

'Your Kingdom Come!' — Studies in Zechariah

A brief review...

In this next vision, Zechariah's minding-angel wakes him up to share in the action! In fact, the prophet has not only sought to understand the visions but has sought to get in on the action by asking for a turban for the priest in the last vision. This suggests how we should come to these visions ourselves. They tell us what is really happening under God's reign and as those who ask God for his kingdom to come, we should be expecting to 'live' in the visions—that is, to respond to what we see by joining in the action. From vision one, we should expect the nations to be troubled; from vision two, we should not fear those whose powers God has vitiated; from vision three, we should be alive to the protection of God over his church and leave the hollow protection of this world; from vision four, we should delight in the purity God has granted to us through Jesus Christ, our High Priest, and look for the peace to which it will lead.

4:1-14

Zechariah must be awakened to see this vision, which suggests that he has found the pace of revelations exhausting! Three times he asks for explanations (vv. 4, 11, 12).

Zerubbabel, along with Joshua, is a key part of what is happening around 520 BC in Jerusalem, but what the prophet sees happening is seven lamps on a stand, fueled from a bowl and flanked by olive trees. Before this is explained, there is a word of God for Zerubbabel and another for the prophet.

Zerubbabel must know, first, that his work will not be accomplished by physical or military strength but that it will be a work of the Spirit, and second, that in spite of massive opposition (cf. Isa. 40:4; Matt.17:20), he will finish the work with loud acclaim ('What beauty! or 'What grace!' or 'Grace to it!'). Completion of the temple will be a work of grace and invite further request for the temple to be a place of grace (cf. 12:10).

Sureness of the triumph of grace is the Christian's 'bread and butter'. It is our major impetus for doing good and for maintaining our testimony in the presence of vicious opponents.

Zechariah must know that the same man who has begun work on the temple will complete it, and his contemporaries will know, by its completion, that they have a prophet among them—that is, all the other things he has said will occur. The source of the opposition may, in part, be the pessimists who despise the smallness of what is happening, or, the alliances of existing people of the land.

Zechariah has seen seven lamps and asked what they mean and is now told that 'these seven' are God's eyes. They cannot be God himself because the lamps need external fuel. Rather, it is the community in Judah who reveal the light of God. Barry Webb suggests this is 'a community "alight" with the presence of the all-seeing all-knowing God who dwells in their midst.'

The idea of a lamp stand is used again in Revelation 2—3 to indicate the churches that are tended by the risen Christ. Clearly, Christ is concerned with the ministry of his churches and determines the outcome of their battles. He gives gifts for the care and progress of his church but the work remains the operation of the Spirit (Eph. 4:4-13).

But Zechariah has also asked about the two olive trees that feed this lamp, and adds the curious detail of pipes coming from the olive fronds to the lamps. God is showing him that Joshua and Zerubbabel, called 'sons of oil', are the agents whereby the community is secured as a work of the Spirit. They are not a replacement for the Spirit but the means the Spirit has raised up. Zerubbabel in particular must know that his work can only be by the Spirit. He

already is or will soon be their governor, and his work on the temple will be successful. The temptation will be for him to see his work as his own. Rather, it will be a work of the Spirit

5:1-4

The visions return to encompass the whole community. A large scroll matching the size of Solomon's temple porch flies through the sky. It is a curse that will overtake (note its mobility and its entering houses) any who break the 8th and 9th commands—perhaps representing all the commands but focusing on two that are needing emphasis—sins associated with trade and law. The use of an ephah also suggests false trading.

God's presence among his people is a holy presence and the blessing of God on the community must be accompanied by actual righteousness being practiced (cf. Isa. 9:7; 32:17; 2 Tim. 2:22). Perhaps any who dream of the earlier temple are warned (by the dimension of the scroll) that access to God involves holiness. Evil doers will be 'cleaned out'.

We recall the fate of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, or other wrong-doers confronted by Paul (1 Cor. 5:5; Tim. 1:20). Christ himself comes to purge his church (Rev. 2:16). In the final temple, no thief will be allowed to enter (Rev. 21:7-8).

5:5-11

A flying measure (ephah = circa 36 litres) is 'going out' of Jerusalem. Zechariah discovers that it is the evil of the land, that is, of God's people. The curse of the previous vision is in action! Its lead cover is lifted to reveal a woman, who, understandably, wants to be out! But she is pushed down and taken to Babylon—the place Judeans have been urged to leave (2:6-7). Here a house is made for her. Jerusalem will have her house of God, and Babylon will have a house for evil where it is celebrated on a pedestal.

Evil belongs in the world but not among God's people. Paul urged the Corinthians to purge out the leaven or evil influence that was among them (1 Cor. 5:7-8). Clearly, Christians are not responsible for final judgement (cf. Matt. 13:24-30) but should see to it that, within the church, evil is called what it is and not left to fester and mislead the believers.

6:1-8

The final vision in the series returns us to the imagery of the first, with coloured horses but now more numerous, identified as 'strong', and with chariots. Instead of appearing from among myrtle trees (1:8), they appear from between mountains of bronze. Does this suggest the bronze pillars of Solomon's temple (1 Kin. 7:15-16)? If so, these riders come from God's temple. In fact, before leaving on their mission, they present themselves to the Lord of all the earth (where God's sons of oil also stand—4:14). They are identified as four 'spirits' or 'winds' (v. 5) suggesting speed. Two groups are sent North and one group South. They are to patrol the earth, as in the first vision (1:10) and are eager to be about their work.

The interpreting angel sees the point of this mission and cries out that already, his or rather, God's Spirit is set at rest; that is, vengeance has been taken on those who furthered the disaster against his people (1:15), that is, the Babylonians.

Vengeance is a dangerous subject for us, but all the more important for us to know that vengeance belongs to the Lord (Rom. 12:19). Note the apostles recognizing the right of God to remove Judas and for him to be replaced (Acts 1:20, quoting Psa. 69:25; 109:8). The implications of this for the unrepentant are sobering, but it is important for us to know that nothing can prevent the triumph of God's grace producing a faithful people and a new heavens and earth in which there will be righteousness.

When vision four said God would remove the iniquity of the land in one day, we know Christ did this on his cross. God's purpose in this is in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing (Rom. 6:6). Finally, not only will the power of sin be broken, but its presence will be eradicated.