

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 6 July 2014

No. T0840

Speaker: Mr. Ernie Brown

A look at Zechariah: Zechariah 1:1-2:13 - The man and his message

The object of this series, beginning today, is to develop some of the major features, themes and trends of the book of the prophet Zechariah. We shall examine it, first of all, in its own context, then in the context of scripture as a whole.

There are those who are a bit uneasy in case the study of prophecy in the Old Testament becomes merely academic because it doesn't directly concern the Christian church, nor the present dispensation. But, if matters dealt with in the Word of God are for the glory of Christ, and for the fulfilment of the will of God, they must, necessarily, be of interest and concern to those who love the Lord Jesus. In any case, there are universal truths stated that are always applicable.

Zechariah's message was the fruit of his receiving a revelation from God. Twice over, in Zechariah 1:1-7, we read that "*the word of the LORD came to Zechariah*" (Zechariah 1:1, 7). This aroused his interest and engaged his attention. As a result, he was conducted through all these exercises, which were for his own blessing, to fit him for his service, and for the ultimate spiritual blessing of those amongst whom he served God.

Considering that statement, "*the word of the LORD came to Zechariah*", and because this is the introductory address of the series, we shall be thinking about 'The Man and his Message'. Old Testament prophets were very carefully selected, with their names, their lives, their service, all characteristic of the work they had to do. We are told "*Zechariah was the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet*" (Zechariah 1:1). Whether this means that Zechariah was the son of Berechiah and the grandson of Iddo is not clear. Likewise, whether or not Zechariah's father had an early death, and his grandfather Iddo had a hand in his upbringing, is a detail which need not concern us. But, here we have three successive godly generations. We can learn something from that.

As indicated, names recorded in the Bible are very often characteristic, as well as personal. If we then look briefly at Zechariah 1:1, we get a message, even in the names of these succeeding generations:

- Iddo means 'the appointed time'.
- Berechiah means 'Jehovah will surely bless'.
- Zechariah means 'Jehovah will remember'.

There we have the overall message in a nutshell: At the appointed time, Jehovah will remember His people, and He will surely bless them.

God's plans will not be frustrated, either by the opposition of His enemies or even by the disobedience of His own people. We ourselves learn this in first coming to the Lord. We are entirely dependent for blessing on what God has done on our behalf. What horrifies us at first is that there is absolutely nothing we can do to earn salvation for ourselves. There is absolutely nothing we can do in ourselves which will merit favour with God. But the thing that is absolutely shattering, at first, eventually becomes our eternal anchor. We were completely incapable of making any contribution at all to our soul salvation. It is all of God. There is therefore absolutely no weak link in the chain of salvation. The nation of Israel, as a nation, had to learn that very same lesson.

Here, then, we have some characteristic features of Zechariah:

He was not afraid to declare plainly the moral condition of the people. In the sense of that, he clearly intended to concentrate the attention of the nation, and especially the godly remnant of the nation, on their final days as a nation.

- He was conversant with that which was from God and for God.
- He could look ahead to see how the ways of God would emerge.
- He was one who knew what it was to draw near personally to God.
- Further examination of his pedigree determines that Zechariah was not only a prophet - he was also of the priestly line - he was ideal for the job he had to do.

Then, in Zechariah 1:3-6, we get an important trend. The prophet speaks to the godly minority. "Look," he says. "Examine the history of the nation." There is a certain, continuing, repetitive, cyclical succession. A cycle of attitudes and events. The cycle properly begins with God choosing to bless His people. He does so. Before very long, the nation is disobedient to their God who has blessed them in such a wonderful way. As a result, God raises up a prophet, who warns the nation to mend their ways.

Generally speaking, the mass of the nation ignore the warnings given. Inevitably, the threatened punishment comes. God disciplines the nation, not only for going astray, but because, being warned of the error of their ways, they had refused to abandon their disobedience and idolatry. God calls other prophets. They cry from the heart. There is a measure of repentance in a godly minority who are seeking to be true to their God. As a reward for their turning in repentance, God is pleased to lift the discipline for the moment. Having been restored to a measure of communion with their God, the blessing that God in His wonderful grace grants to them, and through them to the nation, is even better than what they had enjoyed before. A marvellous tribute to the grace of their God and ours! The cycle begins again.

So! There is this cyclical succession that takes place:

1. Blessing;
2. Disobedience;
3. Warning;
4. Disregard of the warning;
5. Disciplinary punishment;
6. Challenging exhortation;
7. Repentance in measure;
8. The lifting of discipline for the moment;
9. Restoration of a measure of communion; and
10. The bestowal of renewed, even greater blessing than they had had before.

At each stage, what was forfeited by irresponsibility was very good. What God, in His wonderful grace, provides for the repentant, godly few, is even better.

In many cases in the nation's history, repentance is induced in at least some of the LORD'S people by giving them, through the words of the prophet, a long-term view of what God has ever had in mind from the very outset. It's like looking through a spiritual zoom lens. We might be looking at something fairly close to hand, and then suddenly the focus seems to zoom right forward into the far distance, and we see what is not yet visible to the naked eye. But, to whom it is revealed, God is going to do wonderful things, in accordance with His own will. The principle is very much in line with Proverbs 4:25, "Let thine eyes look right on". There's always spiritual blessing in getting things happening at the present time in proper perspective by letting our eyes look right on to see what God has ever had in mind. Zechariah does that. In telling them what is going to happen in the future, as a result of the grace of God, repentance is produced, and a measure of restoration given.

The background of the prophecy was the return from Babylon of a godly remnant, a small proportion of the nation. They had responded to the permissive decree that had been issued by Cyrus the Persian. Those who wished could return to their home land and be involved in either the rebuilding of the Temple altar, or the reconstruction of the city. But the return from Babylon itself was an example of the cyclical sequence already described. In disciplinary judgment because of their disobedience, they had been captured by Babylon, taken into a far country, and compelled to serve their Gentile conquerors. It was for a defined time of 70 years, as Jeremiah 25:11-12 tells us. Then the word of the LORD, coming to some, produced repentance in them which made them willing to respond to the opportunity to go back to Jerusalem.

This is a preview of a greater opportunity; a greater return; a greater prosperity and peace, than the remnant of Zechariah's day could ever know. This will occur when the Lord Jesus Christ appears in power and great glory. Then, and only then, will true peace and true prosperity be enjoyed by the nation.

Some of the things that Zechariah announced had already happened when he gave his prophecy. Other things have happened since, between the days of the prophecy and our day. We can compare what has happened in history with the word of God and we can say, "Yes, we see it now". We are aware that vital matters remain unfulfilled. But, we have the advantage of hindsight. We can see that the word of God, delivered in the past, has been fulfilled verbatim. This gives us total confidence in that which is yet unfulfilled. As the past came into being, because God said it would, we are assured that that which is yet to take place will assuredly occur, because God says so.

This opening message, Zechariah 1:2-6, is a call to repentance. The prophet reminds the people why they are in their present state as a nation. He says. "Learn the lesson of history. Your fathers have been subjugated to the Gentile

powers because of their disobedience to God. Repent. Cast yourselves on the mercy of God. There is no other way back to God."

This is followed by a comprehensive second message that the prophet had to give. From Zechariah 1:7-2:13 we are given the record of three visions given in one long night to Zechariah:

1. The first vision is of the man among the myrtle trees (Zechariah 1:8-17).
2. The second vision includes the horns and the carpenters (Zechariah 1:18-21).
3. Thirdly, the man with the measuring line (Zechariah 2:1-13).

Vision 1: The man among the myrtle trees (Zechariah 1:8-17)

First, the man among the myrtle trees. The lesson is plain. When His earthly people go astray, God uses the Gentile nations to discipline His people. This is part of the disgrace, that they, Israel, who should be at the head of the nations, are subjugated to one Gentile nation after another. They know that this is a disgrace to them. What they don't feel is that it is a dishonour to Jehovah, their God. That is the real disgrace. They certainly resented, with a burning resentment, that they have been subjugated to these Gentile powers. But in Zechariah 1:15 God says, "*I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease.*"

Their conquerors were just having an easy time and settling back and enjoying the situation. Jehovah, the God of Israel, says, "I cannot tolerate this. This is out of order. I was displeased with my own nation Israel, so I allowed this Gentile nation to afflict them a limited amount. See what they have done. They have heaped it on, far too much, imagining it is by their own strength." They had gone far further in this disciplinary exercise than God had intended. He will take them to account for that. The Jews had been subjugated because of their disobedience. Gentiles were allowed to be on top for the moment, but they are accountable to God for what they did.

Vision 2: The horns and the carpenters (Zechariah 1:18-21)

The second vision involves the horns and the carpenters. Throughout scripture, horns are symbolic of power. In Zechariah 1:18-19, he says, "...Behold four horns..." What did he mean? These are the four nations that had and would scatter Judah and destroy Jerusalem. Here we have it. God says, "This is not the first time, and it won't be the last time." Taking a panoramic view of the history of the Gentile nations, first one, then another and another and another. There will eventually have been four Gentile nations who have been brought in by God in a disciplinary way, to subjugate His earthly people.

Linking this up with Daniel's prophecy, we know that it is Babylon that had come and gone. The Medes and the Persians were in power at the time. Then, when the prophecy is totally fulfilled, they would be succeeded by the Greeks, then the Romans, and eventually by the revived Roman Empire. But here Zechariah surveys the whole thing. His eyes look right on. He is holding this up as a warning of necessary discipline, but ultimately, as a promise of peace and blessing.

What are these carpenters then who will throw out these Gentiles? Evidently powers that are brought in which will successively deal with the four horns. He says first of all a horn, then a carpenter; then a horn, and then a carpenter, and so on. It certainly seems to bear the interpretation that the second horn was the first carpenter, for certainly it was Darius the Mede who conquered Babylon. Certainly it was Alexander the Great of Greece who conquered Persia, and it was certainly the Romans who brought about the downfall of this Grecian Empire.

This takes us on to the downfall of the final form of the Roman Empire, which will be brought about by the personal intervention of God Himself in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel, when he appears in power and great glory as we read in Matthew 24:30. So, it would be consistent with this to take the four horns to be the four Gentile world empires, and the four carpenters as the last three of those empires and finally the Lord Jesus Christ personally. These Gentile nations thought they were oh so mighty and oh so clever. But at each stage God brings in another power to limit the previous power. He will only allow them to go so far and no further.

Vision 3: The man with the measuring line (Zechariah 2:1-13)

To any suffering saints in any dispensation, it is a great comfort to realise that God has His overall plan, which He is working to, and man cannot negate it. What God has decreed will ultimately be brought to pass. God reserves to Himself the ultimate, overall control. He is the One depicted as the man with the measuring line.

God's plans will not be thwarted. The day will surely come when the nation and the city of Jerusalem will be in the right place, the right condition, the right relationship with their Jehovah God. Then, and only then, will everything on the earth be in its proper place. But, for the moment, Zechariah says, in effect, "*Let thine eyes look right on*" (see

Proverbs 4:25) There are two significant phrases here. Zechariah 2:8 *“After the glory”*, and another that is also characteristic of the prophecy, in Zechariah 2:11, *“in that day.”* God will personally intervene in the Person of His Son, who will exercise due retribution on the enemies of God and the enemies of the people of God. Having put down all enemies He will introduce His Kingdom. Then comes in that day which God has looked forward to for so long. As Paul said on Mars’ Hill at Athens, *“God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised Him from among the dead”* (Acts 17:31).

I am assured that that looks on to what Zechariah calls *“that day”*, the glorious day when the Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords (see Revelation 19:16), ushers in His Kingdom. Not until then will the world will be ruled, administered, in righteousness, by God’s appointed Man. After the glory, after His appearing, there will be a kingdom of peace, prosperity, and glory that this world will never have seen, the culmination of God’s ways on earth, when all these long term prophecies given in the time of Zechariah will be fulfilled literally.

These partial repentances, partial recoveries, partial restorations, look on to the time when there shall be national repentance, national deliverance, national elevation. For these details we must wait for other talks in this series.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.