

'Your Kingdom Come!' — Studies in Zechariah (5)

Zechariah has shown us throughout his book that the only way for the people of God to live is to see 'behind the scenes', or rather, to live by faith in what God reveals. This larger picture depicts the present in its true light, and as a sign of what is to come. But then again, what is to come is precisely what is needed to 'sense the moment' in what is going on now.

This second oracle and finalé to the whole book tells us what will happen 'on that day' (used 16 times). In terms that speak to the struggling returnees in Jerusalem (the city is referred to 20 times), and calling on memories from throughout their history, God tells Zechariah how the battle between God and the nations will end, but with special reference to his own people.

12:1-9

Nothing, either celestial or terrestrial, or we ourselves exist apart from Israel's covenant LORD (v. 1), and nothing will escape his final review and resolution when he comes to deal with the nations. Until the very end, haters of God mount their attack on Jerusalem and the revelation that centres on that city (v. 3). But Jerusalem will be too much for them to handle (vv. 3, 6) and they will dissolve into panic and impotency (v. 4).

Jerusalem will know this is God's doing (v. 5), and even the way it happens will prevent Jerusalem from making political advantage out of the victory (v. 7). In the place of Israel's bad leadership (already spoken of) there will be a whole populace like David, or like God (v. 8)! God's revelation, centred in Jerusalem, will be no longer contested or compromised.

All this gives hope to the dispirited people in 6th century BC Jerusalem but it also tells every generation of persecuted believers that even though they are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered, they should continue to believe in God's justifying and saving power (Rom. 8:36-37). Finally, when all the world's hostility is focussed in one final assault, the battle will come to nothing (Rev. 20:6-10).

12:10-14

But the battle of God with the world has never been a matter of mere power. It has always been a moral one. God has promised to remove sin 'in a day' (3:9), and here we see the effect of this promise on God's people. The Spirit will awaken them to the grace of God, and will also awaken them to their need for it. All of them had treated God as someone to be eliminated (pierced), but now, they grieve, and not in any formal way but privately in their homes.

Ezekiel announced that God would bless Israel, both nationally and spiritually, and in knowing God's goodness to them again, they would despise themselves (Ezek. 36:24-31). The grace of God leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). All this begins to happen in earnest when the Spirit is poured out and people are pierced to the heart and say, 'What shall we do?' (Acts 2:37).

13:1-6

Again, 'on that day', there will be a fountain to wash them clean of this sin. And there will be no more idols, or false prophets (as in 10:2) with a spirit of uncleanness. Radical action will be taken to prevent it happening and no one will want to be known as a prophet (given that the office is so despoiled).

Israel had been told that if a son committed treason by speaking against Israel's God and King, he should be stoned, with his parents leading the execution (Deut. 13:6-11)! There is no evidence that this was ever done, but the sanction makes it clear that idolatry is out of the question. Christ says he will come to remove any who mislead his people (Rev. 2:20-23).

13:7-9

Now we are taken deeper still into the removing of sin. God has a shepherd, close to him (so he is not the 'pierced' God of 12:10). Rather, he is God's servant, the Branch (3:8; 6:12) or the coming King (9:9) who shepherds God's people. It will be a terrible day because the shepherd will be killed and his people be scattered. This will be followed by a terrible sorting out in which two thirds will perish and even the surviving third will be refined by fire. But in the end, there will be a people who call on God truly. Our salvation comes from a fountain for cleansing, but includes also a fire for refining. The covenant song, 'I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people' (Lev. 26:12; Ezek. 11:20) will be fulfilled in truth.

Like a fountain flowing abundantly, the blood of Christ is sufficient to cleanse us from all sin. In this mighty action, his purpose is to completely remove sin from us (Rom. 6:12-14). Wherever the people of God become careless of this truth (and who can say they are not part of this problem), God acts to awaken his people to the seriousness of their neglect (Heb. 12:7).

14:1-21

This 'day', defined more by its being the day of God's final actions rather than its point on the calendar, will find the nations still hostile to God and his revelation. Their attack on God's people will be without mercy and almost seem to succeed (half the city will be taken). As Paul will say later, for your sake we are being killed all day long' (Rom. 8:36). But then, God will bring all this to an end—and what an end!

God's feet will touch the Mount of Olives, split it in two and make a way for the besieged citizens of Jerusalem to flee for their lives. Here is the ultimate exodus (cf. Exod. 14:21-22). 'Every mountain and hill will be made low' (Isa. 40:3) is the promise of God to give confidence to his church until the final day comes.

Now, God himself will be with them. The creation will reflect this new presence so that present descriptions of night and day and seasons of the year will not be relevant. A river from Jerusalem will feed the Dead Sea on one side and the Mediterranean on the other, recalling the waters that flowed from Eden to water the earth. Jerusalem will sit above the surrounding plain and be peacefully inhabited—judgements against it will be gone forever (cf. Rev. 22:3).

For the hostile nations, there will be plague, panic and confusion. Their animals will perish too. The inhabitants of Jerusalem, and Judeans as well, will plunder their enemies—that is, all the nations that have set themselves against God.

Finally, the oracle shows that there are those among the nations who have not hated God and now join with Israel in their worship. In terms that could be understood at that time, this last day is described as travelling to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths, one of the main and happiest of their celebrations (at the end of harvest). Those who refuse to come will experience drought and plague! Like the earlier description of all Jerusalem being a temple, now, even something as commonplace as a horse's bells will be inscribed with 'holy to the Lord' (cf. Exodus 28:36 where this inscription is only for the High Priest's turban). Any pot in all Judah will be a holy utensil and traders (a problem for the returnees, and again in Jesus' time) will not defile the temple any longer.

This final oracle prepares the way for the final chapters of our Bible. In the new heavens and earth, the water of life will flow from God and the Lamb. God himself will be light enough for the nations to find their way, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory and the glory and honour of their nations into the holy city of God (Rev. 21:23-27).

This is the day God has promised, and this is the day for which we long and pray!