

God's Concern For His People

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Text: Zechariah 1-3

Introduction:

I. Zechariah 1:1-6

A. Historical context

1. Return from captivity, rebuilding of the altar, and the laying of the foundation of the temple (Ezra 1-3)
2. Opposition (Ezra 4:1-5) and preoccupation with their own houses (Haggai 1) led them to stop the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 4:24)
 - a. Note that Ezra 4:6, and 4:7-23 show later times that the enemies tried to impede the work of God. Primarily show that Zerubbabel and Joshua were right to reject their help in 4:1-3
 - b. Their failure to rebuild shows disinterest in God dwelling with them. Illustrate with building on a bedroom and bathroom for mother-in-law!
3. Haggai and Zechariah were prophets of God who led them to re-start the rebuilding process (Ezra 5:1-2). This would be around 520 BC.
4. This prophecy occurs between Haggai 2:9 and 2:10

B. Overview of Zechariah

1. In a nutshell, Zechariah has an introduction, eight visions and a conclusion in 1-6; a question and four answers about fasting in 7-8; and the rest of the book, which is much harder to outline
2. The book encourages the returnees in terms of God's care and provision for them and the success He will give them in rebuilding the temple
3. A lot of the passages look forward to the coming of Christ
 - a. Not like pre-exilic prophets who saw the return from captivity in the foreground
 - b. Possibly, events in the Maccabean period serve as foreground fulfillments in some cases
4. Uses a lot of vision/apocalyptic language. Makes it exciting. Somewhat similar to Daniel, Ezekiel, Revelation

C. Analysis of 1:1-6

1. The 8th month of the second year of Darius
 - a. Around 520
 - b. Dates reckoned by foreign king; Jews had no king of their own
 - c. Every dating formula in Zechariah is a reminder that there is no king in Jerusalem
 - d. The shadow of the exile was still hanging over them
2. Iddo was one of the priests who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Joshua (Nehemiah 12:4)

3. The Lord was very angry with your fathers
 - a. Interesting to note that God's wrath was directed toward people and not sin in the abstract if there is such a thing; see Psalm 5:4-6 and many other passages
 - b. Every pile of ruins in the land bore mute but clear testimony to this message
4. Call to repentance
 - a. The Lord of hosts speaks
 - 1) Emphasized by being repeated three times
 - 2) Authoritative declaration of the Lord Almighty: we should listen to Him
 - 3) Highlights the sovereignty of God, and the unlimited resources at His disposal
 - a) All heavenly armies and all the host of created things are at His beck and call
 - b) Supreme commander of every earthly, heavenly or cosmic force
 - 4) Listen to Him!
 - b. Return to Me!
 - 1) Basic and fundamental plea to sinful men; don't pass over lightly
 - 2) Call to repentance is central in the preaching of the prophets: Isaiah 55:6-7; Jeremiah 3:12-13; Hosea 14:1; Joel 2:12-13; Amos 5:4-6; Zephaniah 2:2-3
 - 3) Must completely change direction, reorient life!
 - 4) Still needed today
 - a) People today think man is basically good and just needs to develop the good that is in them
 - b) They cry peace, peace, when there is no peace
 - c. If they change, He will change:
 - 1) The key to inaugurating a new era of redemptive history
 - 2) Road to spiritual renewal begins with genuine repentance
5. Basis of the appeal
 - a. The bad example of their fathers; lesson drawn from their history
 - b. Former prophets warned them
 - 1) The exile forms a break; former prophets and later prophets
 - 2) Evil ways: direction, mindset, path, tendency
 - 3) Evil deeds: actual practices of evil
 - c. They did not listen or give heed
 - 1) To Me: prophets spoke the words of God
 - 2) Reject their word you reject God
 - 3) Prophets were God's servants; rare privilege, honor; they were exalted, not debased, in such service
 - d. God's word overtook the people and destroyed them

- 1) Word always catches up to us; don't even try to run away
- 2) Like a highway patrol officer turns on the flashing lights, so God's Word will drive right up alongside us and nail us for our infractions
- 3) Defiance to God and disobedience to His word is always dangerous
- 4) Messengers die, but the word lives on; people are transient, but God is eternal (Isaiah 40:6-8)
- 5) Distinguish between frailty and weakness of God's messengers and the eternal character and truth of His message
- e. What the Lord purposed, He has done
 - 1) Important opportunity to break the cycle
 - 2) Word was fulfilled exactly; every prediction to the letter
6. We need to take the message seriously
 - a. We want to feel good, but need to repent
 - b. We don't like negative preaching, but need to repent
 - c. We may not like telling people what they need to hear, but they need to repent

Body:**I. Vision 1-4****D. Vision 1: Horsemen patrol the earth 7-17**

1. Report 7-11
 - a. Date: 24th day of 11th month of 2nd year of Darius
 - 1) Same day, 5 months earlier, Haggai stirred up the people to begin rebuilding temple
 - 2) Same day 2 months earlier, Haggai's last address
 - 3) 24th day: Haggai 1:15; 20:10, 18, 20
 - b. Zechariah is described as a prophet: received the word of the Lord
 - c. Various colored horses
 - 1) Whose horses are they: The Lord sent them
 - 2) Function: patrol the earth; God's equestrian reconnaissance troop
 - a) Same word used for Satan in Job 1:7; 2:2
 - b) Relentless crisscrossing and ongoing scrutiny of the planet
 - c) Nice to know God has His troops to counteract Satan
 - d. They are in the ravine: symbolizes low estate of God's people? Psalm 88:6
 - e. The angel who was speaking with me: 1:9, 13, 14, 19; 2:3; 5:5, 10; 6:4
 - f. They report to the Lord
 - 1) Bad report: earth is at ease and secure
 - 2) A disappointment to God's people who were suffering

- 3) Contrary to the promise of Hag 2:21-22: not yet any earth-shaking and kingdom-shattering events
2. These horses will return
 - a. In the last vision in 6:1-8
 - 1) They are also reconnaissance horses
 - 2) But they also cause God's spirit to rest, by executing judgment
 - b. In Revelation 6:1-8
 - 1) We should see the horses in Revelation in the light of this passage
 - 2) God's horses, sent out to execute God's judgments on the earth
3. Lord's commitment 12-17
 - a. Perplexed question
 - 1) How long will God not have compassion for the cities of Judah
 - 2) They are still under Persian rule and Jerusalem is still without temple, or wall
 - 3) Contrast between peaceful nations and downtrodden people of God
 - b. Lord responds with comforting words
 - 1) He is jealous for His people
 - 2) He is not passive, uninvolved
 - c. God is angry with the nations
 - 1) They exceeded their mission
 - 2) They were sent to punish God's people, but they cruelly abused them; see Isaiah 47:6
 - 3) They gratified their own ambition and revenge, went to the extreme
 - 4) God often punishes His instruments of judgment (for example, Isaiah 10)
 - d. God is going to bless His people again
 - 1) A rebuilding passage
 - 2) Emphasis on the word 'again'; dominates the verse
4. Observations
 - a. We get impatient when all wrongs aren't immediately righted
 - b. This would be ideally fulfilled in Christ

E. Vision 2: Horns and craftsmen 18-21

1. Four horns
 - a. Horns represent power (animal horns): 1 Samuel 2:10; Ps 75:4-5
 - b. Four points of the compass; enemies from all directions; totality of enemy nations
2. Four craftsmen
 - a. Power God uses to counteract the horns

- b. Gives comfort to know that God has a force to oppose every enemy we face; neutralizing power
- c. For every horn, there is a craftsman to beat it down, counteract it
- d. God will destroy every hostile power
- e. I envision a blacksmith beating down the horns, but I don't know if that is the intended visual here

F. Vision 3: Measuring Jerusalem 2:1-13

1. Vision itself 1-5
 - a. Appropriately follows the destruction of the enemies in visions 1 and 2; now God's people can grow and develop
 - b. Four characters; a surveyor, Zechariah, the interpreting angel and an unidentified angel; it's difficult to keep track of the angels in this vision
 - c. This picks up on 1:16 and develops in detail
 - d. Orders are cancelled; Jerusalem will have so many people that it will not be measurable
 - e. The young man is the surveyor since the intent of the angel's message is to stop him from measuring Jerusalem
 - f. Three points to notice:
 - 1) Great multiplication of people
 - a) Typical prophetic theme: Isaiah 54:1-3; Ezekiel 36:10-11, 37-38; Hosea 1:10-11
 - b) Fulfillment in Christ: Galatians 4:26-28; Romans 4:16-17
 - c) Our view of our mission: 2 Corinthians 4:15; Romans 15:20-21
 1. We should see that we have a mission
 2. We need much more passion to get the gospel spread: Isaiah 66:18-21
 - 2) God is a wall of fire
 - a) A physical wall unnecessary
 - b) He is the people's security
 - c) A figure borrowed from the exodus: Exodus 13:21
 - d) We need to look to the Lord and find in Him our protection and our confidence in every situation; we are so tempted to trust other things
 - 3) God's glory in their midst
 - a) Return: Ezek 8-11; 43
 - b) Much better than any other glory; see John 1:14
2. Appeal to flee from Babylon 6-7
 - a. Danger of influence from Babylon's lifestyle
 - b. Babylon symbolizes human opposition to God: see Genesis 11; Revelation 17-18

- 1) In Revelation, she represents the glitz, glamor and attractiveness of the anti-God world
- 2) Some exiles had become wealthy and comfortable in Babylon and did not want to leave
- c. God demands separation; He is always calling His people out of the world
- d. Danger of fallout from Babylon's destruction
3. Great blessings of God 8-12
 - a. He comes against the nations which plunder us
 - 1) He sends Him after glory; that is, in order to receive glory, in search of glory
 - 2) God is glorified by His judgment against the heathen nations
 - 3) God's judgment and wrath are commendable aspects of God's character
 - b. He who touches you touches the apple of His eye
 - 1) Our pupils are very sensitive and we reflexively protect them
 - 2) God is super sensitive to what is happening to His people
 - a) He is protective of us
 - b) He greatly values us; consider Acts 9:4; Matthew 25:31-46
 - 3) He loves us with the same love with which He loves His only begotten Son: John 15:9-10; 17:23
 - c. By a mere hand gesture, the Lord overthrows the established order of the nations
 - 1) The plunderers are plundered (cf. Ex 12)
 - 2) Tables are turned
 - 3) Fulfillment of the prediction will vindicate the authenticity of the messenger (9, see 11)
 - d. Notice daughter of Babylon 7 and daughter of Zion 10
 - e. Reading through 8-12 it is obvious that there is more than one who are the Lord
 - 1) The Lord of hosts sent me in 8-9 but He is coming and will dwell in their midst in 10
 - 2) Verse 11 is even more complex
 - f. The Lord himself will dwell in our midst
 - 1) Rejoice! Incarnation of Christ and His presence with us are the reason for the highest joy
 - 2) Many nations would join: Genesis 12; Isa 2:1-4; 19:16-25
 - 3) The land is holy because the Lord is there!
4. God is poised for action: let us wait in awe and reverence: Zephaniah 1:7; Habakkuk 2:20. Should be a warning to the nations

G. Vision 4: The cleansing of Joshua and the impact on God's people: 3:1-10

1. Background
 - a. Series of 8 visions; first 3 ultimately are visions of blessings and deliverance

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- b. But we haven't dealt with some of the issues in providing that, like the sin problem
 - c. Massive problem: returned but still unclear how God can dwell with sinful man
2. Joshua's filthy clothes 3:1-5
- a. He was high priest
 - 1) He represents the nation
 - 2) On the day of atonement, he bore the nation's guilt as he entered the holy of holies
 - 3) He illustrates an enormous problem. They have returned from captivity but still unclear how a holy God can dwell with them
 - b. Filthy
 - 1) A strong word for filth of the vilest character
 - 2) Very graphic; think of soiled by human waste and vomit
 - 3) Word indicates clothing or a place dirty from human excrement (Deuteronomy 23:13; Ezekiel 4:12; Isaiah 28:8; 36:12)
 - c. We need to see ourselves this way
 - 1) Ezekiel 20:43; 36:31: it is important for us to really understand the terrible nature of sin, the stench, the filth, the grossness
 - 2) Compare the condition of the prodigal son
 - 3) We were morally in the gutter; how would God see us
 - 4) Helps us to see ourselves as desperately defiled and hopeless
 - 5) If sin isn't so bad, then grace isn't so great
 - 6) We can overcome sin more easily when we hate it, when it disgusts and repulses us
 - d. Consider the role of Satan here
 - 1) There is quite a debate as to whether this refers to a personal Satan, or to a more generic enemy or something else
 - 2) What we know about him from other passages would depict him as one who accuses the brethren
 - 3) He wants us to believe that we are not fit to appear before God and we cannot please Him so we might as well abandon His service, which we are only polluting, and act out our true character by pursuing sin and wickedness
 - 4) He wants to accuse us before God and claim us
 - a) In Revelation 12, Satan lost the war in heaven and thus the power to accuse the Christians before God
 - 1. This occurred when Jesus died and rose again (12:10), when Jesus provided His blood to atone for our sins
 - 2. His only remaining option is to try to attack and turn disciples away from Jesus using the sea beast (persecution), the earth beast (false religion) and Babylon (worldliness)

- b) In Job, Satan falsely accuses Job of only serving God because of what God gives him when he does serve Him; of having selfish, mercenary motives
- 5) Here in Zechariah Satan has a wonderful opportunity. Clearly, Joshua is repulsive
- e. The Lord's response
 - 1) Rebukes Satan
 - a) The Lord chose Jerusalem
 - b) The Lord plucked them out of the fire
 - 1. He rescued them from captivity and this shows God's favor for them
 - 2. He has no intention of altering His plan for the salvation of His people
 - 2) Removes the filthy clothes
 - a) Not something that man could just do on his own; we cannot provide for our own cleansing
 - b) There should be no confusion: this means forgiveness. He did the unthinkable: removed our guilt from us by His grace
 - 3) Replaces with festive garments
 - a) Not just ordinary clothes; these represent celebration and joy
 - b) Jesus died not just to justify us, but to transform us, to make us new creatures
 - 4) Zechariah suggests putting a clean turban on his head, which completes the picture. On the front of the turban the words: Holy to the Lord: Exodus 28:36; 39:30
- 3. Privileges granted based on service 6-7
 - a. If walk in God's ways and perform His service
 - 1) God's blessings are contingent on our cooperation
 - 2) Guilt paralyzes; couldn't serve without God's cleansing
 - b. Provides access to God's courts, governing and having charge of them
 - 1) Without cleansing, there could be no access
 - 2) See Hebrews 4:16; 10:19-22, the concept of drawing near to God (Hebrews 12:18-24)
- 4. Joshua is a symbol 8-10
 - a. Not surprising because many OT men are foreshadowings of Jesus: some of the most prominent are Adam, Melchizedek, Joseph, Moses, Boaz, Samuel, David, Elisha, Isaiah, Jonah. This list could be expanded to include many other men plus many other events and objects
 - b. Some ways in which we see parallels between Joshua and Jesus
 - 1) The name: Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua

- 2) The idea of Joshua being crowned and sitting on a throne showing the union between the functions of priesthood and kingship (6:9-15)
- 3) The idea of being the Branch
 - a) Used in other Old Testament passages: Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Isaiah 4:2; 6:13; 11:1; 53:2; Zechariah 6:12
 - b) The idea seems to be that God cut down the tree of Israel, but Jesus is the shoot that brings new life and hope to the felled tree
- c. The stone
 - 1) Debatable what the stone refers to; I prefer to see it as referring to God's people
 - 2) The seven eyes refer to God's watchful care over His people
 - 3) God engraving an inscription on it means that it belongs to Him
 - 4) Removing the sin in one day
 - a) Forgiveness is the foundation of all other blessings
 - b) Think about the decisiveness of Jesus sacrifice: see Hebrews
 - c) Old Testament sacrifices required endless repetition, because they did not actually remove the guilt
- d. Everyone sits under his own vine and his own fig tree
 - 1) See 1 Kings 4:25; Isaiah 36:16; Micah 4:4
 - 2) Proverbial statement of prosperity and contentment
 - 3) Just as the exodus was a type of deliverance, so the golden age of David and Solomon is a type of the reign of the Messiah

Conclusion:

- I. Encouraging messages
 - H. As in most of the book, the messages are positive and look forward not only to the rebuilding of the temple, but of the Lord coming to be among us
 - I. The prophecies in these visions look forward to God punishing and destroying our enemies, to God dwelling in our midst and valuing us greatly and to the forgiveness and cleansing God provides through Jesus

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Selected Bibliography

Note: I have not found good commentaries on Zechariah. My opinion is that it is the biblical book least well served by commentaries. I have found it necessary to pick some tidbits from various commentaries, but to largely study it by analogy with other prophetic statements. Better than some are the College Press New International Commentary, the ESV Exegetical Commentary and Expositor's Bible Commentary.