

'Your Kingdom Come!' — Studies in Zechariah (3)

In summary, the first part of this book has included a 'word of the Lord about repentance (1;1-16), a 'word of the Lord' comprising of eight vision in one night (1:7—6:8) and a 'word of the Lord' that rounds out what has been already said (6:9-15).

The eight visions have talked about horsemen whose report arouses God's jealous care for Israel and then two visions about how God's 'return' to Jerusalem reverses the order of fear and turns all Jerusalem into a temple for God's glory. The two central visions have to do with the persons at the centre of the action—the priest is purified and the governor told his success will be by the Spirit. The next two visions show the sins of Israel actually being removed and the last, returning to the opening scene, shows charioteers executing the judgement anticipated in the first vision.

6:9-15

The first half of the book now closes with a further word from the Lord related to some silver and gold brought by returnees for the temple, a foretaste of the coming fulfillment of 2:6-12. Their contribution is made into a crown for Joshua the high priest, again, as a sign of greater things to come—their temporal action is in fact part of God's eternal plan. Joshua is symbolically called 'the Branch' (as in 3:8) who will not only be priest but a temple building king—greater than Zerubbabel. The prohibition of one person holding the office of priest and king (cf. the sin of King Saul) will be abolished. Zechariah says you will now I am a prophet when you see this happening.

We note, first, the interplay between the present and what is promised—the donors are both a fulfillment of a promise and have their gift acknowledged as a sign of things to come. Second, the fulfillment is made conditional on their obedience—something that can only be possible because God will secure the obedience of his people (cf. 12:10). Third, God speaks of what will be fulfilled in the coming of his Son to be King-Priest (as Psalm 110) to purify and lead his people in victory among the nations.

7:1—8:23

Nearly two years have elapsed (1:1; 7:1) since Zechariah began to prophesy and the temple work recommenced. It will take two more years to complete (Ezra 6:15), but now, midstream in this project, we are told, five times, that 'the word of the Lord' comes to Zechariah (7:1, 4, 8; 8:1, 19) to encourage the workers (the fourth of these has 'Thus says the Lord' seven times and the fifth another three). The word of the prophet is essential to the health and progress of God's people (cf. Prov. 29:18).

We are reminded of the seven times in the Apocalypse (Rev. 2—3) that John is told to write 'the words of him...', that is, of the risen and powerful Christ. The church of Christ lives and moves only by every word from God's mouth (cf. Matt. 4:4).

Chapter 7 begins with some Bethel residents asking for God's favour and about maintaining their fasts, possibly up to four every year (7:5; 8:19). These people may be some who were left in Bethel (Northern kingdom) after the captivity and who visited Jerusalem on these occasions to seek God's favour. The questioners get more than they bargained for! The Lord is interested in their motive rather than their habit (7:5-6) and looks for them to reform their ways. One is reminded of the Pharisee who prayed 'with himself' (Luke 18:11). But then, in chapter 8, the Lord goes on to promise that he will completely remove the need for fasting (8:19).

The first words deal with the hypocrisy (along with the idolatry) that had lead to the 'whirlwind' that had scattered Judeans among the nations (7:14) and this culture remained

endemic for the 70 years of their captivity (7:5). God says their hearts had become 'diamond-hard' in resisting the word of his Spirit to them (7:12). Rather than focus on prescribed fasts (7:3), the residents of Bethel (and all Judeans) should obey the word given to the earlier prophets (eg. Isa. 58), that they should live justly and compassionately with one another (7:9-10; 8:16-17). God is always coming to Israel with steadfast love and faithfulness (Exod. 34:6-7) and requires that they treat each other in the same way. So, this second section of the book begins, as does the first, with a call to repentance.

It is easy for the seemingly most self-effacing of pieties to be an alternative to direct engagement with God and his will. Jesus warned against it (Matt. 6:16-18) as did Paul (Col. 2:23).

Chapter 8 moves from rebuke to promise, and concludes, not with a desultory petition, but with 'many peoples and strong nations' coming to Jerusalem to seek the Lord's favour (v. 22). Israel's agenda has been parochial and self-serving, but now, the Lord addresses the 'remnant' (vv. 6, 11, 12), those remaining after the judgement of captivity. They should lift their eyes to see what God is about, and then, be bold in finishing the temple. 'Don't fear!' 'Be strong!' God says (vv. 9, 13, 15).

The Lord says: 'I have returned to Jerusalem' (v.3)—it is not just the people who have come back. Jerusalem will a faithful and holy city, and will prosper (vv. 3-5). Already, there are indications that this is beginning to happen: those who have heard the word of the Zechariah and Malachi will remember that before restarting work on the temple, there were no jobs, security was poor and community feeling was non-existent (v.10). Presumably, things had noticeably changed. But this is only a foretaste! The days of judgement are over (v. 11; cf. Isa. 40:1-2). God will make them prosper and they will be a blessing. The Abrahamic covenant is reaffirmed.

What is happening in Judah in the fifth century BC ('these days'—vv.8, 15) is a sign of what is to happen 'in those days' (v. 23). On these grounds, he calls them to put fear away and to be bold.

The grace of God in Christ has a distinctly future look. Of course, the grace of God has appeared in history (Tit. 2:11), and we have been saved by grace (Eph. 2:9), but it is the grace coming to us from the Father and the ascended Christ (Eph. 1:2; 6:24; etc) that now moves us to action. We have access to grace (Rom. 5:2) and come to a throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). It will conclude with the grace coming to us at the appearing of Christ (1 Pet. 1:13). Our whole life is an anticipation of grace, and this is the chief motive for our deeds of faithfulness and holiness.

So with these Jews in Judah: their fasts *will become* seasons of celebration. *Therefore, now*, they should 'love truth and peace' (v.19). It is this transformation among his people that will be the basis of the nations coming to seek the Lord—begging to be included among them because they have heard that the Lord is among them (vv. 21-23).