

## THE PROMISED MESSIAH

Zechariah 8:1-8; 9:9-12

When everything we hear makes us wonder if we can believe it, when everywhere we go we may be exposed to some crazy person attacking the place, when we are hesitant to use our credit cards for fear that someone will steal our identity and cause financial ruin and when we see little or no evidence that things are going to get any better, it tends to make us either cynical or hopeless or maybe just hopelessly cynical. While we are not experiencing such things as a frequent occurrence in the area where we live, we hear about an increasing frequency in other places in our nation and especially in other parts of the world.

The uneasiness that we are beginning to sense with regard to what the future holds or even for our present safety, is just a fraction of what those fifty thousand Jews felt when they left Babylon and arrived back in the land of Judah in 538 B.C. There was a mountain of work to do and they were surrounded by other states (provinces of the Persian Empire) who were not happy to see such an influx of these people coming into that region of the world who thought and claimed that the land belonged to them.

We know from other historical accounts by Ezra and Nehemiah that some progress was made toward restoring the nation but the work was hindered by the enormity of what had to be done and a waning enthusiasm and a shifting of priorities on the part of many of those who had returned from Babylon. Getting the job done was not helped by the dangers and threats of their enemies. During this time, God raised up two prophets (Haggai and Zechariah) to help redirect their priorities and to infuse some enthusiasm inspired by visions of God's purpose for them and their descendants.

There are three major divisions of the prophecies of Zechariah. In chapters one through six we find eight visions and comments on these visions. In chapters seven and eight we find questions and answers about fasting and feasting. Within this second division we see promises of blessings for God's people on which we will focus in this present discussion. The third major division is found in chapters nine through fourteen and there we find information about battles, leaders and the goal of history. In each of these divisions there is a consistent arrangement of the information that Zechariah provided. The pattern is A-B-C-D-D1-C1-B1-A1. For example in the first major division, vision 1 and vision 8 are related. Vision 2 and vision 7 are related. This same pattern is seen in chapters seven and eight when the first subject is "men of Bethel come to ask a favor of God." And the last subject is "many will ask a favor of God." The various topics build to a climax in the middle of the sequence which in this case is found in the last part of verse 8:8 where we see "they shall be My people, and I will be their God." The earlier verses in chapter eight are supportive comments that lead to that pinnacle statement.

### God Is Faithful – 8:1-8

<sup>1</sup> Then the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I am exceedingly jealous for Zion, yes, with great wrath I am jealous for her.' <sup>3</sup> "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts *will be called* the Holy Mountain.' <sup>4</sup> "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. <sup>5</sup> 'And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets.' <sup>6</sup> "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too difficult in My sight?' declares the LORD of hosts. <sup>7</sup> "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Behold, I am going to save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; <sup>8</sup> and I will bring them *back* and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.' Zechariah 8:1-8 (NASB95)

When the people returned from Babylon to Judah, they were inspired by the idea of restoration and getting back to the former glory that Israel had during the time of David and Solomon. Their inspiration started to wane as the reality of the enormity of the task that was before them was realized. I don't know how long it took, but they came to the conclusion that this great vision of what they wanted to achieve would not be accomplished in their lifetime.

Put yourself in their sandals. How would we respond if we had a goal of seeing our nation return to a time of stability in families, a time when morality and character really mattered, when a time when there was no pornographic literature on the shelves of the corner grocery store, when there was no liquor-by-the drink (or even any package stores), when nudity was not allowed in motion pictures, when people were shocked if they heard or read the word "damn" in the media, when mothers raised their children, when divorce was rare and living together was unheard of, when drugs were something that you had prescribed by your physician, when "crack" was just the sound that your joints made when you got up in the mornings, when "joints" were the connections of two bones, when abortion was a scandal, when men married women instead of other men, when God was a name used in reverence and not part of cursing, when people who had a job really worked and to be on welfare was not something to be proud of, when "aids" meant helpful things, when prayers could be offered in schools and other public places, when our leaders were men of principle and not just personality, when Christians went to church on Sunday night, and when everyone knew the importance of integrity and valued it in their own lives and it dawned on us that we will not be able to see that happen in our lifetime?

Would we become discouraged and give up or would we be inspired to work harder to return to the way it should be?

The message from God through Zechariah to these discouraged Jews was that He (God) had not lost the vision of seeing His people become even greater than what had been with David and Solomon. What happens when we become discouraged and "lose the vision?" We become lax and lose the intensity, fervor, or zeal for the work that needs to be done. God's message to them was that His zeal was "on fire." How often do we find people today who we would describe as being "on fire" for the kingdom of God?

The missing "ingredient" for being able to accomplish what needed to be done was the very presence of the Lord in the midst of the people. We remember the accounts of the Spirit of God filling the Tabernacle and filling the Temple when it was dedicated. We can also recall that after some of the initial captives had been taken to Babylon and the remaining people did not turn back to God that God's Spirit left the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel saw it in a vision.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the first thing in the promise to renew Jerusalem was that God would return to them and dwell among them as we see in verse 8:3. His very presence would change the character of Jerusalem. The way Zechariah stated it was that the city would be called (named) Truth and the land or the mountain on which it was built would be named Holy. We know that (in the Scriptures) names are indicative of character.

If the character of the city could be described as Holy and Truth, then we would expect to find safety and security (salvation) for even the most vulnerable of humanity. To Zechariah's way of thinking these vulnerable ones (most humble) were represented by little children and the elderly.

Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Did God return to Jerusalem and dwell among them? I think we call that event the First Advent when God in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth physically walked and ministered among His chosen people. How did that work out? They rejected and crucified Him. This was in spite of the overt act of riding into Jerusalem on a donkey as was

prophesied by Zechariah in chapter nine.

Because of that rejection, then the promise of salvation did not materialize in the physical setting of Jerusalem and Mount Zion. However, God was not to be thwarted in His plan and there was a remnant of those who did NOT reject Him but, instead, received Him. We see in John 1:11-12 that He came unto His own, but they would not accept Him, but to as many as did receive Him, to them He gave the authority to become His children. This is the Church.

The message of Zechariah to the Jews was that if they could not even imagine such a restoration, it was OK since God had already seen it as coming to pass. This great accomplishment was not too difficult for Him. God saw salvation being available for all who would believe and it would not be limited to the borders of Judah but was available to all the world – from the land of the east and the land of the west.

Various translations of the first part of verse eight state that “I will bring them back.” The word “back” has been added to the text which gives the impression that this prophecy applies only to the Jews (those who had already been in Jerusalem). If that extraneous word is left out, then we see that God’s salvation is available to all who can be called His people. Since that is the case, and since we find that these (saved ones) are dwelling in the midst of the new (renewed) Jerusalem, we have to conclude that the new Jerusalem is the Church of the Lord Jesus.

Is the church the ultimate expression of this promise of a renewed Jerusalem? Most commentaries see the ultimate outcome to be the future Millennial Kingdom that happens in the Second Advent when Christ returns.

As we approach the third major division of Zechariah’s prophecy (chapters 9-14), we see the same structure or arrangement of the events prophesied as was evident in the first two major divisions. The first event mentioned is “judgment of the nations” (9:1-8) with a companion event of “blessings of the nations” (14:16-21). The second event in this series is “Judah’s righteous, saved, humble king comes and peace is established” (9:9-10) with a companion event of “judgment for Judah’s/Jerusalem’s enemies being destroyed in battle by God’s intervention” (14:1-15).

#### The King Is Coming – 9:9

<sup>9</sup> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9 (NASB95)

Clearly, this prophecy was fulfilled in the last week of the life of Christ before His crucifixion. This was the “Palm Sunday” event that helped to solidify the resolve of the Jewish rulers to eliminate Jesus by rejecting Him even though there was an overabundance of evidence that He was not only from God but was God Incarnate.

The prediction was for this “king” to be different from kings that the world embraced in that he would be humble rather than boastful and proud. Typically, a triumphant king would enter a city in a chariot or on a horse. He was not to be armed with instruments of war but would bring justice and salvation.

#### He Is the Creator of Peace – 9:10

<sup>10</sup> I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim And the horse from Jerusalem; And the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; And His dominion will be from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth. Zechariah 9:10 (NASB95)

Typically, invasions of Israel would come from the north and Ephraim would be the first

to be attacked by an invading force. The promise of peace was expressed in terms of stopping the chariots of war from overrunning Israel. The conquering kings would ride their horses through the capital city of Jerusalem and God was giving them a promise of that not happening under the reign of the Prince of Peace.

In a practical sense, there have been many who have tried to crush the church and eliminate its influence in the world. From the Romans to the Communists, all have failed and the church is still here. In our present day, the humanist and others are still trying to eliminate and negate the impact of the church on the world. These also will fail.

### God Is the Victor – 9:11-12

<sup>11</sup> As for you also, because of the blood of *My* covenant with you, I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. <sup>12</sup> Return to the stronghold, O prisoners who have the hope; This very day I am declaring that I will restore double to you. Zechariah 9:11-12 (NASB95)

This prophecy seems to be related primarily to the contemporaries of Zechariah in which those who heard his message saw themselves as prisoners of the Persian Empire. God was extending to them a message of hope that because of His covenant with them, He would provide a means to set them free.

In a spiritual sense we see that the shed blood of Christ provides the means to set all humanity free from slavery to sin and to restore us to the relationship with God that was lost in the fall that happened in the Garden of Eden. The companion verses for this prophecy are found in 13:7-9 where we see that judgment of ‘my shepherd’ brings refining and fulfillment of the promise to “set the prisoners free.”

Just as that group of exiles who had return from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and city needed to hold on to the vision that God had for them, we also need to keep the faith and not despair. The craziness happening in the world and the opposition from within our own nation can be discouraging. They needed to take hope in the belief that God Himself would one day reign and bring in an age of peace and prosperity. Just as with them we need to remember that our God is still on His throne. He is still in control.