hear the present prophets (8.9-17). God will bless His people.
 - e. Fasting and mourning will be turned to joy, gladness and feasting (8.18-23). "The fast of the fourth month was to commemorate the day the Babylonians made a breach in the wall of Jerusalem (Jer. 52.6-7). The fast of the fifth month was to remember the destruction of the temple (2Kings 25.8-9). The fast of the seventh month remembered

the death of Gedaliah (Jer 41.1-2) and that of the tenth month was to remember when the siege of Jerusalem began (2Kings 25.1)... the fulfillment of this prophecy came in the days leading up to the gospel age, when Gentiles all over the world, wherever there were Jews, saw their faith, saw the religion God had given them, and became God-fearers and proselytes. These furnished a great pool of ready converts to the gospel. Ultimately the promise is fulfilled in Christ, because He is where all truth-seekers must find the end of their quest." (Waldron)

4. Destruction of the nations; deliverance for God's people (chapters 9-11)
 - a. Punishment of the nations (9.1-7). However, note there was hope for the nations; they could become part of His people (vs. 7).
 - b. The Lord defends His people and gives them victory (9.8-17). Victory would be achieved because the King was coming, although in a humble fashion (vss. 9-10). Salvation would occur "because of the blood of My covenant with you." This was not the old covenant with Israel, but the promised covenant of the Messianic age (Jeremiah 31.31-34).
 - c. The Lord renews His people (chapter 10). Idolatry had led to the people's captivity, but now the Lord would bring His people out of captivity (not just physical, but spiritual).
 - d. Woe to the evil shepherds, the Lord will provide a Good Shepherd (chapter 11). May point to the future destruction of national Israel. Why would this destruction occur? Because national Israel had rejected the Good Shepherd (vss. 12-13). "The point is that in pity God would provide a good shepherd for His people Israel, to replace the wicked ones they had had. But they would not receive this shepherd; they would despise Him, and He would be disgusted with them. The shepherd, of course, was Jesus. The leaders of Israel set the price they would pay for His betrayal: thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave! Judah too this money he was paid, and cast it down in the temple... (Matthew 27.3-9). Then, in the vision, Zechariah cut his other staff Bands, because the Lord would destroy the fellowship of Israel. This passage is a prophecy of God's offer of His Son, His rejection at the hands of the Jews, and the consequences this rejection would bring upon their nation." (Waldron)
5. Spiritual Jerusalem: holy and indestructible (chapters 12-14)
 - a. Jerusalem besieged (chapter 12). National Israel may be destroyed (chapter 11), but spiritual Israel would be protected even though the nations of the world would make war against it. This spiritual Israel had also once rejected the Messiah (vs. 10; John 19.37), but had responded with mourning.
 - b. Spiritual Israel: purified and refined (chapter 13). Those who mourned (12.10-14) are now purified by the fountain (13.1, i.e. the blood of Jesus). These now reject the idols and are true to God. They may have been scattered after the slaying of their Shepherd (vs.7; Matthew 26.31), but they were not forgotten. These are refined and saved.
 - c. Jerusalem delivered; nations flow to it (chapter 14). In language reminiscent of Revelation, God's people are persecuted and all hope seems lost. But God fights for His people! God will reign and His people will dwell in safety. The nations are judged by God, but many families of the earth stream to Jerusalem. All in Jerusalem is holy, even the bells on the horses bear the inscription reserved for the high priest (vs.20; Exodus 28.36).