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Commentary

# **The Message of Zechariah for Today**

Matthew Henry

## **Overview**

Zechariah was a colleague of the prophet Haggai and worked with him to advance the building of the second temple (Ezra 5:1); for two are better than one. Christ sent forth His disciples two by two. Zechariah began to prophesy some time after Haggai.

But he continued longer, wrote more, and prophesied more particularly concerning Christ than Haggai had done. He begins

with a plain, practical sermon, expressive of the scope of his prophesying, in the first five verses; but afterwards, to the end of chapter 6, he relates the visions he saw and the instructions he received immediately from heaven through them.

In chapter 7, following an enquiry by the Jews about fasting, he shows them their duty for the present day and encourages them to hope for God's favour, continuing to the end of chapter 8. After this, there are two sermons, both called burdens of the word of the Lord (one begins with chapter 9, the other with chapter 12), which were probably preached some time later. The scope of these sermons is to reprove sin, to threaten God's judgments against the unrepentant, and to encourage those who feared God with assurances of the mercy God had in store for His church, especially the coming of

the Messiah and the setting up of His kingdom in the world.

In **Zechariah 1**, after the introduction (v. 1), we have,

- First, an awakening call to a sinful people to repent of their sins and return to God (vv. 2-6).
- Second, great encouragement to hope for mercy is given through the vision of the horses (vv. 7-11); the angel's prayer for Jerusalem and the answer to that prayer (vv. 12-17); and the vision of the four carpenters who were employed to cut off the four horns with which Judah and Jerusalem were scattered (vv. 18-21).

In **chapter 2**, we have another vision which the prophet saw, not for his own entertainment, but for his satisfaction and the edification of those to whom he was

sent (vv. 1-2). There is a sermon upon it in the rest of the chapter, serving as an explication of the vision and showing it to be a prediction of the replenishing of Jerusalem and of its safety and honour (vv. 3-5).

By way of application, here is a use of exhortation to the Jews who were still in Babylon, pressing them to hasten their return to their own land (vv. 6-9); a use of consolation to those who had returned, in reference to the many difficulties they had to struggle with (vv. 10-12); and a use of caution to all not to dictate demands to God or limit Him, but to wait patiently for Him (v. 13).

The vision in chapter 2 gave assurances of the re-establishment of the civil interests of the Jewish nation, promises that were fulfilled in Christ.

Now the vision in **chapter 3** concerns their church-state and ecclesiastical interests, and assures them that they shall be put into a good posture again. The promises of this also have an eye to Christ, who is not only our Prince but the High Priest of our profession, of whom Joshua was a type. Here is a vision relating to Joshua, as the representative of the church in his time, representing the disadvantages he laboured under and the people in him, with the redress of the grievances of both. He is accused by Satan but is brought off by Christ (vv. 1-2). He appears in filthy garments but has them changed (vv. 3-5). He is assured of being established in his office if he conducts himself well (vv. 6-7). This is a sermon relating to Christ, who is here called "the Branch," who should be endued with all perfections for His undertaking and be carried triumphantly

through it, and by whom we should have pardon and peace (vv. 8-10).

We have another comforting vision in **chapter 4**, which, as it was explained to the prophet, contained much to encourage the people of God in their present straits, so great that they thought their case hopeless, that their temple could never be rebuilt nor their city replenished. And therefore the scope of the vision is to show that God would, by His own power, perfect the work, though the assistance given to it by its friends was ever so weak, and the resistance given to it by its enemies was ever so strong. Here is the prophet's awakening to observe the vision (v. 1). The vision is of a candlestick with seven lamps, supplied with oil and kept burning, immediately from two olive-trees that grew by it, one on either side (vv. 2-3). The general encouragement hereby is intended to be given to the

builders of the temple to go on in that good work, assuring them that it should be brought to perfection at last (vv. 4-10). The particular explication of the vision is for the illustration of these assurances (vv. 11-14).

Hitherto we have seen visions of peace only, and all the words we have heard have been good and comforting. But the pillar of cloud and fire has a dark side towards the Egyptians, as well as a bright and pleasant side towards Israel. So have Zechariah's visions; for God's prophets are not only His ambassadors, to speak of peace with the sons of peace, but also heralds, to proclaim war against those who delight in war and persist in their rebellion.

In **chapter 5**, we have two visions, by which "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and

unrighteousness of men." God will do great and kind things for His people, which the faithful sons of Zion shall rejoice in; but "let the sinners in Zion be afraid" for two reasons.

- **First**, God will reckon severely with those particular persons among them who are wicked and profane, and who hate to be reformed in these times of reformation. While God is showing kindness to the body of the nation and loading it with His blessings, they and their families shall, notwithstanding, lie under the curse which the prophet sees in a flying roll (vv. 1-4).
- **Second**, if the nation's body degenerates hereafter and wickedness prevails among them, it shall be carried off and hurried away with swift destruction, under the pressing weight of divine

wrath, represented by a talent of lead upon the mouth of an ephah, carried upon the wing I know not where (vv. 5-11).

The two kingdoms of providence and grace are what we are all very nearly interested in, and therefore we are concerned to acquaint ourselves with them, all our temporal affairs being in a necessary subjection to divine providence, and all our spiritual and eternal concerns in a necessary dependence upon divine grace; and these two are represented to us in **Zechariah 6**, the former by a vision, the latter by a type. Here is God;

- One, as King of nations, ruling the world through the ministry of angels, in the vision of the four chariots (vv. 1-8).
- Two, as King of saints, ruling the church by the mediation of Christ,

in the figure of Joshua the high priest, crowned, the ceremony performed, and then explained concerning Christ (vv. 9-15).

We have finished with the visions, but not with the revelations of this book. The prophet sees no more such signs as he had seen, yet "the word of the LORD came to him."

In **chapter 7**, we have a case of conscience proposed to the prophet by the children of the captivity concerning fasting, whether they should continue their solemn fasts which they had religiously observed during the seventy years of their captivity (vv. 1-3). The answer to this question, given in this and the next chapter, was not given all at once, but by piecemeal, and, it should seem, at several times, for here are four distinct discourses, each of which has reference

to this case, and each is prefaced with “the word of the LORD came” (vv. 4-8; 8:1, 18). Their method is very observable.

In this chapter, the prophet,

- One, sharply reproves them for the mismanagement of their fasts (vv. 4-7).
- Two, exhorts them to reform their lives, which would be the best way of fasting, and to take heed of those sins which brought those judgments upon them, and which they kept these fasts in memory of (vv. 8-14).

And then, in the next chapter, **chapter 8**, having searched the wound, he binds it up and heals it, with gracious assurances of the great mercies God had yet in store for them, by which He would turn their fasts into feasts.

The work of ministers is rightly to divide the word of truth and to give everyone his portion. So the prophet is here instructed to do, in the further answer he gives to the case of conscience proposed about continuing the public fasts. His answer, in the foregoing chapter, is by way of reproof to those who were disobedient and would not obey the truth. But here, in chapter 8, he is ordered to change his voice and to speak by way of encouragement to the willing and obedient. Here are two words from the Lord of hosts, and they are both good and comforting.

- **In the former** of these messages (v. 1), God promises that Jerusalem shall be restored, reformed, and replenished (vv. 2-8), that the country shall be rich, and that the nation's affairs shall be successful, its reputation retrieved, and its state in all

respects the reverse of what it had been for many years past (vv. 9-15); he then exhorts them to reform what was amiss among them, that they might be ready for these favours designed for them (vv. 16-17).

- **In the latter** of these messages (v. 18), he promises that their fasts should be superseded by the return of mercy (v. 19), and that, upon this, they should be replenished, enriched, and strengthened, by the accession of foreigners to them (vv. 20-23).

**Chapter 9** begins another sermon, which continues through the end of chapter 11. It is called "The burden of the word of the LORD," for every word of God carries weight for those who regard it and will be a heavy, dead weight upon those who do

not. Here is a prophecy against the Jews' unrighteous neighbours—the Syrians, Tyrians, Philistines, and others (v. 1-6), with an intimation of mercy to some of them in their conversion (v. 7), and a promise of mercy to God's people in their protection (v. 8). There is also a prophecy of their righteous King, the Messiah, and His coming, with a description of Him (v. 9) and of His kingdom, including its nature and extent (v. 10). It is an account of the obligation the Jews lie under to Christ for their deliverance from their captivity in Babylon (vv. 11-12). Here is a prophecy of the victories and successes God would grant to the Jews over their enemies, as typical of our great deliverance by Christ (vv. 13-15). Finally, it contains a promise of great plenty, joy, and honour that God had in reserve for His people (vv. 16-17), written for their encouragement.

The scope of **Zechariah 10** is much the same as that of the foregoing chapter—to encourage the Jews who had returned, with the hope that though they had been under divine rebukes for their negligence in rebuilding the temple, and were now surrounded by enemies and dangers, God would do them good and make them prosperous at home and victorious abroad. Now they are directed to look to the great God in all events that concerned them, and, both in the evils they suffered and in the comforts they desired, to acknowledge His hand (vv. 1-4). They are encouraged to expect strength and success from Him in all their struggles with the enemies of their church and state, and to hope that the issue would be glorious at last (vv. 5-12).

God's prophet, who in the earlier chapters was an ambassador sent to promise peace, is a herald sent to declare

war in **chapter 11**. The Jewish nation shall recover its prosperity, flourish for a time, and become considerable. It shall be very happy, at length, in the coming of the long-expected Messiah, in the preaching of His gospel, and in the setting up of His standard there. But when the chosen remnant among them are effectually called in and united to Christ thereby, the body of the nation, persisting in unbelief, shall be utterly abandoned and given up to ruin for rejecting Christ; and it is this that is foretold here in this chapter—the Jews rejecting Christ, which was their measure-filling sin, and the wrath which for that sin came upon them to the uttermost. Here is a prediction of the destruction itself that should come upon the Jewish nation (vv. 1-3).

Here is also the putting of it into the hands of the Messiah. He is charged with the custody of that flock (vv. 4-6). He

undertakes it and bears rule in it (vv. 7-8). Finding it perverse, He gives it up (v. 9), breaks His shepherd's staff (vv. 10-11), resents the indignities done to Him and the contempt put upon Him (vv. 12-13), and then breaks His other staff (v. 14). He turns them over into the hands of foolish shepherds, who, instead of preventing, shall complete their ruin, and both the blind leaders and the blind followers shall fall together into the ditch (vv. 15-17). This is foretold to the poor of the flock before it comes to pass, that, when it does come to pass, they may not be offended.

The apostle (Gal. 4:25-26) distinguishes between "Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children"—the remaining carcass of the Jewish church that rejected Christ—and "Jerusalem that is from above, that is free, and is the mother of us all"—the Christian church, the spiritual Jerusalem, which God has

chosen to put His name there. In the foregoing chapter, we read the doom of the former, and left that carcass to be a prey to the eagles that should be gathered to it. Now, in chapter 12, we have the blessings of the latter, with many precious promises made to the gospel Jerusalem by Him who (v. 1) declares His power to fulfil them. It is promised that the attempts of the church's enemies against her shall be to their own ruin, and that they shall find that it is at their peril if they do her any hurt (vv. 2-4, 6). It is further promised that the endeavours of the church's friends and patrons for her good shall be pious, regular, and successful (v. 5). God will protect and strengthen the meanest and weakest who belong to His church, and work salvation for them (vv. 7-8).

He will pour upon them a spirit of prayer and repentance as a preparative for all

this mercy, and as a pledge of it, the effect of which shall be universal and very particular (vv. 9-14). These promises were of use then to the pious Jews who lived in the troubled times under Antiochus and other persecutors and oppressors, and they are still to be improved in every age for the directing of our prayers and the encouraging of our hopes with reference to the gospel church.

In this **final chapter**, we find additional promises for gospel times. Here is a promise of the remission of sins (v. 1), of the reformation of manners (v. 2), and particularly of the convicting and silencing of false prophets (vv. 2-6). We have a clear prediction of the sufferings of Christ and the dispersion of His disciples thereafter (v. 7), of the destruction of the greater part of the Jewish nation not long after (v. 8), and of

the purifying of a remnant of them, a peculiar people to God (v. 9).

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