INTRODUCTION TO ZECHARIAH

Message #1

Zechariah 1:1

When it comes to doing things for God, one of the big questions many people ask is “Why bother?” Why should we care if we live our lives for the Lord? Why should we care if we make sacrifices for God? Why should we care if we accomplish anything for Jesus Christ? Why should we care if we go to church? Why should we care if we witness? Why should we care if we give? Why should we care if we study God’s Word? There is really one simple answer to all of these questions, because one day the Lord is coming back and when He does, what we have done for Him will pay rich eternal dividends. What we do for God on earth determines what happens when we leave this earth.

There is an old proverb that has been used over the centuries by the sailors on the sea that was taught to us and we have taught it to our children. Red at night sailor’s delight, red in morning sailor’s warning. That proverb was designed to teach that you may discern the kind of weather that is coming by looking at the color of the sky. If the sky were red at night, you could expect a good next day, but if the sky were red in the morning, you could expect a big storm. Now actually, I do not know how precise this is, but it does illustrate the fact that we do look at certain weather patterns to determine the future.

As we look at our present world, there is no doubt that the patterns have taken a major turn. There is a spirit of lawlessness and rebellion. There is a hatred that is brewing against those who love God and His Word. People are reckless and conceited and most love pleasures way more than they love God. Storm clouds are forming and we need to realize what we do now for the Lord is an eternal investment that is about to pay off.

There is a book in the Bible that says you need to be looking at the future and in view of that, get things done for God in the present. This book challenges God’s people to stay focused on future promises and get things done in the present.

The book that drives this point home is somewhat mysterious and often neglected and misunderstood book. It is a book found in the Old Testament called Zechariah. In the next weeks we want to take you through this amazing book. Now in this opening study, we want to introduce you to the book. We do this in question/answer format:

QUESTION #1 – Why study the book of Zechariah?

We always begin here and it is a fitting place to begin because it forces us to think through some of the things in the book. Let me cite three simple reasons to study this book:

Reason #1 - Because Zechariah is one of only 66 inspired books that God gave to man.

Zechariah is one of only 39 O.T. books of the Bible that has been inspired by God that has never really been challenged by Jewish interpreters or Christian interpreters as belonging in the Bible.
Mark Boda writes: “The book of Zechariah has been preserved throughout the ages by painstaking reproduction of the text from generation to generation, beginning in ancient days when all that was available was papyrus or parchment and ink…” (*The Book of Zechariah*, p. 1).

Two ancient Hebrew manuscripts of Zechariah are the Cairo Codex, AD 895 and the Codex Leningradensis, AD 1008. The oldest copy of a Hebrew text of Zechariah is from the second century B.C.. It was found in the Qumran caves. The oldest Greek text of Zechariah is a manuscript from the first century B.C.. In the first century AD, Zechariah was translated into the Syrian language. This is a book that has been preserved by God in manuscript form. George Klein, who wrote a good commentary on Zechariah said manuscripts are in a “pristine state” (*Zechariah*, p. 49). So this is a rare inspired book of God.

The Jewish O.T. is called the Tanakh. This is an acronym (TaNaKh) that actually reminds the Jews that the O.T. is divided into three main parts: “Ta” which refers to Torah; “N” evim which refers to prophets and “K” tuvim which refers to the writings. This is the way Jesus viewed the O.T. in Luke 24:44. He broke it down into the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms which refers to the writings.

Now the prophets in the Hebrew Bible form the second section. Back around 190 BC there was a Jewish compilation of a collection of twelve books of the Bible, known as “The Twelve Prophets” or “The Twelve.” In this collection, the twelve O.T. prophetic books of Hosea to Malachi were linked together, which comprise what is called the twelve prophets. These prophets were classified as Minor Prophets, not because their information was not important, but because compared to the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the number of verses was shorter.

**Zechariah was classified as one of the twelve minor prophetic books.** It is the longest of the books classified as Minor Prophets. It is a book that has 14 chapters and contains 211 verses. The second longest minor prophet is Hosea with 14 chapters and 197 verses.

One of the reasons why Zechariah has not been questioned as belonging in the Scripture is because it is quoted so often in the N.T.. **It is quoted some 71 times in the New Testament.** In fact, there is an unusually high amount of quotations in Zechariah that specifically pertain to Jesus Christ. One scholar called Zechariah “the most messianic…of all writings of the Old Testament.”

Zechariah predicts that Jesus would enter Jerusalem on a colt (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21-4-5; John 12:14-16). Zechariah predicted that Jesus would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (11:12-13/Matt. 27:9). Zechariah predicted that Jesus would have His hands and feet pierced (12:10/John 19:37). Zechariah predicted Jesus would provide a cleansing from sin by a death on the cross (13:1/John 1:29; Titus 3:5). Zechariah predicted that Jesus Christ would one day return build a Temple (6:12).

Clearly, Zechariah is one of the rare inspired books that belong in the inspired Scriptures.
Reason #2 - Zechariah is a book that really is designed to inspire hope in the heart of God’s discouraged people.

When Zechariah wrote this book, the people of God were very depressed. They were thinking back to a time when the Temple stood in all of its glory and now it was shameful and disgraceful.

We are living in a bizarre, wacked out world that frankly is evil and depressing. We can think back to a time when there was a reverence for God in the church and there was a real focus on knowing God’s Word. That isn’t the way it is now in most places. It is depressing. 50 years ago there was no thought of needing security. 20 years ago you would never go to church and see electric guitars and drum sets on a platform. But this is where we are today. Frankly, it is discouraging at times. We need a book like this because we need hope and this is the kind of book that can give us that hope.

It causes God’s people to keep their focus on the bright future and the coming of Jesus Christ. The book of Zechariah is a great book of hope not just for Israel, but for all God’s people. As Stephen Miller said, “Probably no other prophetic book is so dominated by hope and blessing for God’s people as is Zechariah. The enduring message of the book is that the king of God will triumph” (Zechariah, p. 135).

Reason #3 - Zechariah is a book of the Bible that is rarely, if ever studied.

The real tragedy concerning this book is that it is rarely studied. Carl Laney said that “Zechariah has been called an obscure book and an extremely difficult book to understand” (Zechariah, p. 5). In fact, for most people it is not ever studied. Isn’t that something? Here is a book of the Bible that is so positive and so uplifting and so quoted and yet it is so neglected.

Martin Luther wrote two commentaries on Zechariah. When he came to chapter 14, he said, “Here in this chapter I give up. For I am not sure what the prophet is talking about.” At least Luther expounded the book, which is more than you can say about most.

I want to use an illustration I have used before. Suppose one day some Christian in heaven bumps into Zechariah. Let’s say that Zechariah says, “I wrote a book of the Bible.” The person says, “Yes, I know you did.” Now Zechariah says, “How did you like it? How much did you study it?” “I’ll bet the vast majority of people would hang their heads and say we never really did study it seriously.” That will be a shame.

But frankly the shame will be on the ministers who have had this book in their Bibles their entire lifetime. The sad reality is they never took the time to study it. So when you get to heaven, I want you to say, “We loved your book Mr. Zechariah and we went through every word of it.”
QUESTION #2 – Who is Zechariah?

With perhaps the exception of Zephaniah, we know more about Zechariah than we do any other minor prophet.

The name Zechariah means “Jehovah remembers.” What a great name. It indicates God does not forget His people and He always remembers His promises to them. We look around at a troubled, hateful, hurting world and it is so easy to become depressed and discouraged. But the name Zechariah lifts us up because his name means the Lord always remembers His people. It is more than coincidental that Zechariah’s father, Berechiah, means Jehovah blesses and Zechariah’s grandfather Iddo means appointed time. When you combine these three names together, what they mean is God remembers His people and blesses them at His appointed time.

Zechariah is a very common name in the Bible. There are about 30 different individuals in the Bible with this name and all are in the O.T., with the exception of John the Baptist’s father whose name was Zacharias (Luke 1:5, 12, 13, 18, 21).

According to Zechariah 1:1, Zechariah is identified in three ways:

**Way #1** - He was a *prophet*. 1:1a

**What this means is that he received direct revelatory messages from God.** Zechariah is an amazing prophet. He is specifically called a prophet by Ezra and he is closely linked to Haggai (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). He was signaled out by God to communicate His precious Word to His people. His message was designed to bring cheer and hope to the souls of discouraged people so they would keep going for God. Naturally a key theme will keep going and stay faithful because your Messiah is coming.

**Zechariah gives some of the clearest messianic prophecies about Jesus Christ in the entire Bible.** He predicts a glorious future for Israel and that becomes the basis for challenging her to turn to the Lord now in the present:

1) Christ is the branch. 3:8
2) Christ is God’s servant. 3:8
3) Christ is the Shepherd. 9:16; 11:11
4) Christ is the smitten shepherd. 13:7
5) Christ would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey colt. 9:9
6) Christ would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. 11:12-13
7) Christ would have His hands and feet pierced. 12:10
8) Christ would return to the Mount of Olives. 14:3-8
9) Christ would be both King and Priest. 6:13
10) Christ would be a fountain that removes all iniquity. 3:4; 13:1
11) Christ will be rejected by Israel.
12) Christ will restore Israel. 12:8-10
13) Christ will destroy Israel’s enemies. 9:14-15; 12:12
14) Christ will reign worldwide. 9:10; 14:9

The primary point of all of these prophecies is to show that one day the Messiah will overthrow all of Israel’s enemies and He will bring Israel to a glorious future. Therefore, in view of the future, keep at it and stay faithful in the present.

The fact that God elected and chose Jerusalem is a key motivating factor (1:17; 2:12; 3:2). Furthermore, the hope of the Lord’s coming does have a purifying effect on the lives of God’s people in any dispensation. In fact, John said, “every man who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself even as he is pure” (I John 3:3).

H. A. Ironside said when the church neglects prophetic books it loses much, it loses hope (The Minor Prophets, p. 340).

**Way #2** - He was the son of Berechiah. 1:1b

We don’t know a thing about Berechiah, other than he was Zechariah’s father. He probably died when Zechariah was young, before the Jews returned from Babylon to Jerusalem. According to Zechariah 2:4, Zechariah was a relatively young man when he prophesied so he must have been very young when his father died.

Think about this. Zechariah was born into a family that was enslaved to the Babylonians and then at a young age, his father dies. What this teaches us is you don’t have to come from the perfect background to be greatly used by God. Zechariah proves that you can be greatly used for God even if you didn’t have a father growing up.

So he was born a son of Berechiah when in captivity and then he actually traveled back to Jerusalem with 50,000 other people, including his grandfather, when Israel was permitted to return to rebuild the temple under Cyrus.

**Way #3** - He was the son of Iddo. 1:1c

Iddo was Zechariah’s grandfather. This is significant. The fact that he was connected to Iddo is specifically mentioned by Ezra (Ezra 5:1; 6:14) and Nehemiah (Neh. 12:16). Now Iddo was also mentioned by Nehemiah as being the head of a key priestly family that returned to Jerusalem from Babylon with Zerubbabel (Neh. 12:1, 4, 16).

According to historical tradition, Iddo was a member of the Great Synagogue that was responsible for governing the nation. So Zechariah had an amazing connection to God. He was born into a priestly family and his grandfather was one who took God very seriously.
When Cyrus gave an edict that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, comparatively speaking, the numbers were few. According to Ezra, only 4 of the 24 divisions of priests decided to return (Ezra 2:36-39). Zechariah’s grandfather, Iddo, was one of them.

His grandfather decided to take Zechariah with him. By land the trip from Babylon to Jerusalem is over 1600 miles. If you average 10 miles a day it would take 160 days. If you average 20 miles a day it would take 80 days. Little Zechariah traveled with his grandpa all those days to Jerusalem. This is not an easy trip, but he made it with his grandpa. Only about 50,000 people made the trip (Ezra 2:64). Zechariah was one of them.

Think of this. Zechariah is traveling with his grandfather back to Jerusalem. His grandfather Iddo must have told him about the wonderful privilege it was to go back to a place where the Word of God was loved and the worship of God was sacred. Zechariah was traveling with his grandfather who was a priest, looking forward to getting back to the Temple.

Grandparents need to take notice of this. We need to teach our grandchildren the importance of reverent worship. I have heard many testimonies of people who talk about a faithful grandfather or grandmother who greatly influenced them for God.

So what this means is that Zechariah could function as a priest by pedigree, but he would also function as a prophet by God’s election. In this regard, he was just like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who functioned as a prophet and a priest.

We learn from Jesus Christ in Matthew 23:35 that Zechariah was murdered and martyred by some mob action that took place in the Temple. J. N. Darby said that “the Jewish Targum states that Zechariah the son of Iddo, a prophet and priest, was slain in the sanctuary” (Irrationalism of Infidelity, pp. 150-159).

Zechariah became a tremendous man of God and a great theologian. He has an awesome view of God’s sovereignty. He has a detailed grasp of Jesus Christ. He has a deep understanding of soteriology. He grasps election. He grasps imputation (3:1-5). He had a prophetic grasp of eschatology. Much of that he learned from his grandpa.

QUESTION #3 – What is the historical background of Zechariah?

Zechariah was born in Babylon when Israel was in captivity. He was born into a priest’s family. Life was not great in Babylon, but it wasn’t bad. It could have been worse. The people had their houses and for the most part the Babylonians were good to the Israelites.

In 539 BC the Babylonians fell to Cyrus, the Persian King. God stirred Cyrus’ heart to permit any Jew who wanted to go back to Jerusalem (Ezek. 1:1-4; II Chron. 36:22-23). Cyrus signed a decree that permitted Israel to return to her land and rebuild her Temple (II Chron. 36:21-23; Ezek. 1:1-4; 6:3-5).
About 50,000 did return under the leadership of Zerubbabel (the governor), and Zechariah’s grandfather Iddo, a priest, decided to return to help rebuild the Temple (Neh. 12:16). The leaders of the project were Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest (Ezra 5:1-2). Iddo took Zechariah with him and ultimately they completed the foundation of the Temple in 536 B.C.

But some obstacles arose and the work shut down. So God raised up a couple prophets to proclaim His Word to His people. God wanted the work completed and He raised up two prophets to proclaim it. One was Haggai and the other was Zechariah. Apparently the people were just enjoying life and forgot about getting a work done for God. Eventually the temple work began again in about 520 BC and the temple was finally completed in 516 BC.

Zechariah began his ministry about two months after Haggai began his ministry. Zechariah began his ministry in the 8th month (Zech. 1:1) and Haggai began his ministry in the 6th month (Hag. 1:1).

Both prophets encouraged the returned remnant to get to work and rebuild the Temple. Both prophets said don’t let obstacles or negatives get in the way of doing things for God. Don’t let what is happening in the world cause you to lose sight of God’s Word and God’s work because for God’s people the future is bright.

Zechariah really points to the fact that one day what we did for God will be worth it. Christ will return and we will experience the blessings of God.

QUESTION #4 – What are some of the great themes of Zechariah?

There are some wonderful themes in this book:

Theme #1 - Even though God’s people may have strayed, return to the Lord and experience His grace and blessings. 1:3

Theme #2 - Justification righteousness does not come by our works but by God’s imputed grace. 3:4

Theme #3 - Jesus Christ will return and be King of the earth and He will remember what we did for Him and what we gave to Him. 14:9

Theme #4 - Those nations who have done hurtful things against Israel and God’s people will eventually pay because God will judge them. 1:21