
Day 275 - October 2

Period of Restoration (535-425 BCE)
Zechariah's Futuristic Prophecies

Readings: *Zechariah 9:1-14:21*

Reflections:

- It is uncertain when Zechariah announces these final oracles or prophecies. There is almost 35 years of silence in the written record and so all we know is that it happened at some point during this time. Like Ezekiel and Daniel, Zechariah's visions stretch into the future as well as look back on the past. There is symbolic imagery throughout that is pregnant with meaning with the key theme being the coming of the Messiah and the ultimate revelation of the will of God.
- The first oracle opens with the idea of the eyes of all people being on the Lord. The image here is not ultimately about looking at God as it is about wise perception. "Eyes" are symbolic of wise perception or insight. The phrase "Tyre and Sidon, though they are very skillful" should probably be translated, "though they consider themselves very wise" and helps us to see that this opening section of the oracle is about a turning of all people to seeking the insight or wisdom of the Lord.
- Zechariah 9:8-13 is one of the key prophecies about the peace the Messiah will bring. He comes not on a chariot but riding in peace on a donkey. God himself will destroy the war-making of the nations as he establishes this new kingdom in peace. This vision of peace is a global peace, from sea to sea, from the River (a reference that may bring back images of the Garden of Eden, humanities starting point and initial home of peace) to the ends of the earth. Although Israel is to return to their fortress, prisoners of hope, and recipients of a promise of a double blessing, still war will be upon time. The promise God makes is that he himself will fight their battles for them and restore that initial blessing and prosperity to them.
- The Lord then turns his attention to the false leaders. As we have seen in the past, the false prophets and leaders of Israel had consistently proclaimed peace and security when there was no peace or security before the Lord. They had used their leadership position as way to meet their own self-centered needs for wealth and comfort. God then says that he will take responsibility to care for the nation and to gather them again from the nations.

- God then declares that the manifestation of his blessing, divine favor and unity, has been broken. These are two key aspects of God’s blessing within community, a sense of his favor as well as an experience of unity. The wages paid to God by his people was a pittance of 30 coins. The comment from the Lord saying it was a “handsome price” is a sarcastic comment. This insulting payment or response to God leads God to declare that this money should be thrown to the potter. This may be a reference to Israel needing to be completely refashioned as a potter would refashion a pot (see Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 18:1-6) because of their worthless heart condition.
- As a part of this, God declares that he will raise a leader who does nothing a good leader/shepherd should do. We see here four key elements to leadership: care for the lost (reaching out to those outside community), seek the young (include all ages, particularly the young), heal the injured (provide care for those who are wounded) and feed the healthy (invest into the mature and strong). Every spiritually mature leader should care equally about these four aspects of creating a caring community.
- Zechariah 12:1 summarizes God as Creator: the maker of the heavens, earth and who placed spirit within mankind.
- God goes on to declare that he is going to make Jerusalem “an immovable rock for all the nations.” He goes on to say that “the feeblest among them will be like David.” This references although no doubt taken as literal, in hindsight would seem to be symbolic of the new coming kingdom, one that can’t be shaken (See Hebrews 12:38).
- Zechariah 12:10-14 is a fascinating passage. God declares that he will pour out his Spirit (or a spirit) of grace and supplication. This likely is a reference to the coming of God’s Spirit as referred to by the other prophets. God then refers to himself as the one who has been pierced by his own people. This is a fascinating image as God refers to himself as a firstborn son. It would seem that God himself is prophetically foreshadowing his own incarnation as the Son and looking ahead the weeping of the people over his death. It is interesting that the wives of the clans are consistently mentioned in the section about all those mourning. It will be many women who will mourn with the death of Jesus, the one called Emmanuel, God with us.
- This outpouring of God’s presence, this piercing of God, leads to the profound spiritual transformation Zechariah had prophesied earlier (Zechariah 3:9-10). “On that day a fountain will be opened to the house (or dynasty – referring to the Messianic lineage) of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (symbol of God’s community) to cleanse them from sin and impurity.” Here we see again the very essence of what the first Christ-followers would see accomplished in the death of Jesus.
- This radical transformation is portrayed with the strongest of language (hyperbole) as all false leaders and all traces of sin are wiped out. Now, again although this is all expressed dramatically in physical imagery, the reality we will see revealed with Christ will be completely spiritual.

- God announces what will happen when the false Shepherd is struck down and how community scatters. Now Jesus uses this text to describe what will happen to his disciples after the crucifixion (Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27). This is likely just to help them see the connection that when you take out the leader, the community scatters. This passage goes on to suggest that only a remnant (one third) of God's people will actually be refined and enter into the new promised community. This spiritual transformation will be for a minority, not a majority of the Jewish nation.
- The next vision unfolds the coming "day of the Lord" (Amos 9:8-15; Joel 1:15–2:11; Isaiah 1:24-31; 2:2-4; 4:2-6; 26:16–27:6; 33:13-24; 59:1–60:22; 65:13-25; Jeremiah 30:7-11; 32:36-44; Ezekiel 20:33-44; Daniel 11:40; 12:1; Matthew 24:21, 29; 25:31-46; Revelations 19:11-16) and the destruction of Jerusalem. Again in the context of this unfolding text, it would seem to foreshadow that ultimate destruction prophesied by Jesus and occurred in 70 CE. Jesus' predicted that he would be the one that could come and bring judgment. In this text it simply says that God would come with his holy one. Now again we must remember that when God comes to judge, he typically uses foreign nations as an expression of his judgment. It would not be Babylon this time but rather the Roman Empire. Some commentators see this as referring to a future time closer to the return of Christ but it would make most sense to refer at least to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.
- Zechariah 14:7-11 what Ezekiel (47) prophesied. "On that day ("the day of the Lord" is a period of time when God completes his will) there will be no light... It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime – a day known to the Lord. When evening comes (appears to be the darkest hour), there will be light (completely unexpected reversal of everything anticipated). On that day living water will flow from Jerusalem (notice no reference to the Temple as in Ezekiel's vision...here it is just flowing from the community), half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and winter. The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name. The whole land...will become like the Arabah (or like a plain). But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place... Jerusalem (this new community or New Jerusalem) will be secure." What an awesome vision of the spiritual transformation accomplished by the death and resurrection of Christ.
- Zechariah 14:12-15 then announces a final horrible judgment against the enemies of his people. It almost sounds like armies being wiped out by a nuclear bomb. This destruction of the enemies of Jerusalem will motivate the survivors of the nations to worship God and to see him in Jerusalem. Those that fail to worship God will suffer from drought and plague. In that final day everything is transformed into being completely holy and there will no longer be a "Canaanite" (symbol of a godless foreigner) in the house of the Lord. This is an interesting conclusion in light of what unfolds with the coming of Christ. Again we must see these physical images as taking on new spiritual meaning. The true enemies of God suffer defeat through the coming of Christ. Indeed, the nations of the world (the Gentiles) come and worship God through the new community of God. No longer is a Canaanite found in

God's community because all people of faith, regardless of race or tribe are now spiritual descendents of the Father of faith, Abraham (see Romans 9). In this way, all people who live in trust relationship with God through Christ become the true people of God, the true fulfillment of these prophecies given to Israel.

- What is amazing about these final oracles of Zechariah is how rich they are with insight into the coming of the Messiah and how aligned they are with other prophecies. We see again in these prophecies that there is not a clear, linear prediction of historical events but rather a mix of images and insights that help the reader understand the essence and shape of the events that were to come. We must remember this when God speaks to us, that he often gives us images and pictures to unpack over time rather than a simple "to do" list or run down of events. Even when God speaks he uses it to grow our dependence on him, not remove our need of it. In this way he remains completely focused on partnership and relationship.