

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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A look at Zechariah: Zechariah 3:1-6:15 - Visions in the night

Today's talk completes our studies of the eight visions in the first half of the prophecy of Zechariah. According to Zechariah 1:7, these visions were all in one night - *"on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month in the second year of the reign of Darius, the Persian ruler."* Last week's talk, 'The man and his message' from Zechariah 1:1-2:13, included the first three visions:

1. The man on a red horse amongst the myrtle trees, Zechariah 1:8-17
2. The four horns and the four craftsmen or carpenters, Zechariah 1:18-21
3. The man with the measuring line, Zechariah 2:1-13.

Today, I'll talk about the remaining five visions:

4. The cleansing of Joshua the high priest, Zechariah 3:1-10
5. The golden lampstand flanked by the two olive trees, Zechariah 4:1-14
6. The flying scroll, Zechariah 5:1-4
7. The woman sitting in an ephah, Zechariah 5:5-11
8. The four chariots, Zechariah 6:1-8

Then I'll finish with Zechariah 6:9-15, the crowning of Joshua and also by suggesting some practical applications from Zechariah 3-6 for believers in today's world. If you are like me and have difficulty in remembering the details of these different visions, I suggest that you follow in your Bible, starting at Zechariah 3. I'll be referring mainly to the English Standard Version. And I'll do the same as last week's speaker and explain the immediate meaning of these visions as well as their future fulfilment. If you heard last week's talk, you'll remember that the names of Zechariah and his forefathers are very suggestive of the meaning of the book as a whole:

- Zechariah means "Jehovah remembers": He'll never forget the promises He made to their forefathers.
- Berechiah means "Jehovah blesses": He'll bless Israel out of love for their forefathers.
- Iddo means "the appointed time": often called "in that day" throughout Zechariah.

Vision 4: The cleansing of Joshua the high priest (Zechariah 3:1-10)

The fourth Vision in Zechariah 3:1-10, of the cleansing of Joshua the high priest, continues the themes of the first three visions. Jehovah now revealed to Zechariah that He saw the plight of His covenant people. He also revealed how He'll accomplish His purposes of grace in the future restoration of Israel. Here in Zechariah 3, the LORD showed how He was dealing with the returned remnant of Israel from their captivity in Babylon. But Zechariah 3 opens with one of their leaders situated in the dock of the law courts of heaven. Satan was there ready to accuse Joshua of being spiritually unfit to hold the office of high priest (Zechariah 3:1). But the LORD knows Satan always opposes God's purposes for His people. He anticipated this accusation and intervened in grace on Joshua's behalf. At the same time Satan was rebuked with the question in Zechariah 3:2, *"Is not [Joshua] a brand plucked from the fire?"* In grace, the LORD turned and personally addressed Joshua with the words of salvation and assurance: *"Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments"* (Zechariah 3:4). Joshua's filthy garments, symbolic of his iniquity, were taken from him. He was given clean (pure) clothes to wear and a clean turban for his head. Thus he was established before the LORD to lead the people in worship. He was then solemnly charged to live before the LORD and discharge his duties as high priest in accordance with God's holy laws.

"And so it should be", I hear you say! "Any person occupying such a public office must be spiritually and morally qualified for the position." But two months earlier, the prophet Haggai had said that the entire nation, including the priesthood, was defiled in God's sight. Haggai 2:14 states they were unclean in every work of their hands and worse, they offered polluted sacrifices. So in Zechariah 3:8 the LORD designated Joshua and his friends, *"men who are a sign."* That is, they were a sign of the spiritual cleansing available for the entire nation. They were also a sign for the future people of Zion amongst whom the LORD will choose to dwell in the holy land in that day when He claims Israel as His people (see 2:10-13). Yes, there's no nearness to God for any generation of God's people without first the forgiveness of, and deliverance from, sin by His sovereign grace.

Who is Israel's great Deliverer? He is announced in Zechariah 3:8b, *"Behold, I will bring my servant the Branch."* Jeremiah 23:5-6 prophesied, *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'"* So Joshua's name, meaning Jehovah saves, is also a sign. Christians know that the name Jesus is the Greek rendering of Joshua. Acts 17:31 says that righteousness will be established at the Appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is also the *"offspring of David"*, that is, *"[the] Branch out of the stump of Jesse"* (Revelation 22:16 with Isaiah 11:1, 10).

The fourth vision concluded with another symbol, the seven-eyed, or seven-faceted, engraved stone that the LORD set before Joshua. It represented Christ, the Stone laid in Zion, who will be the foundation of God's government upon earth (see Isaiah 28:16). He alone is able to rule in accordance with God's mind. He alone is able to remove Israel's iniquity in one day to make them His priestly people. In Exodus 19:5-6 He had said, *"Now therefore ... you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* And so Zechariah 3 ends with a forward look to that appointed time, *"In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbour to come under his vine and under his fig tree"* (Zechariah 3:10). This speaks of the enduring conditions of peace and safety in the Kingdom ruled by Messiah.

Vision 5: The golden lampstand flanked by the two olive trees (Zechariah 4:1-14)

In Zechariah 4, Zechariah saw a golden lampstand with seven lamps and two olive trees on either side of it. He must have thought of the lampstand of the tabernacle in Exodus 25:31-40, which was a symbol of the light of God. The angel interpreted this vision by telling Zechariah to give a message to Zerubbabel, the civil ruler of the exiles. *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit", says the LORD of hosts. Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it'"* (Zechariah 4:6-7).

Therefore, the oil in the seven lamps represented the fullness of the Spirit of God, who alone was to be the nation's resource.

- "Not by might" meant 'not by any military force';
- "Not by power" meant 'not from any human authority'.

Joshua and Zerubbabel were to complete the rebuilding of the temple and the re-establishment of Israel by relying on the supernatural power of the Spirit.

The name 'the LORD of hosts' indicated that He had all resources at His disposal. Great obstacles, as detailed in the book of Ezra, symbolised as *"a great mountain"* (Zechariah 4:7), faced them. But every difficulty would be removed and the headstone of the temple put in place to complete the building, with praise filling the people's lips. Such was the blessing from Jehovah that the rebuild under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua was a total success even though it was a day of small things. (That is, when it was compared to Solomon's temple project, see Haggai 2:3.) Zechariah 4:10 says that everything happened under the supervising gaze of the seven eyes of the LORD - a reference back to the final, all-sufficient symbol of the fourth vision in Zechariah 4:9.

Zechariah 4:11-12 relate the question that puzzled the prophet, *"What is the meaning of these two olive trees?"* The angel replied in Zechariah 4:13, *"These are the two anointed ones who stand by the LORD of the whole earth."* In Israel, both the high priest and the king were inaugurated by the use of the anointing oil. The two anointed ones at that time were therefore Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the ruler, through whom grace flowed for the benefit of the nation. In full measure, it will flow through Christ when He sits a Priest upon His kingly throne, as we'll discover in the latter part of Zechariah 6. When God said to Christ, *"Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"* (that is, until Christ is crowned King), He also said to Him, *"You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek"* (Psalm 110:1, 4). "Grace upon grace" will indeed be the feature of Israel's worldwide kingdom when it is established by Messiah, the anointed Priest and King!

Vision 6: The flying scroll (Zechariah 5:1-4)

Zechariah 5 introduces the sixth vision in which Zechariah saw a huge flying scroll, Zechariah 5:1-4. He was well acquainted with the ancient form of the Scriptures in the form of scrolls. The flying scroll symbolically represented the Law extending its authority over the whole of the land of Israel. It brought a curse for those who professed to follow the Law, but who practised stealing or casual oath making. These two common sins showed that Israel's sin was against both man and God. Although God was now acting in grace towards the nation, He had neither overlooked,

nor condoned, their sin. Rather, the captivity in Babylon had been God's punishment upon Israel, when He judged them because of their indifference towards the law of God.

Vision 7: The woman sitting in an ephah (Zechariah 5:5-11)

The seventh vision of the woman sitting in an ephah, Zechariah 5:5-11, is closely associated with the previous vision. It revealed what happened to remove the curse caused by the flying scroll. In Zechariah 5:6, an ephah came into sight. It represented the iniquity of all the Jews. An ephah was a measuring basket used in trade and commerce. The woman who sat in the ephah symbolised the idolatrous systems of religion that emerged from Babylon, which had infected the whole world of commerce after Babel (see Genesis 11:2, Isaiah 21:9 and Revelation 17:5). Israel also had been contaminated with these idolatrous practices of superstition. Their infidelity was highlighted early on in their history - at the golden calf incident on their exodus from Egypt (see Exodus 32:1-35). This was another reason why God's judgment was poured upon the nation (see Acts 7:39-43). Therefore this idolatrous evil had to be put away - symbolised in the lid of the ephah being clamped down with a lead-weight and the ephah itself removed. The vision ends in Zechariah 5:11 with two women, with stork-like wings, taking the basket back to Shinar (from where idolatry originated). This action symbolised God cleansing the nation from idolatry. And it is historically true that the Jews have never returned to idolatry since their captivity in Babylon. However, when we get to Zechariah 13, we'll learn of a future and final cleansing for the nation so that they can enter into Messiah's kingdom.

Vision 8: The four chariots (Zechariah 6:1-8)

The eighth and final vision in Zechariah 6:1-8 was of four chariots pulled by powerful horses. The horses were of the same colours as in the first vision of Zechariah 1:9-11, and so the symbolism is the same. They're again symbolic of angelic powers which controlled the four great world-empires connected with Israel's history. These empires were symbolised as *"two mountains of bronze"* in Zechariah 6:1 and, as was said last week, they were used by God to discipline Israel. The empires were: the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Grecian and the Roman Empires. But in Zechariah 6:5, the chariots are called *"the four spirits of heaven."* They were sent out from the presence of the LORD of the whole world. As we learn from Daniel's prophecies, these angelic beings are God's messengers and control events on earth. They went into action in Zechariah 6:7-8 and produced conditions of rest, or quietness, for the Spirit of God in *"the north country."* These angelic powers had first removed the Babylonian Empire then replaced it with the Medo-Persian Empire; and then turned the attitude of the next emperors favourably towards the Jews. The returned remnant had come out of *"the north country"*, that is, north of Israel where these two empires were based. The Jews from that time were permitted by Darius to peacefully carry on their distinct national life, especially their worship of the LORD. This message was a great encouragement and blessing to Joshua, Zerubbabel and their fellow-Jews in their on-going efforts to re-establish Jerusalem with its temple and to give Israel a national identity once more. Overall, the impression left upon Zechariah that night was that the four empires were instruments in the hand of God for the accomplishment of His will for Israel, His chosen people.

"Thus says the LORD"

Immediately after this series of visions, Zechariah was directed by a word from the LORD in Zechariah 6:9 to crown Joshua, Zechariah 6:9-15. He was told that three of the exiles had brought silver and gold back with them from Babylon. Zechariah had to make a crown from these precious metals and go into the house of Josiah. In the presence of all four men, he was to perform this strikingly symbolic act upon Joshua the high priest and pronounce, *"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honour, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.' And the crown shall be in the temple of the LORD as a reminder to Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen the son of Zephaniah. And those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of the LORD. And you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. And this shall come to pass, if you will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God"*, Zechariah 6:12-15.

"Thus says the LORD" means the message was a prophetic word. Zechariah acted as a prophet in both senses of the word.

First of all, he spoke directly to the four men and, by extension, to the rest of the Jews. It was a word for the nation, there and then. Their appointed time had arrived! They would get help from afar and succeed in their temple-building project if they accepted and obeyed this word from the LORD.

Secondly, Zechariah was also prophesying (in the more familiar sense of the word) of a future day and of Another of whom Joshua was a type.

Already we have learned from Zechariah 3:8 of the coming Servant of the LORD called the Branch. This coming King, the Sprout or Shoot of David's line, would be of the supreme rank of the royal Melchizedek priesthood! So, symbolically, the crowned Joshua pictured this Coming One, who would be both Priest and King. I mentioned this in connection with the pronouncement made to Joshua in Zechariah 3:8, after the vision of his cleansing. I said it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is both Priest and King.

Here in Zechariah 6:13 the declaration is made that in Him there will be complete harmony between these two offices, called, "*the counsel of peace.*" Yes, in the Millennium, Christ will exhibit absolute kingly authority as well as divine priestly sympathy and grace. God will accomplish this in His own appointed way and at His own appointed time. As I have already commented in Psalm 110:4, God had committed Himself by oath to His Christ, "*You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*" Hebrews 7:1-3 explain that the name Melchizedek means first "*king of righteousness*" and also "*king of Salem [or, peace]*", whose priesthood is likened to the Son of God's in that He remains a priest for ever. Hebrews 7:6 says that Melchizedek blessed Abraham, the founding-father of the nation of Israel. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel is constantly reminded of the fact that Jehovah remembers His promises to Abraham and his descendants. At God's appointed time, Jehovah will bless the nation through their long-awaited King-Priest.

The English Standard Version's clause in Zechariah 6:13, "he shall bear royal honour", is variously translated; and we need to use all variations to appreciate the full impact of this awesome statement:

- King James Version, "He shall bear the glory";
- Septuagint, "He shall receive power";
- Rotherham, "He shall bear the honour";
- New International Version, "He will be clothed in majesty";
- Revised Standard Version, "It is He who shall bear royal honours"; and
- The Amplified Bible, "He shall bear the honour and the glory [as the only begotten of the Father]."

The message of the book of Hebrews is that, because the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God, He is the only Man capable and worthy to sustain the combined glories of priesthood and kingship for ever. Amen!

Practical Conclusions

One danger of studying Zechariah is that we might be inclined to conclude that its prophecies are only applicable to Messiah and His relationship to Israel. Whilst this is true, there are practical lessons for Christians today to be gleaned from the book. For example, there is much unrest in the world at the present time, especially in areas to the north of Israel. Could it be that God is moving nations in preparation for Christ's kingdom? Remember that the Lord taught His disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2). That's when every knee shall bow to Him and every tongue will confess Him as Lord to the glory of God the Father! Although we should love and look for the Appearing of the Lord, we more particularly pray, "*Come, Lord Jesus!*" (Revelation 22:20). For we wait for Him to come again and receive us unto Himself. Until the Rapture, we must continue to pray for God's controlling hand to be on and over our world, so "*that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness*" and so that the Gospel of God's grace might be preached to everyone (see 1 Timothy 2:3-5). And faced with the difficulties of living as Christians in the twenty-first century, it's encouraging to know that angels are also sent by God to serve those who are to inherit salvation, see Hebrews 1:14.

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