

'Your Kingdom Come!' – Studies in Zechariah (4)

The book of Zechariah has twice mentioned a coming king (3:8; 6:12) and now mentions him again (9:9). The returned exiles must live under the rule of an earthly king, Darius, but they are answerable for a greater hope. Like us, they need to pray for the kingdom to come and live in expectation! But then, they are living under leadership that is often inadequate, that is, leaders of the nations, and their own leaders, and these prophecies speak to this dilemma.

The latter part of the book comprises two oracles (9:1; 12:1). Again, God speaks about things that cannot be seen but are the necessary confidence for Israel to live truly in their present circumstances.

9:1-8

Various local nations are a threat to the returnees: Northern nations centred on Damascus (vv. 1-2a), then the seafaring nation Phoenicia (vv. 2b-4), then cities of Philistia on the sea board West of Jerusalem (vv. 5-8). God's people need to know that the Lord has his eye on the North, that the Phoenicians will be stripped bare even though they are wise and prosperous, and that the confidence and pride of the Philistines will be broken, and wonderfully, the cruelty of their remnant will one day be replaced with faith in Israel's God. Again, God is watching and guarding his people.

We are not living among these particular enemies, and the church is not a political entity needing to compete with nation states, but then, we do have enemies that threaten our place in this world and we need to know that the destiny of nations will come under the authority of God and his Christ and to live in a way that anticipates this certainty (Acts 4:23-31; Rev. 11:15).

9:9-17

Affectionately ('daughter of Zion'), Israel is told she will have a king again. Zerubbabel is a Jewish prince but their king is the Persian Darius. Israel must live in the light of what is to be: their own king will come to them meekly – on a donkey but bringing salvation none the less. This follows up the crowning of Joshua as a sign of things to come (3:8; 6:12; cf. Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5). Israel, like their king, will have no recourse to war, but will, nonetheless, conquer the nations (v. 13) and bring peace.

The promise of the king is linked with the blood of the covenant, that is, the sacrifices again being offered in Jerusalem. Here is a further development of the idea that the office of king and priest will be united. *Because* of this atonement, their present 'imprisonment' (unable to fully experience the reign of God in the world) can be with hope of deliverance, of receiving a first-born's inheritance. As purveyors of peace, God's people will be weapons in God's hands to destroy Greece. (This is an early reference to Greece but it was the Western frontier for the Persian kingdom and would later become Israel's enemy.)

Matthew sees Jesus riding into Jerusalem and tells us that their King has come (Matt. 21:4-5). It will be a reign of peace (Luke 19:41-42), but a reign that will demolish its enemies. It

will also be a reign whose validity and power relies wholly on the blood of the covenant which Jesus himself would provide (Luke 22:29).

Seeing how God has called Israel to live in the days before Christ helps us to also hear the prophetic word about Christ being Lord and Christ, and, in the light of his atoning sacrifice, to wait for the full outworking of God's promise.

10:1 – 11:3

Israel lacks a true shepherd (not necessarily true at every point but often the case) and must be encouraged to trust God for their crops (vv. 1-3). The leadership presumably is panicking about survival when they have a faithful God to answer their prayers (cf. Jam. 1: 16-17). They have turned to household gods and diviners.

God is angry with their leaders but has compassion for his people. He will answer their prayers and they will become strong (mentioned several times) so that their children are glad (vv. 3-7). In language that recalls the exodus and other victories, God says Israel will come through its 'sea of troubles' (vv. 8-12).

In a like manner, we are reminded of God's victories through Christ so as to be assured that in all the reversals of the present age, we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:31-39).

Israel's unfaithful leaders (who think they are like cedars of Lebanon or oaks of Bashan) may well fear; their self-interested leadership will lie in ruins (11:1-3).

11:4-17

The matter of leadership needs to be opened up more and Zechariah is asked to enact two parables about God's relationship to Israel through their history. First, Zechariah plays the role of a good shepherd (v. 4) with staffs of favour' and 'union' (v. 7). The flock is doomed to slaughter but is still cared for. They have had many bad leaders – greedy and pitiless (v. 5), and under that leadership, were themselves greedy and pitiless for one another (v. 6). God, who still cared for his people destroyed three of their shepherds or kings (a symbolic number for bringing the reign of this or that king to an end) but still to no effect (v. 8). They detest their shepherd – God. He loses patience with his people and annuls his covenant with them, breaking the symbols of his reign, favour and union vv. 10, 14; "union' is literally a cord or bond in the sense of a pledge). These things happened over time but came to a head in the captivity of 586 BC. Israel needs this understanding of their history so as to live humbly and not repeat the errors of their fathers.

Zechariah says some, 'the afflicted of the flock' (rather than 'sheep traders'), saw this parable and understood its meaning (v. 11). They know God has been right to judge them – leaders and people.

Still acting as good shepherd, representing God's care for all Israel (not just the afflicted and faithful), he asks for payment, and they oblige with a rather handsome 30 pieces of silver. But he is disgusted with them thinking they can pay God out! He throws it back into the temple – the scene of much of Israel's false leadership.

Now, Zechariah must play the role of bad shepherd – foolish in that he cannot be trusted to look after the sheep (v. 15). He may mean Nebuchadnezzar, or any other of the kings into

whose hand God had given up his people at various times. Such a leader had been raised up by God but must answer for his own rapacity.

God's people under their various leaders have been worthy of doom but have been blessed with God's favour and a bond to unite them. Now, in Jerusalem, they are experiencing a renewal of favour, but the prophecy, at this point, suggests they will continue to experience these principles at work in their history. They must continue to live in repentance, and by trusting in the promise that God would send their true Shepherd King.