
The Book of Zechariah

Part 4 by: Ronald L. Dart

When you are reading the Old Testament prophets, there's a particular challenge you run into again and again. What time period is the prophecy aimed at? Now I have long since explained that in order to understand a prophet you need to know where he was and how his prophecy would be understood by the people who heard it. Some of the prophecies are purely historical, other are set in the near future, still others are way off, and far beyond the prophet's horizon. In some cases, they're even beyond our own horizon.

The prophet Zechariah is really an interesting case in point. He was writing in a clear, well understood, historical context. He used names of real people, dates, and places. His prophecies were delivered to real people who were affected by those prophecies, but every so often, his prophecies, what shall I say, they fall off the table historically and suddenly you find they've joined up with the book of Revelation, which is looking down to the end time, that is in the future. I think almost universally understood by all, but a handful of Christians, at the last days. In some cases, its type and antitype. There's a historical fulfillment that's reflected, and an end time fulfillment. In some cases, there is really nothing in history that matches it at all, and we are forced to look ahead to see what in the world was this prophet seeing and what did it mean?

You can easily see how understanding what was going on around Zechariah when he wrote, can help in understanding what he's about. For one thing, he uses so many icons, so much symbolic imagery, that you have to ask, what did his first readers think he meant by the things he wrote down?

Get Back To Work On The Temple

In Zechariah chapter 6 verse 9, the prophecy turns back to the time of Zechariah, to the time of the building of the Temple. They had actually laid a foundation, but political circumstances had forced the abandonment of the project and yet here comes a prophet saying, "Hey! Here's the word of the Lord, get back to work on the Temple."

Now he says in verse 9, "And the word of the LORD came to me: "Take silver and gold, from the exiles, Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah, who have just arrived from Babylon. Go the same day to the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah."

Now these are real people in real time, with first and last names, we got them nailed.

Verse 11, "Then take the silver and gold and make a crown and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua, the son of Josedech."

You may know this, but 'Joshua' is the Hebrew, that finds its expression in the Greek word 'Jesus', those names are one and the same. In this case he is talking about Joshua, the son of Josedech, who along with Zerubbabel, who was the governor of Judah at that time who served the people. There is an anomaly here, Zerubbabel was the ruling governor, Joshua was the high priest, but there is something new here, listen to how he put it.

The Branch

Zechariah 6 verse 12: "Tell him, this is what the LORD almighty said: "Here is the man whose name is The BRANCH, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. {13} It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.""

Two what? Because, up until this point we only have one guy here and his name is Joshua. Well if you follow this through from the beginning of Zechariah you would know that there are two, Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel who is the ruling governor.

What this prophecy is about is someone whose name is not Joshua but The BRANCH, and most Christian commentators quickly and immediately identify this with Jesus, who is going to branch out and build the Temple of the Lord. I don't know how we should take that relative to Jesus. Does it mean when he spoke to the Jews that He would destroy this temple and will rebuild it in three days, referring to His body as the temple of the Lord. Or was He looking down to the last days to when He returns and builds the Temple of the Lord?

Well we'll have to put that in abeyance for right now. He says that He will build the Temple of the Lord; He will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule. Now explanations of this vary. Some suggest it means a harmony between the two offices of governor and high priest. Others think the Branch is the Messiah who unites both offices in one crown. It is true enough that Christ is a priest king and does unite the offices in Him. Now the Qumran community actually expected two Messiahs, one of them a king and the other a priest, Jesus was not exactly what they were looking for.

He goes on to say, "Now the crown," and I presume after the coronation.

"The crown will be given to Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen the son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the Temple of the LORD."

Something to remind everybody, of the unity, the unity of command in Israel and of rule.

If Then Statement

Then he says in Zechariah 6 verse 15: "Those who are far away will come and help to build the Temple of the LORD and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if."

And this is the killer in so many prophecies, they are "if then" statements. They depend on whether or not you do something, this will happen if, "you diligently obey the LORD your God."

Ok, here is the challenge that was laid out before the people who heard Zechariah speak, the first eyes that fell on his writings and read what he said. They realized that there would be a harmony between the two offices there, but they also may have looked ahead to a time when that one crown would actually sit on one head, who would be their Messiah.

Should We Mourn and Fast?

Zechariah Chapter 7: "In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Chislev.

"The people of Bethel had sent two men to entreat the LORD, by asking the priests of the house of the LORD Almighty and the prophets, {3} "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years."

One suspects that this fast in the fifth month, had to do for the mourning for the loss of Temple, but the Temple had been rebuilt.

"Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me: "Ask all the people of the land and the priests," here's the question in verse 5: "When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? {6} And when you were eating and drinking, was it not just feasting for yourselves?"

Ouch, this is a question we have to ask ourselves about all of our religious services. Are they really for God? Are they really for His Glory? Are they to honor Him, or are we just doing it for our own entertainment, our own pleasure, or even to feel good about ourselves? So, you think livelier music is needed for worship, Ok fine. Are you doing it for the Lord? Or are you doing it for your own pleasure, because you like it better?

What Does God Desire Of Us?

Continuing in Zechariah 7 verse 7: "Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?" And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: {9} "This is what the LORD Almighty said." Here is what I want from you people, all right. "Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. {10} Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. And in your heart Do not even think evil of each other."

Now this is classic. He didn't say, "This is what the Lord Almighty says, "You don't have to fast any more in the fifth month or the seventh month, you are now going to have to fast in the twelfth month."" He didn't say that.

This is what I want, I'm going to be looking at how you treat one another, I don't want you to even think evil of each other in your hearts.

They had questions about their religious services. Are they really necessary? Does God want this of them? The reply from God is much more practical and down to earth.

Pure religion and undefiled is not defined by your fasts, it is to visit the fatherless and the widows in their afflictions and to keep yourself unspotted from the world (John 1:27). How simple and how Christian?

The People Turned Their Backs On God

Zechariah continues in chapter 7 verse 11, "They refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped their ears. {12} They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So, the LORD Almighty was very angry."

You know this is really something, because the people came there saying do, we need to keep on fasting? They were religious people. They weren't a bunch of sinners out there running around doing stuff. They were religious people, but they wouldn't do the important things.

And God being angry said this in verse 13, "When I called, they did not listen; so, when they called, I would not listen. {14} I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate."

And what made all the difference? Was it religious services? Was it religious ritual? What was it? Well it seems to boil down to how they treated one another.

God Will Not Forsake Israel

You know there is a peculiar thing about prophets, they will tell you something is going to be so bad, but then God comes along and reminds them to be sure and tell the people that "I am jealous for Zion, that while it will be bad for a while, I'm not going to let it go completely."

Zechariah 8 Verse 1: "Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, {2} Thus saith the LORD of hosts; "I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. {3} Thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Zion, and I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain."

Now you know, Christians reading this passage will have little doubt that this is a prophecy about the return of Christ, Jews reading this passage will see it as representative of Zechariah's own day, that God is bringing His people back, and that means He is coming back to Zion and He will dwell in the midst of them and so forth. But a Christian is going to recall some things from the New Testament and other prophets that make them think about the ultimate return of Christ.

"God dwells in Zion; Jerusalem is called the city of truth." Isaiah described this same event in different terms.

The Anger Of God

Isaiah Chapter 1 verse 21, Isaiah cries out. "How is the faithful city become a harlot! It was full of judgment; righteousness used to lodge in it; but now murderers."

What a picture you get and of course you learn if you read through Biblical history, there was a time when they had so corrupted the word, the expression how is a faithful city become a harlot, is perfectly apt, because they had moved temple prostitution right to the temple mount in the Temple of God. Male and female.

He said: {22} "Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water, {23} Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: Everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards: they don't judge the fatherless; the cause of the widow doesn't come to them."

One of the things that repeatedly comes in prophecy is this anger of God because you have allowed your judicial system to become corrupted. It favors the money interest. We ought to be frightened when we read this kind of thing.

Verse 24, "Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, "I will ease me of my adversaries, and I will avenge me of my enemies: {25} And I will turn my hand upon you, and I will purely purge away your dross, and take away all your tin.""

How do you get rid of the dross that corrupts silver? You heat it in a pot until it's melted down, and then you skim off the bad stuff.

Verse 26, "And I will restore your judges as at the first, and I will restore your counselors like it used to be at the beginning: and afterward you shall be called, the city of righteousness, the faithful city. {27} Zion shall be redeemed with judgment and her converts with righteousness."

Man, it's amazing how often our redemption comes in judgment. We have to come to a place where we are willing to deal correctly with crime. We certainly aren't there yet in this country but here is the return of judgment to God.

God Loves Judgment

In reading the Psalms we see that God loves judgment (Psalms 33:5, 37:28). He just loves it, which means basically, if you're ever called to sit on a jury, you had better be as pure and honest as the driven snow, when you make your decision. You must not be influenced either by a person's poverty or a person's wealth.

Then later Isaiah returns to the same theme again, later in the book.

Chapter 60 verse 14: "The sons also of them that afflicted you shall come bending to you; and all they that despised you shall bow themselves down at the soles of your feet; and they will call you. "The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.""

He says, "Everyone that has afflicted you, all of those people that persecuted you, all of those people that fired rockets in among your civilian population, they will have to own up to the fact that this is the Zion of the Holy One of Israel."

The word 'Zionism' is absolutely hated by the people around Israel.

Verse 15, "Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through you, I will make you an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations."

Isaiah wasn't the only one, besides Zechariah, Jeremiah spoke of this same time.

You'll find it in Jeremiah 31 verse 23: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; "They shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless you, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness. {24} And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities around it, husbandmen, and they that go forth with flocks. {25} For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul." {26} Upon this," Jeremiah says, "I woke up, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet to me."

Then later in Jeremiah there is a curious statement made about this event.

God's Covenant With David

Jeremiah 33 verse 16: "In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, Yahweh our righteousness. {17} For thus saith Yahweh; "David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; {18} Neither shall the priests or the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually."

There is no king reigning and there are no Levites offering these offerings right now, but then the prophecy doesn't say that they would always be doing this, he's simply says there will not be a lack of a man who could.

Verse 19, "And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, {20} "Thus saith the LORD; "If you can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, that there should not be day and night in their season."

If you can stop that and change that.

{21} "Then my covenant can be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers."

Now how can this be? There is no king there. There are no Levites there now serving. Well a little later in this same Chapter there is a clue.

Jeremiah 33 Verse 23: "Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, {24} "Do you not consider what this people have spoken, saying, the two families which the LORD has chosen, he has cast them off? Thus, they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. {25} Thus saith the LORD; "If my covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth. {26} Then I will cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for.

And it's the word for in here, what follows is what tells us what the problem is.

"For I will cause their captivity to return, and I will have mercy on them."

The implications of this are these, as God has caused Israel to return before, He will cause her to return yet again. During the captivity, there will be no king sitting and no Levites serving. Disaster may strike, and people may be carried away but in the end the promise unto David and to the Levites will be fulfilled, in the end they will return. And the way I read the prophets there will be a final return with the returning Messiah as king and high priest.

There Will Be Peace In Jerusalem When Christ Reigns

Returning to Zechariah Chapter 8 Verse 4: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet be old men and old women dwelling in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. {5} And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof."

Do you do realize what this pictures? It pictures a scene of safety for the weakest people of society, old men, old women, getting around with a cane or a staff and kids playing in the streets of the city with no danger from anyone.

Verse 6, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; "If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvelous in my eyes?" Says the LORD of hosts. {7} Thus saith the LORD of hosts; "Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country."

This is kind of strange in a way, they never went west in any captivity that I am aware of.

Verse 8, "I will bring them, and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."

You know I can really see why some people see this fulfillment in a return from Babylon and from Persia. I can see why some people think that this is an establishment of the nation of Israel and in type, I can see it too. But I fear that there is yet another holocaust on the horizon from which the final return will come about.

Continuing in verse 9, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; "Let your hands be strong, you that hear in those days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in that day, the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built.""

Notice we're right back in Zechariah's time. You that hear these words that are spoken, in these days that the house of the LORD might be built.

Verse 10, "For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beasts; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men everyone against his neighbor."

What he is telling us is, there was a time when there was no safety, no job for men to do and they were really in a lot of trouble. We've got similar parallels today when you have to be careful when you go outdoors. You have to be careful when you line up to get on a bus in Israel, you never know when someone is going to blow the whole thing up. You have to be careful when you're plowing your field because you never know when a rocket may come in from over the border to blow you, your houses and everything up.

He says in verse 11, ""But now I will not be to the residue of this people as in the former days," saith the LORD of hosts. {12} "For the seed will be prosperous; the vine will give her fruit, and the ground will give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things."

God Will Deliver Israel

You know when you get through reading through the prophets you have the distinct impression it's going to happen not once, maybe not twice but perhaps many more times, that Israel will get in trouble and God will deliver them out of it yet again.

Verse 13, "And it shall come to pass, that as you were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so, I will save you, and you will be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong." {14} For thus saith the LORD of hosts; "As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not turn back from that: {15} So again have I thought in these days to do well to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: don't be afraid. {16} This is what I want you to do, speak you every man the truth to his neighbor; execute the

judgment of truth and peace in your gates: {17} And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath: for all these are things I hate," saith the LORD."

How Do You Treat Your Neighbor?

And once again we come up right flat against this, it's not a question of how you worship, it's a question of how you treat your neighbor. Now I don't say that worship is not important, worship is very important because it keeps you in the knowledge of who God is. But knowing that, you really have to be careful about how you treat your neighbor.

"And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me," [19} "saying, thus saith the LORD of hosts; "The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, are going to be in the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.""

I was fascinated to realize they came to God to ask about these fasts, and this is Gods reply. Love the truth and love the peace.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you determine if a prophecy is already fulfilled or has a future fulfillment?
2. Do you enjoy studying the prophets?
3. What do you think about God's questions to Judah about who did they mourn and fast for?
4. How would you answer Mr. Dart's questions about who are we honoring with our religious services?
5. What does God desire of us as His people?
6. Do you find a similarity of what God said he requires in Zechariah to what the Messiah states Himself?
7. Why is it easier to fast and do religious rituals rather than making sure we are treating each other the way God tells us to?

8. What are your thoughts about Mr. Dart's statement: "There is no king reigning and there are no Levites offering these offerings right now, but then the prophecy doesn't say that they would always be doing this, he's simply says there will not be a lack of a man who could"?
9. How would you answer Mr. Dart's question: "How do you treat your neighbor?"
10. How much of Zechariah is still applicable to us today?