

Explore: The promised Messiah

March 12, 2015

• *The Explore the Bible lesson for March 29 focuses on Zechariah 8:1-8, 9:9-12.*

Introduction to Zechariah

We can conclude with accuracy the prophet Zechariah ministered near the end of the sixth century B.C. He is identified particularly with the ministries of Haggai and Ezra, who guided the people to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem in 520 B.C. after the Babylonian exile (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Zechariah seemed to be at the forefront of historical change among his Jewish counterparts. Scholars argue Zechariah's writing illustrates a momentous transition in Jewish literature from the prophetic to the apocalyptic. We have strong reason to believe Zechariah came from a priestly family.

We will deal with two distinctive passages in Zechariah's book. The first passage, 8:1-8, was shaped by the wider perspective of Zechariah 1-8, which has been quite the subject of exegesis and biblical criticism over the years. Some scholars assert these chapters constitute one large introduction, while others suppose Zechariah wrote his words as a response to some of the specific prophecies of Haggai. Even others propose the first eight chapters consist of four distinct groups of prophecies that were edited and finally put together somewhere at the end of the sixth century. We can say with total accuracy, however, Zechariah authoritatively spoke for the Lord on weighty matters of theology and politics in these chapters. The prophet showed tremendous concern and enthusiasm for interpreting the events of his day through the prism of good theological reflection.

The second passage, 9:9-12, locates a transition in Zechariah's prophecy to a more poetic style. Scholars even debate whether Zechariah 9-14 was written by the same author as the previous eight chapters, and some consequently argue for a different date. The mention of Greece in 9:13 adds particular difficulty to those who figure an earlier date. Nevertheless, Zechariah's message remained highly consistent. He focused on God's provision of peace and the surety of salvation. Zechariah also pointed emphatically toward the coming Messiah. Consequently, we will examine two major attributes of God that Zechariah both described and utilized to encourage his people during a tumultuous time of change.

God is faithful (8:1-8)

Some scholars rightly notice the staccato-like style and repetition of this passage. Zechariah tries to raise our heart rates about the faithfulness of God. Readers indeed ought to consider again God's "jealousy" for his people (vv. 1-2). God's attitude reveals he will protect Jerusalem (or Zion) from other nations who seek to act on ill will toward her. God then promises to restore the broken relationship with his disobedient people after the exile. For instance, God promised to return to Jerusalem, undoubtedly because the faithful people have begun to restore both the temple and their worship of Yahweh (v. 3). In fact, Jerusalem will be known as the Faithful City, or "city of the truth." To be faithful in these terms indicates fidelity to the only one, true God. Jerusalem no longer will play the harlot.

Zechariah further provided some picturesque language regarding the promises of God in dealing with generational leadership (vv. 4-5). He described a scene in which older men and women gleefully watch younger children play wistfully and fearlessly in the city streets. Keep in mind many of the older people of Zechariah's day could well remember the trauma and bitterness of exile (v. 6). God's promise of peace, quiet and inclusive relationships certainly provides more than a modicum of optimism. On this

side of the New Testament, we would do well to remember Jesus' similar words of hope when he prayed, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-13).

Zechariah's vision came to a climactic point when he announced God's plan to save the people from their foes (vv. 7-8). When translated from the Hebrew, we find these verses indicate God desired to deliver his people in the expanse of land between the rising and the setting of the sun each day. God was and forever is faithful to the remnant of people who came through the exile. God is forever faithful and at work in our midst. God undoubtedly expects us to prioritize our lives around his faithfulness and goals.

God is king (9:9-12)

Jim Denison, founder of the Denison Forum on Truth and Culture, often asks the question, "Is Jesus your king, or is he your hobby?" Zechariah's prophecy now points us toward total fidelity and commitment to the Messiah, the Promised One who saves us from our sins. Accordingly, one would be hard-pressed to miss the connection between Zechariah's prophecy and the lordship of Jesus Christ. In fact, Matthew not only quoted this exact verse regarding Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but also interpreted Zechariah's vision as being totally fulfilled (Matthew 21:5).

For instance, consider Zechariah's call for the crowds in Jerusalem to "shout," for the Messiah will enter the city as both a royal and divine figure. Zechariah also stated the Messiah will come in humility—even riding on a donkey. This means the Savior will not be concerned only with overpowering enemies with military might. Indeed, Jesus would conquer the powers and the principalities by way of the cross. We can, therefore, definitively confess Jesus is God.

Additionally, readers may take note Zechariah portrays the Messiah as one who will disarm the nations and enact a lasting peace (v. 10). In other

words, the Messiah will be both humble and powerful. It is interesting to note, however, some scholars view this verse as a reference to the second coming of Christ—the assumption being Jesus will expand and control a new Davidic kingdom for many years. How comforting it is to know our Christ can and will bring an end to all armed conflict. We are moving toward a day when the lion will lie down with the lamb (Isaiah 11:6).

Last, we can rely on the truth that God is victorious in all he does (vv. 11-12). Zechariah's language at this point indicates God will rebuild Zion for the remnant. In other words, his salvation will be sure and hopeful. God's shed blood will restore and bring back to life we considered lost, a "waterless pit." In fact, those prisoners who are saved will dwell in a "stronghold" created by God. Salvation in and through God our king means safety and deliverance from sin.