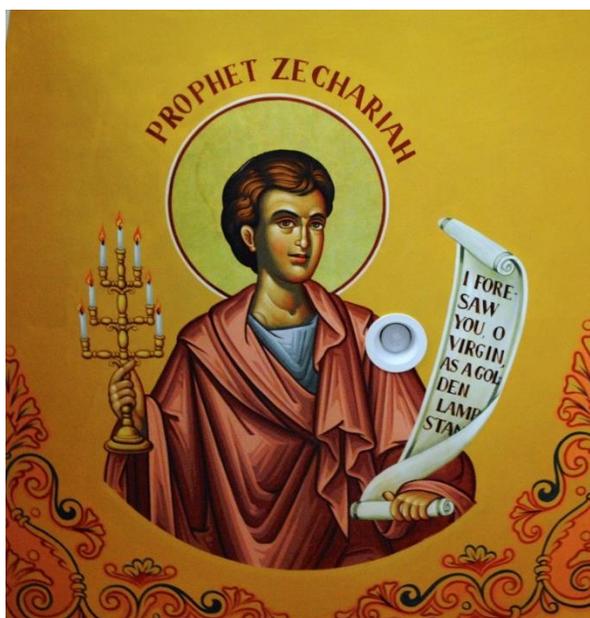


THE COMING OF CHRIST IN THE MINOR PROPHETS

Zechariah 1-6



Introductory Questions/Intentions:

- Who was this prophet and in what historical/cultural circumstances was he writing?
- Who was his audience and what was the importance of his message, especially about Christ (the Messiah)?
- What does the prophet teach about the identity & character of Christ & the meaning of His *Advent* (Coming)?
- How can our understanding of Christ's First Advent through this prophet improve our discernment of and love for Christ now and prepare us for His Second Advent?

Zechariah's name means "*The Lord remembers*", which is a quite appropriate name for him given the message this prophet delivers to a people returning from exile. He, along with Haggai, had returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile after King Cyrus (538 BC) conquered Babylon and allowed

them to rebuild under the leadership of Zerubbabel. They both urge the people who had become discouraged to finish rebuilding the Temple. Zechariah's encouragement comes in the form of visions and messages which convey a present exhortation, and an eschatological and messianic hope for the future. His book is clearly divided into two distinct halves, the first containing eight visions and the second containing various messages or oracles with which he is burdened.

The book starts off with a call for **repentance** in 1:2-6 which admonishes the people to not be like their ancestors who failed to heed the warnings from the prophets. The structure of this initiating call by the Lord of hosts is firstly to "*return to me. . . from your evil ways*" (Zech. 1:3-4 ESV). It then points their attention to the consequence their unrepentant ancestors had suffered—that God had "*done what he said he would*" (Zech. 1:6b). The implication here being to encourage the people to learn from the example of the past rather than repeat it. It possibly would have also implied that it was their un-repentance which led to their exile. The title for God, יהוה צבאות (ADONAI-Tzva'ot (CJB) or the Lord of Hosts (ESV, NASB) or the Lord of Heaven's Armies (NLT) is used 53 times in the book. It takes a prominent role as the primary way the prophet refers to God. This is quite a significant title for God to address the people, who had been defeated and exiled by an earthly army, in order to emphasize to them that the commander of Heaven's armies was for them.

Eight Visions

Among the eight visions, 4 and 5 are the first to directly foreshadow Christ as they prophecy about the cleansing and crowning of Joshua (the priest) and the golden lamp stand and olive trees (3:1-4:14). The vision's structure tends to point to the center point as the focus which is interestingly where we find the messianic reference to the "*Branch*" (3:8), which is translated "*Dayspring*" in the Septuagint (used by the Orthodox churches). This messianic foreshadowing continues into the second half of Zechariah and recalls the prophecies of Isaiah (chapters 4 & 11). It is referenced numerous times in the Gospels (for example Matt. 9:36, 19:26, 21:5, 26:15, 26:31 Mk. 10:27, 14:27, Jn. 12:15, 19:37). Also John makes reference to Zechariah multiple times in Revelations (for example Rev. 6:2-5, Rev. 11:1, 4, 21:1, 21:25, 22:5).

These visions, on one level, serve to encourage the people to continue presently in the effort to rebuild the Temple but on another level promise a far greater, final redemption to come. The first vision of the riders introduces the Angel of the Lord (1:11), to whom the other angels report and who asks God how long until he shows mercy again (1:12). God's response is one of comfort and that His anger is now shifted against the nations which inflicted harm against Israel (1:13-15). It ends with a promise of comfort and restoration for Israel (1:16-17). The second vision of the horns and blacksmith speak of God's plan to destroy the other nations (1:21), followed by the third about measuring Jerusalem (2:1-4) fulfilling what God had said in 1:16. What follows is a quite significant promise delivered by a second angelic figure who speaks for the Lord and promises to not only protect the city but also be the glory inside it (2:5)!

We then see a repeated phrase which tells us the result of all of this, mainly that *"then you will know that the Lord of Heaven's Armies has sent me"* (2:9b, 4:9 and 6:15 NLT). This phrase is reused later as a significant marker. We see an expansion of God's people as many nations will join themselves to the Lord (2:11). Also, significant promises from God to come and live among them (2:10), and again choosing them to be His special possession (2:12). These things are further reasons to take comfort and encourage a people who are currently feeling dejected—no doubt assuming that the Lord had left and deserted them in exile.

This comfort continues as God himself defends Joshua, the high priest before the Angel of the Lord, against the Accuser (3:1-2) and then takes away his sins as he removes his filthy rags (3:3-5)—a reminder of Isaiah 64:6. It is interesting to note that in all of these actions, it is God who is the active initiator and operator, and Israel who is the passive beneficiary of His grace. In 3:8 we see a direct connection of messianic foreshadowing as the priests are called *"symbols of things to come"* (NLT) and will be replaced by the servant *"the Branch"*—which points us to Jesus' role as our high priest and a promise to remove the sins of the land.

Next, God affirms his support of the rebuilding of the Temple by Zerubbabel and ultimately, despite the small beginnings, it is not by human might or power, but rather through the Lord's sovereign direction that these things will be accomplished (4:6-10). This is an important theological point to note here of God's sovereign direction which is underlined by the repetition of the phrase, *"then you will know that the Lord of Heaven's Armies has sent me."* (Zech. 4:9b NLT) This is followed by an explanation of the vision of the lamp stands by the angel and a reference to the two anointed ones, also referred to in Revelation 11:4.

The next two visions speak of judgement, firstly from the flying scroll (5:1-4) and secondly in the vision of 'the basket case woman' representing Wickedness. This basket of the sins of the land is taken away to Babylonia (5:5-11). Again this imagery of justice and removal of sin continue to build the theme of redemption, forgiveness and comfort to the people. Closing up the visions are the four chariots who go out to do the Lord's work patrolling the earth (6:1-8). Before the start of the second half is a message for Zechariah to crown Joshua and a messianic message that *"the man whose name is Branch"* will build the temple of the Lord (6:12-13a); the Septuagint translates his name as *"Orient."* He will rule as King on His throne and also serve as priest so that there will be *"perfect harmony between his two roles."* (Zech. 6:13 NLT) This foreshadows Jesus' role as the God-Man and our Mediator and Lord. The importance of this point is again emphasized by that repeated phrase, *"you will know that my messages have been from the Lord of Heaven's Armies"* and brings the visions neatly to a close (Zech. 6:15 NLT). This conclusion involves a symbolic crowning of the priest, a prophetic message of a promised messiah, a visible memorial and help from others in the rebuilding of the Temple.

QUESTIONS:

1. What did the Coming of the promised Messiah mean for the Jews of Zechariah's day that still holds great significance for us, especially as we observe the Advent season?
 2. What important themes in these passages can help us prepare for the return of Christ and/or signal the world's need for His Second Coming?
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Oracles

The next section of messages or oracles begins with a question from the people of whether they should continue to mourn (7:2-3). The Lord criticizes the genuineness of their fasts and feasts (7:5-6). Instead he tells them what he really requires of them, which is very much akin to what we read in Isaiah 58. God desires that they “*render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.*” (Zech. 7:9-10 ESV) It was their neglect to do this which had made the Lord angry at them, so he did not hear their calls and scattered them (7:12-14). Likewise for us, true piety must result in a faith that works and a love beyond mere sentiment.

What follows is surprising, the Lord then says that he is jealously returning to them, to dwell in their midst, save his people and bring restoration (8:2-7). God’s promise that, “*they will be my people, and I will be faithful and just toward them as their God*” (8:8) comes as a total surprise of undeserved grace. Furthermore, it is after this show of grace that God then commands them to “*be strong and finish the task.*” (Zech. 7:9a NLT) The gospel implications of this are clear. As with us, God’s requirement of obedience follows his show of grace towards us so that our obedience would be motivated in thankfulness—reflecting on the former judgment we have been rescued from. He says, “*so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong.*” (Zech. 7:13b ESV) We see this pattern continued in 8:14-17, and 18-19. The imperatives are predicated on grace first shown. Also, the nations are drawn to Israel to seek the favour of the Lord (8:20-23).

The second half of Zechariah echoes many similar themes of the first half such as God’s impatience and judgment (11:4-14, 14:2), His giving victory over the nations (9:1-8, 12:1-9, 14:1-4), His promise to be their God (13:9, 12:5), provision of a King and leader (9:9-10, 10:2-4, 11:4-17, 13:7-9), purifying his people (12:10-13:9, 14:21) and the blessing of the nations through Israel (14:16-21).^[2] Also it has many messianic references weaved into it. In 9:9, Israel’s King comes riding on a donkey (cf. Matt. 21:5, John 12:15). This King brings peace and a universal reign “*because of the blood of my covenant with you*” (9:10-11) which sets the prisoners free. Later on, we see a parallel to 10:2 in Matthew 9:36 and Mark 6:34, as Jesus sees the crowds as sheep without a shepherd and has compassion on them. This is followed by God’s promise to care for his flock and the coming of “*the cornerstone*” from Judah (10:3-4).

Shepherds

Moving on to chapter 11, there is a shift in how Zechariah now addresses the Lord as “*my God*” (11:4). God tells him to become a shepherd to a flock which is doomed to slaughter. This sort of call to a ministry which is bound to fail is reminiscent of the call of Jeremiah to preach to a people who would not listen. We must understand that the call to ministry is not always a call to success but rather faithfulness. Zechariah eventually becomes impatient with this wayward flock and rejects them (11:8-11). The people determine his wages to be thirty pieces of silver (11:12) which is sarcastically referred to as a “*lordly price*” and he is commanded to throw it to the house of the potter (11:13). Interestingly the Complete Jewish Bible renders this word יוֹצֵר [yô·ṣēr] as treasury instead of potter (Zech. 11:13 CJB). However, the obvious parallel to Judas here is undeniable (cf. Matt. 27:9-10). The breaking of the second staff signifies the breaking of the bond between the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

The Lord then commands him to go back to the people, but this time to play the part of a worthless shepherd (11:15). This sort of living parable speaks against the people who could not appreciate the good shepherd they were given and so are handed over to a shepherd who would abuse and neglect the flock (11:16). However, this worthless shepherd, though he will be an instrument of the Lord's judgment against the people, will also himself be judged of the Lord (11:17). This is also a theme we see repeated, that the Lord sovereignly uses other peoples and nations as his agents of judgment but also exacts judgment on them for their own sins.

On that day

From this point on until the end of the book, there is the repetition of the thematic phrase "*on that day*" pointing forward to a coming eschatological Day of the Lord. This last section is based on the fact that it is a declaration coming from the Lord, "*who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him.*" These are his 'credentials' for the sureness of these prophecies (12:1). It is this God who makes these grand promises and will establish Jerusalem, strike their enemies, and give salvation and glory (12:3-9). Were it anyone lesser, they may indeed be too incredulous to believe.

God then refers to himself as "*him whom they have pierced*" (12:10) which is picked up and referred to in John 19:37 and also in Revelation 1:7. On that day, Israel will mourn for this One they have pierced, both corporately and individually. On that day is also promised cleansing (13:1), the end of idolatry and false prophets (13:3). These false prophets will be exposed and ashamed (13:4-6). The reference to the wounds on their chest or back showing what would have been self inflicted in the service of idols—evidence exposing them as false prophets. The messianic prophecy that follows is about the Lord's shepherd, that he will be struck down and his sheep scattered (13:7) is clearly referenced in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 26:31, 56; Mark 14:27, 50; John 16:32). It is followed by the promise of a remnant (13:8), and their purification (13:9) so that they will be the people of God.

The Day of the Lord

Finally in chapter 14, the coming Day of the Lord is brought into full focus. It starts off with what seems to be tragedy to a besieged Jerusalem (14:1-2), but then the Lord comes to fight on their behalf (14:3). On that Day, it says that there will be perpetual light (14:6-7), the elimination of darkness—which reminds us of Isaiah 60:19 and is picked up again in Revelation 21:25 and 22:5. Furthermore, life giving waters will flow out of Jerusalem and the Lord alone will be worshipped (14:8-9). Jerusalem, the City of God, will be fully restored and safe (14:10-11) and the Lord will judge the nations who fought against it (14:12-15). Those surviving will worship the Lord, celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles and the ones that still do not will be punished (14:16-19). Interestingly in John 7:37-39, it was also during the Feast of Tabernacles that the Lord Jesus said that for those believing in him, "*out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*"

The imagery connected with this feast is significant, as it was a celebration of God's provision and protection for them in the wilderness and also one of the feasts that required a return pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Deut. 16:16). Also, Jesus is said to be the Word which has come to dwell or tabernacle with us in the prologue to John's gospel. So this is very appropriate imagery for the Second Coming of Christ and the ultimate hope and celebration of His people. Lastly, there is imagery of all vessels in the house of the Lord being holy so that all may come and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them (14:21)—an abolishment of the priestly system as they become a nation of priests. The fact that there are no traders in the Temple points to the fact that there is no longer any need for Temple sacrifice, no need for people to buy their sacrifice to offer at the Temple, for the Lord has perfectly cleansed and rescued His people.

Concluding Thoughts

The overall significance of this book, though at first reading it may seem strange and hard to understand, is a message drenched in hope and encouragement to a people who have become disillusioned and feel deserted. The opening call to return to the Lord is not toward a God who is aloof and still wrathful against them. Instead the following eight visions emphasize that the Lord is for and with His people. Though they have been conquered and displaced by mighty human armies, the Lord of Heaven's Armies who is faithful to his word is on their side. God's sovereign control over all events is highlighted, no situation was ever out of His control. Instead, just the opposite—they were the agents of accomplishing His final purpose.

Apart from present help and hope of restoration in the rebuilding of the Temple, there is also future hope of the Lord dealing with the people's sin and blessing them. The introduction of the messianic Branch at the pinnacle of the visions' chiastic structure serves to emphasize this. The Branch also starts off the second half of the book as the one who will ultimately build the Temple of the Lord and rule as King and serve as priest. After numerous exhortations to live as God's true people, to do justly and that through them the nations would be blessed, the book ends with a final eschatological hope of the consummation of all things in the blessed hope of a perfected Kingdom reign. Zechariah is overall a very Gospel centered, grace driven book—Jesus takes center stage in this prophetic encouragement. It tells the story of a people who had reached the end of their own strength and a God who will do for them that which they are unable to do for themselves.

Amen.
