

ZECHARIAH - THE PROPHET TO OUR TIMES

There can be no clearer prophecy of scripture that relates to the days in which we live. No clearer indication that Jerusalem will be the focal point of world attention in the days before the return of Jesus to earth. One might have thought that the Church at least, would have still retained its hope of the return of Jesus to earth. Does not the occasion of Communion itself, shared in by so many, remind us that we do this “...until He comes” **1 Cor 11:26**. If ever there was a time when the people of God need to have this hope in themselves and share it with those, especially in the Church - it is now!

For the enemies of Israel across the nations, God makes clear that He will make Jerusalem a cup of ‘drunkenness’ or ‘reeling’ as they seek to heave it away. They will fail and be destroyed. But for those who pray for Israel’s salvation, there is this most wonderful of promises *“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of Grace and supplication; then they shall look upon Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for His only Son and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.”* **Zech 12:10**.

But who is this man and what is the fullness of his message to us as we seek to know how to pray and intercede for Israel? How can we avoid “prophetic information” that only distracts us into fruitless speculation and instead focus on the truth that is designed to shape us into a people ready for the times? *“Therefore since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conduct and Godliness.”* **2 Peter 3:11**.

Zechariah – the Man

Zechariah was a priest but also a Prophet. His Name means “God remembers” that reminds us of God’s faithfulness to Israel. His

prophetic ministry began in 520BC two months after Haggai had completed his, forming a kind of relay. It began whilst he was a young man with chapters 7&8 occurring 2 years later (518BC) However, some critics who deny the predictive element of prophecy say that the 9:13 reference to Greece indicates that chapters 9-14 were written after 480BC when Greece replaced Persia as the great world power.

His contemporary Haggai was concerned much more with present, immediate and specific problems - *“Finish the Temple and God will bless you.”* Simple! Zechariah’s message however is apocalyptic and full of visual symbolism. In this way, his prophecy is similar to Daniel and Revelation and relates not just to the immediate future but also to the distant peaks, rising up in the far future, at the end of days.

Israel’s first return under Zerubbabel and Joshua took place in 536BC after the edict of Cyrus. However, only 50,000 of the poorest Jews returned at that time; amongst them were many priests. It was a more of a religious return rather than one motivated by territorial ambition or for a better life. Life was far better in Babylon! Isn’t this the story repeated over centuries, that Jewish people have in the main been so reluctant to return to the Land of Promise. *“Next year in Jerusalem”* was their annual cry – for you but not for me! What a joy for us today to witness the re-birth of Israel which God alone has brought about.

These returnees first concern was to rebuild the altar and then start on the Temple but opposition caused fear and apathy to set in. For twelve years things went nowhere until Haggai stirs them up to finish the work. Zechariah however focuses on the greater matters of the future rule of Messiah from Jerusalem.

Israel's Leadership. One can divide Israel's history into roughly four periods of 500 years. 1. The Patriarchs from Abraham to Moses (2000 – 1500BC); 2. The Prophets from Moses to Samuel (1500 – 1000BC); 3. The Kings from Saul to King Zedekiah (1000 – 587BC); and finally the Priests until Jesus. There had of course been a special priest/king once before, whose name was – Melchizedek. But this period under Zechariah marked a transition in leadership from Prophet to priest. It ended with Annas and Caiaphas. Uniquely, Jesus was Prophet (like unto Moses) Priest (of the line of Melchizedek not Eli) and King (from David via Nathan not by Solomon).

Outline of his Message

The Prophecy can be divided into three main sections. The first dealing with immediate problems featuring eight visions. Then after an interlude focussed on Fasting & Feasting the last section concludes by looking at the future in two sections referring to:

1. Things that affect National Israel with clear prophecy concerning Jesus Chs 9-11
2. Things that involve the whole world at the end of the age, Chs 12-14.

Zechariah is something like a jigsaw. If you don't have the picture on the lid, it is very hard to understand where to start. **Hebrews 1:3** says, *"God spoke in times past to the Fathers by the prophets in various ways (or bits and pieces) but now in the last days has spoken through His son."* In many ways, Jesus is the picture on the lid but it only comes into focus by seeing the bigger picture contained in all of scripture. Only when one understands this can one make sense of it all. For example, there are many parallels to the book of Revelation which greatly helps our understanding.

This prophecy is referred to as an 'Oracle' or 'Burden' and it means heavy or weighty. It concerns the judgments that God will *"in the*

last days" pour out on the world and this is no academic matter. It's not just the passing on of information – it's the outpouring of God's heart.

A word of warning

God has revealed Himself to man in many ways. In the NT Paul encourages the Churches not to be ignorant or unaware of these things. *"But if thou shalt seek the Lord your God, thou shalt find Him if thou seek Him with all thy heart."* **Deut 4:29** *"The secret things belong to God..."* (Heb. 'sathar' hidden, concealed) but things revealed (Heb. 'galal' uncovered, discovered, reveal, open. Verb 'galal' to seek after) *belong to us and our children for ever that we may do all the words of this Law."* **Deut 29:29** see also **Rom 11:25; 1 Cor 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8, 2:11; & 1 Thess 4:13.**

However, there are matters He definitely does not want us to pry into just out of curiosity. Remember what happened to the men of Beit Shemesh who peered into the Ark **1 Sam 6:19**. Also Saul who enquires of the Lord through a medium in **1 Sam 28:6**. How often our motivation is one of mere curiosity but the dangers are profound. *"There is a way that seems right unto a man but the ends thereof are the ways of death."* **Pr 14:12**. We can think we are right in what we are doing but it ends in tears. In the end we can become like the men of Athens and the foreigners, *"...who spent all their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear something new"* **Acts 17:21**.

Sometimes we can be seeking just the knowledge about future things that are not for us to know - using the Bible as a 'horoscope.' We should be careful about our pursuit of knowledge for its own sake especially about the days to come. We can so seek to satisfy our curiosity about the things that are going to happen on the earth that we miss what is God's priority concern. His heart is for us to know Him, so that He can trust us to share these warnings about the future with

men who might turn to the Lord for Salvation. True Prophecy is specific and accurate but even so, it doesn't tell us everything we would like to know. There are clear dangers in spending time in pointless speculation. Nevertheless, Jesus upbraided the Pharisees who could forecast the weather but could not discern the signs of the times (**Matt 16:3**) and we too should have the same attitude in seeking to understand the times.

The overview of the near future -

Chapters 9-11

Zechariah accurately foretells (**9:1-8**) the destruction of all the nations who come against the Land. God will deal with all who come against Jerusalem including Syria, Tyre, Sidon, and the Philistines. However some Philistines will join Israel. After this time a Peaceful King (**9:9-10**) will come on the scene riding into Jerusalem. He is greeted with "Hosanna", "Son of David" and Israel is faced with a choice of freedom fighter, Bar Abbas – 'son of the father' or Jesus - 'The Son of The Father'. Who would they choose - the one who would fight the Romans for them or the One who would fight Satan and sin? They choose the former just like any other people in the same situation.

God is the Mighty God (9:11-10:7). Here is a change of picture with the Lord who is prepared now to fight for Israel. He is the Good shepherd unlike the bad shepherds who lead them astray. He will gather His People (**10:8-12**) from the four corners of the world in a reversal of Diaspora. It's a wonderful picture of a gathered people being brought home where there will not be enough room for them. This can only be the events witnessed in recent years followed by a predicted judgment on Israel's forested neighbours (**11:1-3**). Lebanon is certainly a target for God's wrath even though 'cedars' here may also refer to the Temple destruction since it was largely made of cedars from Lebanon. The pride of Jordan and trans-Jordan is broken at this time - the place

where wolves and lions would hide in wait for their prey.

Finally, a judgment of worthless Shepherds (**11:4-17**) who would proliferate in the Land, reminding us that judgment begins at the house of the Lord with Shepherds taking greatest responsibility. How true of today, when the Church is ravaged by self-seeking and fame-hunting wolves. There is a clear picture of Judas who is paid 30 pieces of silver for being an apostate shepherd. Remember, he had been amongst the disciples as they preached the gospel and healed the sick. Finally, He breaks two staffs. One with the Nations indication the Day of Favour (grace) is over. The second with between Israel and Judah indicating a civil war that is triggered by a False Shepherd – the antichrist figure who will lead Israel into the darkest of times.

Future international influences -

Chapters 12-14

The general and most obvious point here is that literal Jerusalem is now the heart of the action. 21 references to The City are in this section alone and the phrase "In that Day" is used 18 times here though not before. Clearly, it is the day of the Messiah, not in humiliation but in triumph. There is a real historical air about it. The order may not always be sequential and **12:3** and **14:2** may be a case of overlapping events similar to the structure of the book of Revelation.

The most significant and challenging thing is this manifestation of an invading Army which is coming from all nations first to lay siege against Jerusalem and then to engage in battle against this most anointed of all cities. At the height of this battle, just when Israel might be anticipating extinction, the Lord Himself will open their eyes "*...to look upon Him whom they pierced and then they shall mourn for Him as for an only one*" **12:10**, and then fight for them.

Despite the liberal critics who believe this is was fulfilled by either Nebuchadnessar, Antiochus Epiphanes or by the Romans, they cannot deny the person of Messiah visibly appearing on Olivet to deliver His people and the destroyer gathered against them. The Spirit of grace and supplication has never yet been poured out on the Jewish nation as a whole, nor has the Lord become *“King over all the earth.”* (14:9) – but then it will! Inevitably, the difficulties that Israel will face at that time and perhaps the current issue with Iran is one, will culminate in the world’s

patience running out and an outpouring of their wrath upon the Land.

However, Israel will be saved by God’s intervention destroying all those who come against Jerusalem. Jeremiah refers to it as the time of Jacob’s trouble (**Jer 30:7**), otherwise known as the great tribulation. This will be a fiery trial that has not been seen before. It is a ‘burden’ (Heb. ‘massa’) to the prophet and contains announcements of judgment to come. Yet, praise God *“... they will be saved out of it.”*

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