

Period of Restoration (535-425 BCE)

Zechariah's Visions

Readings: *Zechariah 1:7-6:15*

Reflections:

- On February 15, 519 B.C., some three and one-half months after his initial message in 1:1-6, and two months after Haggai's final message (Haggai 2:20-23), Zechariah has eight night visions or dreams. Many of the images have dual meanings, a present application and a future meaning. It is interesting that the High Priest who appears in the vision's name is Joshua, the same as the coming Messiah, Jesus is an English version of Joshua. Many of the visions find parallel to Daniel's images. Likely these prophecies were shared among the leaders and people of Israel.
- All eight dreams or night visions may have come in one night. The eight visions can best be understood in the chiasmic symmetrical pattern (an "X" pattern) of a, b, b, c, c, b, b, a, with the climax coming in the fourth and fifth visions. The first and the eighth vision bear a strong resemblance to one another, while the second and third, fourth and fifth, and sixth and seventh are in pairs. The resulting pattern would appear something like this:
 - a Waiting in the Calm Before the International Storm 1:7-17
 - b Watching the Nations Punish One Another 1:18-21
 - b Expecting God's Glory on Earth 2:1-13
 - c Symbol of Sin Being Removed in One Day 3:1-10
 - c God's Spirit Enabling God's Work 4:1-14
 - b Purging Evil from Israel 5:1-4
 - b Removing Wickedness from Israel 5:5-11
 - a Executing Judgment on the Nations 6:1-15
- First vision: The basic message is that nations are at peace but shouldn't be. God's judgment is coming (See Haggai 2:21-22). The man riding a red horse represents God coming in judgment. The colored horses represent the various activities of God, red for judgment, white for peace, speckled (translated brown) for a mix of activities. These horses represent a revelation of God's activity as horses running through the nations. Among the nations there is peace and some signs of judgment—a real mix.

- The man that is standing in the myrtle trees in the valley may be the angel of the Lord and a foreshadowing of the coming Messiah (see Exodus 23:20-21). The myrtle tree was a symbol of Israel and the valley likely represents a low point in their history. The divine man (or Angel of the Lord) was appearing to Israel at one of their low points to say I am still here with you.
- The message of this first vision is pretty simple: The nations who feel secure are not secure. Israel, who is broken and defeated, will one day again see the coming of God in mercy, and the re-establishment of God's house and prosperity of God's blessing. The image of the measuring line is one of expansion and growth. The coming of the Messiah will reveal that the fulfillment of these prophecies is relational and spiritual in nature, rather than physical. The physical city of peace, Jerusalem, will be replaced by the relational community of peace, the New Jerusalem or the church. Lesson: Even when you are in a low point and God is taking a lot longer than you had hoped to fulfill his promises to you, you can trust that his purposes will be accomplished.
- The second vision is based on two images, horns and craftsmen. The horns are symbolic of God's judgment through the nations. A horn was symbolic of power and authority. The craftsmen are symbols of those that God will raise up to judge the horns that have devastated Israel. Lesson: God alone has the final word and his will alone will stand.
- The third vision (part two of the second vision) is about the return of God's presence to Jerusalem and his sovereign protection. The measuring line appears again as the city is prepared for a radical transformation, from a physical city with walls to a relational community without walls. This is a powerful image of the inclusive and vulnerable nature of this new community. Their protection is found in God alone. The image of the wall of fire would remind the reader of God's presence (Exodus 14:19-24). The prophecy would also remind the people of how the glory of God had departed from the temple (Ezekiel 9:3; 10:19; 11:23). Interestingly, although translated as city, the word here is literally "plains" and refers to an open place of peace where people live in safety and freedom (see Ezekiel 38:11).
- This third vision ends with incredible affirmations. As we listen to these prophetic words, we realize how clearly these appear to be the words of the coming Messiah: "Whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye." "I will live among you." "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people." "I will live among you and you will know that that Lord Almighty has sent me to you." "Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling." (Zechariah 2:10-13) Here we see a lot of insight packed into a short number of sentences. We are the apple of God's eye. We are his deeply loved ones. It is all about relationship. We don't have to do anything when God comes to save us. To be still is to wait on God, trust him with a sense of humble awe.

- The fourth vision is the first of two climatic visions. Joshua the high priest is the main figure in the dream. Satan (literally “the adversary”) is present accusing Joshua for his sin. Joshua is covered in filthy clothes (literally “dung-covered clothes”) and the Lord removes these disgusting clothes and puts rich garments on him and a clean turban. Joshua’s renewed righteousness will give him right standing to give leadership to the community.
- The angel then makes it clear to Zechariah that this vision is symbolic of future events: “...who are men symbolic of things to come.” A new image is then introduced. The double terms “servant” and “branch” are often used to refer to the coming Messiah (Isaiah 41:8, 9; 42:1, 19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21; Psalms 132:17; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15). The seven eye stone or seven faceted stone is symbolic of a divinely selected foundation stone. Seven means “divine completion” and the eyes stand for “wisdom.” This stone has a royal inscription on it signifying God as ruler establishing this unmovable new foundation. What is the key statement? God will remove the sin of the land in a single day in the same way he removed the dung-covered clothes of Joshua. In that day, complete peace and harmonious community will be restored: “...each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree.” We see this image of the fruit tree as a symbol of that tree of prosperity and life. Obviously, for Christ-followers this passage is rich in meaning as it points forward to the day that Christ’s death became the final sacrifice for sins and in a single day removed all sin, past, present and future. Christ, the stumbling stone the builders rejected became the capstone (see Psalm 118:22; Zechariah 4:7; Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Romans 9:32; I Peter 2:7).
- The fifth vision is the second part of the climax of these visions. The lamp with seven lights and a bowl for holding the oil is likely a symbol of Israel’s call to be a light to the nations (see Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). The olive oil is an image of the spirit of God being poured out to light the lamp. The branches from the olive trees represent the two leaders God is using to accomplish his purposes, Zerubbabel, the governmental leader and Joshua, the priestly leader. We notice both within the Old Testament Israel as well as within the New Testament church, God typically works through leadership pairs rather than solo individuals. It would seem that this image of two trees is suggesting that there are two types of Spirit-empowered leaders that God uses throughout the generations. In that specific generation, it was Zerubbabel and Joshua. In other generations, there were and would be different leaders that God would use to bring Spirit-led leadership into community and through them enable God’s people to be a light to the peoples around them. From Moses and Aaron onward we see these pairings as God way of showing that there is no one leader that people can look to. God alone is our ultimate leader and he alone is the one we must give ultimate loyalty to. The leaders he calls are those that will humbly allow God’s presence to work through them, even in their areas of weakness.

- The declaration of the mighty mountain becoming a plain may have two different interpretations. First, it may mean that the mountainous task of rebuilding the temple will become easy through the empowerment of God. This would emphasize the power of the Spirit. The second is more interesting and may point ahead to Jesus' reference after cursing the fig tree to throwing the mountain with the temple into sea (Matthew 21:21; Mark 11:23). The vision may mean that God is going to level the mountain of the temple so that it becomes a plain (see previous reference to the translation of "city") where all people of the world can come seek the Lord. This would fit with the references to many nations being gathered and the declaration that follows "God bless it! God bless it!" or better translated, "Grace! Grace!" Israel had been called to be a light to the Gentiles and the promise of the Spirit coming to transform their lives so that they radiate the light of God, would mean the mountain of God, this religious hierarchy where people have to climb to the top and stand outside the holy of holies, would be flattened and be accessible to all nations and all people.
- The reassurance that "the hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple, his hands will also complete it" reminds us that what God begins he will complete. Many times those in leadership need that encouragement as things are often harder and take longer than expected.
- "Who despises the day of small things?" The people were struggling because their temple seemed so small and insignificant. We as people like big things. We like something always getting bigger, not getting smaller. Yet, the real issue isn't size, but if God is present. If God is there, it doesn't get any bigger than that!
- The sentence "Men will rejoice when they see the [plumb line or tin plate] in the hand of Zerubbabel", can be translated two ways. Either the Hebrew word means "plumb line" as most commonly translated, which means that people will rejoice when they see Zerubbabel building the temple according to righteousness. Or it means that people will rejoice when it is completed. It was common to put a tin plate with an inscription in the foundational deposit.
- The seven eyes of the Lord are symbolic of God's all knowing wisdom which sees everything and is guiding the process.
- The vision ends with reinforcing the two ongoing Spirit-empowered leadership roles that serve God's purposes: "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth."
- The sixth vision is about a double-sided scroll that represents God's righteous decree against the sin of the people in the land. The scroll is either 15 feet long or thick and so it is hyperbole of the massive sin of the people. The two sins "swearing falsely" against God (command 3) and "stealing" from people (command 8) are probably symbolic of the common nature of dishonoring God and violating others. They may be symbolic of

the people breaking the whole law or may simply mean that law breaking is so common that these things happen all the time without any conscience.

- The seventh vision (and second part of the couplet) again deals with the sin of the people. Here it is symbolized as a woman in a basket. “Wickedness” is a feminine noun in Hebrew and so this makes sense as an image. The basket is a measuring basket and it is full of wickedness. The sentence “This is the [iniquity or appearance or eye] of the people throughout the land.” Some translators see the word “eye” in the text as referring to the appearance of sin. It more likely means that this is the “wisdom” of the people, to sin as much as they want. Two angels that appear feminine (to respond to the feminine version of wickedness) carry the sin of the people into Babylon (literally Shinar which is another name for Sumar and Akkad where Babylon is located – see Gen. 10:10) and there to build a house or temple for this sin. Babylon is consistently associated with the land of wickedness (Genesis 11:4; 14:1; Isaiah 13–14; 47:1-3; Jeremiah 50–51; Revelation 14:8; 17:1, 5, 18; 18:21) and so that is where this evil should have a home or be worshipped.
- In the final vision, the eighth vision, the strong horses of judgment reappear. They are red, black, white, and spotted again and are symbolic of the four-fold spirit or winds of heaven, God’s power moving through the nations and the land. They will bring peace to the land and allow the nation of Israel to be restored to the land. In the immediate context, it represents Persian forces conquering Babylon and allowing the nation to be restored to the land. In the ultimate context, it looks forward to the time the Messiah will come and bring a new lasting peace (“land will rest”) to the world.
- At the end of these visions Zechariah is told to go through a symbolic act with Joshua the high priest. He is to place a crown of gold and silver on the head of the priest as a symbolic way of looking forward to the Messiah, the branch. This has powerful meaning. Remember Jesus’ name is actually Joshua. Here a Joshua is crowned and the King Priest, the one leader that will combine the two leadership roles (the two trees) in his leadership of God’s people. He will build a new temple and will rule as both King and High Priest. Here is what is said of the coming Messiah, “Here is the man whose name is the Branch (remember Israel was pictured as an Myrtle tree or a Vine), and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord (where God’s spirit dwells on earth). It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two. (bring reconciliation).” What an awesome prophetic announcement of what Jesus Christ (Joshua the Messiah) would do!