

Introduction

Zechariah is a somewhat neglected book of the Bible. Why is this?

First, there is the issue for some of actually finding the book. Then there is also the difficulty of the content. In a day like ours, which puts such an emphasis on outwardly impressive things, this book may seem something like a disappointment.

Thesis

In the book of Zechariah, we see two things:

The comfort and challenge that come from the presence of the living God in our midst, even when his glory is not on public display.

The anticipation of the day when the glory of God would come to this earth in the person of Jesus Christ to bring about the long promised salvation of his people.

1. Historical Background

The key historical fact that casts its shadow over the book of Zechariah is the destruction of Jerusalem. The exile revealed the Lord's holiness in judgement and his long-suffering grace and mercy in forgiveness and restoration.

According to the covenant God made with his people at Mount Sinai, their obedience would lead to blessing and living for a long time in the land their God had given them, whilst their unfaithfulness would lead to economic and political disaster, culminating in exile from the land (**Deut 28**).

The threatened curses for breaking the covenant came in 2 stages:

First, the northern kingdom of Israel was overrun by the Assyrians in 722 BC and her people were scattered throughout the Assyrian empire, never to return.

Secondly, the southern kingdom of Judah continued until 586 BC, when they were defeated by the Babylonians. Instead of dispersing conquered peoples throughout their empire, the Babylonians resettled them in communities in the Babylonian homeland. Thus, in the kind sovereign providence of God, the Judean exiles retained their identity. This is a great comfort.

When the Persians took over the Babylonian empire under Cyrus in 539BC, they encouraged many of the captive peoples to go home, and they funded the reconstruction of national sanctuaries to the deities of these lands.

This fulfilled the Lord's promise to bring his people back to their land and provided the financial resources for rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem.

Cyrus was killed in 530 BC, during a military operation on the eastern frontier, and was succeeded by his son **Cambyses**. Whilst **Cambyses** invaded Egypt in 522 BC, there was a coup at home led by a man named **Gaumata**. Cambyses died while returning home from Egypt to put down the rebellion, and his place was taken by **Darius**, who successfully eliminated Gaumata and gained control of the empire.

The events described in Zechariah take place as Darius was consolidating his power in the Medo-Persian empire.

2. Theological Themes

The fundamental theological context of Zechariah is the return from the exile, which represents a state of partial restoration for God's people.

The exiles found themselves caught between two worlds, between the promises of heaven and the realities of earth; living in the 'now', but longing for the 'not yet',

a. God's Presence

In the aftermath of the exile, God's presence with the remnant was a key question. The return from exile and the rebuilding of Jerusalem were in themselves evidence of the Lord's unfailing love for Israel and his coming to dwell again with His people.

b. The Coming Messiah

In the midst of an uncertain world and a disappointing present, the book of Zechariah point our eyes forwards to things yet to come. The key event which will initiate the blessings of the 'not yet' is the coming of the Messiah.

c. The Final Victory of God

The cleansing of the land and the Lord's final victory (**Zech. 5:1 - 6:8**) were **assured** realities, but they are not yet **present** realities in the days of Zechariah.

Enemies will still remain until the final day of the Lord's fiery wrath.

This final victory will bring about a transformation in the inhabitants of God's land and the entire world.

3. Connections to the New Testament

With the coming of Christ, the 'not yet' of the prophets has now arrived.

Jesus is both the manifestation of the glory of God in the midst of his people and that new temple's Lord.

There also is a 'now' and a 'not yet' in the New Testament.

The 'now' continues to be a time of trials and tribulation (**Acts 14:22**).

Not until the 'not yet' will we see the final victory of God (**1 Cor, 15:24, 25**).

God will not stand by and watch his people devastated; instead, he will intervene and fight for them, destroying the forces of the Evil One and bringing about a re-creation on a global scale as the nations flock to the heavenly Jerusalem.