

The Prophet Zechariah and the Vision of the Restoration

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ABSTRACT: Zechariah is the most frequently quoted prophet in the New Testament, and his prophecies are widely read, discussed, commented on, including today, because they have many Messianic prophecies in mind. The name of this prophet means God remembers. The activity of the prophet Zechariah overlapped with the activity of the prophet Haggai. Both the prophets, Zechariah and Haggai, began their work in 520 BC. Haggai is active for only one year, while Zechariah will continue until 515 BC, when concrete dates are given, but he may have been active even later. Zacharias lived during the first period of the restoration, when the first stones of reconstruction were laid, and he came with a great, beautiful vision, with great plans for restoration, and in such a situation he had no idea of any subsequent disappointments. It is true that his people managed to return from Babylon, they managed to rebuild the Temple, they managed to rebuild a small country called Judah, which was always a province in the great empires, but they failed to become a mighty nation, to be the head of all nations, as the prophets of restoration saw and presented it. The explanation why they failed will be given by the prophet Malachi, which we will address in another study.

KEYWORDS: prophet, Zechariah, vision, restoration

Introduction

Zechariah is the most frequently quoted prophet in the New Testament, and his prophecies are widely read, discussed, commented on, including today, because they have many Messianic prophecies in mind. The name of this prophet means God remembers. The activity of the prophet Zechariah overlapped with the activity of the prophet Haggai. Both the prophets, Zechariah and Haggai, began their work in 520 BC. Haggai is active for only one year, while Zechariah will continue until 515 BC, when concrete dates are given, but he may have been active even later. However, between 520 and 515 BC. he works as a prophet for the Kingdom of Judah, with its capital in Jerusalem. It is possible that Zechariah was one of the people who returned from the Babylonian captivity, because in a very short time it was impossible for him to have been born in that period, because he would have been somewhere less than 17 years old. Thus Zechariah, a man who lived in Babylon, receives the message of his return home and will return to Jerusalem.

Zechariah shows reason for hope

In a time of crisis, God calls him to the office of prophet. Zechariah's name is very suggestive, because it means God remembers, and the Jews even had such a holiday with that name. The phrase you remember has been around for a long time in the Holy Scriptures, in the sense of not forgetting, looking back. By the very name of the prophet, he was actually telling his Jewish people that they too should remember that the 70-year Babylonian captivity was over. The temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed in 586 BC, and by the year 520 BC, 66 years had passed and only 4 years were left before the new temple was to be inaugurated, and they were to remember it. so that the 70 years will not pass and the temple will not be ready. The prophet told them, referring to the 70-year-old prophecy, but also to the future, telling them that they had four more

years to complete the Temple. When someone realizes that he has little time available, he begins to whine. In this context of the whining of the Jewish people comes the prophet Zechariah, just like Haggai, but with a different tone, a different style, a different approach to Haggai, in which he tries to motivate people to get to work. , so that in the four years, he could finish the Temple and exactly at the age of 70, the second Temple would start its activity. This is how the book begins: „Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built. Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, *Is it* time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house *lie* waste? Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house” (Hagai 1: 2-4,8).

Zechariah presents his theological vision of restoration

Haggai, whose name meant celebration, emphasized the actual work of the temple, namely, that the people should begin and lay the foundation stone at the foundation of the House of the Lord and not just at their homes. Zechariah first focused on religion, spirituality, and told them that the first thing they had to do was repentance, their spirituality, because their return to God meant repentance. In Zechariah's view, if people did not repent, that is, if they did not focus on spirituality first and did not turn to God from their evil deeds and inclinations, they came in vain with all sorts of plans, in vain they built temples because they did not realize great thing, because in the prophet's view only a spiritual man, a changed man, that is, turned away from his evil deeds to God, could accomplish something good and lasting in life. It was not so important what they brought as gifts to the Temple, but the most important thing was the condition of the man who wanted to bring and give something. In the vision of the prophet Zechariah, God did not need man's resources, but he needed them first as a man.

If we follow the two prophets Zechariah and Haggai in parallel, we can see basically the same kinds of problems that the Jewish people face, but in form they were also different elements. At that time, people were looking at the events of the time and saying that it was not yet the right time to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. And to justify their attitude, they claimed that they had a lot of events, of conflict states in their neighborhood, along with all sorts of other issues presented as excuses for not starting to rebuild the temple. Zechariah presents some prophecies represented in horses of different colors, which roamed the whole earth: „I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white. And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth. And they answered the angel of the LORD that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest” (Zechariah 1: 8-11).

This vision of the horses was the image of scouts, who had to roam and search the whole earth. After the riders go and explore the earth, they return at the end with a report in which they present the image of the earth as being in a state of peace and quiet. Hagai urged the people to start building the temple, without arguing with them about the situation at the time. Instead, the prophet Zechariah comes and presents things differently, showing that from a divine perspective, things are in peace and quiet and as such can be built, even if here and there were conflicting situations. They needed this argument at the time to see that things were different than they had imagined.

Haggai had short-term goals in mind, while Zechariah had long-term goals in mind. Haggai had a very narrow view of the place, the space in which they were, while Zechariah had an overview of the whole earth, and as such he motivated his fellow citizens. Precisely because people often ask why they do one or the other of the activities or things, Zechariah showed that motivation. The first reason brought by Zechariah and presented to his countrymen, in the sense

of getting to work, was the argument that the report brought by the horsemen who roamed the earth was a report of peace and tranquility in the world of their time.

Just as at that time the householders cut off the horns of the animals so that they would not sting with them and make victims, the prophet Zechariah takes this reality from the people and presents it as a prophetic image to the people, presenting some blacksmiths who cut the horns: „Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. And the LORD shewed me four carpenters. Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it” (Zechariah 1: 18-21).

Plastic images related to their world, the prophet Zechariah takes them in his message and conveys to the people not to be afraid of horns, of anything that could cause them certain damage because God will cut the horns of those who could cause them a bad.

Another plastic image used by Zechariah to encourage the people was the man with the measuring rope: „I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein” (Zechariah 2: 1-4).

When you see people on the street doing measurements, it's clear that something will work there. The prophet's message was to tell them that Jerusalem would be a wallless city. Why? for it will be so great and ever-expanding that the walls will block it, limit it at some point, and in order not to be conquered God promises them that He will protect that city: „For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her” (Zechariah 2: 5).

Zechariah argues in this way in front of the people, coming up with such plastic arguments, to urge them not to be afraid and told them that: Look at the fact that God will cut the horns of those who could harm them, he said that God is examining the earth, that God is coming with the measure, and yet if anyone wants to oppose them, let them know that they are not left alone and that they are not the only ones affected, but God promised them that He Himself would intervene to protect them. These arguments then made sense in those conditions when they learned that their God, whom they worshiped, would come to their aid and protect them.

Zechariah is a very profound prophet, he penetrates the core of religion, of man's relationship with divinity. He does not say that the sanctity of the Temple will protect them, but that God is holy and that He will protect them. Zechariah, being a religious man, tries to convey to the people that state of religiosity through the images he uses to illustrate his prophecy before the people. In the 8 prophetic pictures in the first part of the book, the prophet's intention to draw man closer to God gradually increases. Through these messages, Zechariah tries to personally persuade every man of the people, he tries to cause a personal awakening, and then an army is formed and there is a people dedicated to divinity.

The following picture given by the prophet Zechariah is even more religious, depicting the high priest Joshua, a situation in which the priest stands face to face with the Devil, who knows all the evils he has committed and who accuses the priest of various iniquities: „And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him” (Zechariah 3: 1).

Zechariah shows that the Devil is coming and accuses, as if rhetorically, that it is not possible with people like them, like the high priest Joshua, to rebuild the country, with people like them to be able to rebuild the Temple? Joshua, the priest, was dressed in dirty clothes, which confirms the fact that he had certain defects of character and behavior, just as any of the people could be in such a position. Zechariah states that although the Accuser appears there, the Defender

was also sent there: „And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? ” (Zechariah 3: 2).

The expression embers snatched from the fire, refers to salvation, snatching means saved from total destruction. Those who returned from Babylon, if they remained there, would be assimilated to the Babylonians and nothing would remain of their identity and would have disappeared completely, just as there is nothing left of the fire but ashes, and from that fire of Babylonian captivity God He will bring them out after 70 years of captivity, and with them He wants to restore His people again.

These prophets present a new way of thinking, especially found in the writings of the New Testament. Haggai comes and says that the righteous will live by his righteousness. Jeremiah says that God will be called the Lord - Our Righteousness, and Zechariah also comes and says: Take away his filthy garments, and put on him clean clothes, and make a feast: “And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by” (Zechariah 3: 4-5).

All these aspects, in the Christian vision, refer to the divinity, to Christ, who offers His justice, His clothes and who intervenes for people. And the Old and New Testaments are not two opposite things, they contain exactly the same philosophy, exactly the same doctrine of salvation we find in both. Because of the intervention of Christ, who is the Lord - our Righteousness and by whom man is justified by faith and who offers new clothes to the high priest Joshua and even if he erred he would become a new man by the power of the One who can do all new things , and these aspects presented by Zechariah were part of his prophetic message of the rehabilitation of the Jewish people. Thus, Zechariah conveyed his message to those returning from Babylonian exile, being very worried about their future as a nation, seeing them worried, even frightened by certain problems, and the first prophetic vision received was related to the rehabilitation of the high priest Joshua.

The Jews were worried that they would not be able to make sacrifices for 70 years, which meant emptiness and inner pain. No longer having a temple, they could no longer sacrifice, and if they could no longer sacrifice, they wondered how their sins could be forgiven, and the vision of the prophet Zechariah comes to solve that problem of religion, their relationship with God the Creator, a problem of the cleansing of sins.

The vision in which the high priest stood before the Lord, with Satan, the Opponent, and the apostle by his side, the high priest actually represented the whole people, the priests are sinners. Such a conclusion cannot be drawn only from this paragraph, because the reference is not only strictly about a man, but he represents the whole people. The people acknowledged their sins, their state of unworthiness, but they were worried about being able to confess their sins and finally be cleansed of them. This vision of Zechariah responds to the need of the Jewish people for their problems. They as a people had two things that they could verify, namely: they had a prophecy that told them that they would be in captivity for 70 years, which they could verify. Their first captivity took place in 605 BC, and their first return from captivity was in 537/536 BC. The temple was destroyed in 586 BC, and in the time described by Zechariah, they were in 520 BC, and in 516 BC. the temple has been finished. Thus, they had a double fulfillment of the 70-year-old prophecy that could bring them confidence in God's Word. Then there was the fact that God influenced a pagan king (Cyrus) to issue a decree for the Jews to return home, which was another favorable element for them. Those of us who have met Daniel, their most venerable elder, and we think of Haggai, Zechariah, and others, some of whom may even have spoken to Daniel. And in this way, they could know that after the painful period of captivity of 70 years, there was a beautiful period of rehabilitation, of recovery, of the Jewish people. It was a problem in their

minds as a people that they did not yet have a temple and could not confess their sins in order to receive forgiveness, and the problems that people were facing at that time would be answered through a prophetic vision of Zechariah. What can be seen from the presentation of that vision is the symbolism. The clothes represented the character of the man, and if the clothes were presented as dirty it meant that the people were sinners, that they had a lot of defects and that they were to be condemned from a religious point of view. When people are presented with beautiful and clean clothes it means that their moral and spiritual condition was good. This symbolism of clothes represents the state of man at a given time, and in the end, everyone needs clean clothes. Every Christian knows that the garment symbolizes his life, and the garment of Christ represents the life of Christ. The whole priestly costume was a kind of trousers, a long coat on top, a belt, and a miter on his head.

The generation of Zechariah was the first generation to return home from Babylonian captivity, and they were no better morally than their predecessors. In Zechariah's vision, indirectly, it was a beautiful lesson about Christ's righteousness in favor of man, as the prophets Jeremiah and Haggai had said before. After this presentation of the vision, a condition is presented to the people: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by" (Zechariah 3: 7).

The prophet Zechariah told them that they had been returned from captivity, that they had been forgiven and changed, to have a new beginning, but it all depended on them, on what they were to do next. In the vision presented by the prophet man was forgiven by divine intervention, but after all this man, out of respect for the One who forgave him, will also obey the law. Therefore, obedience to the law was nothing but respect for their God, who will forgive man.

The prophet shows that God has a plan, and any good thing is always done with a plan prepared in advance. The plan was to restore them as a nation, and they were to be involved in that rehabilitation plan: "And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong" (Zechariah 8: 13).

The prophet Zechariah presents the vision of people, men and women with a long life, a symbol of blessing: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age" (Zechariah 8: 4).

The children who will play in the streets were also the symbol of the blessing: "And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (Zechariah 8: 5). The lack of children, on the other hand, was a symbol of aging, of loss, of population decline.

Conclusions

Zacharias lived during the first period of the restoration, when the first stones of reconstruction were laid, and he came with a great, beautiful vision, with great plans for restoration, and in such a situation he had no idea of any subsequent disappointments. It is true that the people of his people managed to return home from Babylon, they managed to rebuild the Temple, they managed to rebuild a small town called Judah, which was always a province in the great empires, but they failed to become a strong nation, one that will be the pinnacle of all nations, as the prophets of restoration saw and presented it. The explanation why they failed will be given by the prophet Malachi, which we will address in a later study.

References

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