

Route 66

Zechariah: Beyond Obligation

Part 38 – May 23, 2010

Have you ever started a building project like a deck or tiling a shower, only to realize that you don't have the money, time, or skill to fulfill what you (*or your spouse*) had envisioned? Like this chicken coop; or this second floor bathroom; or this hot tub. These people may have been proud ... but they shouldn't have been; with the possible exception of this backyard Ferris wheel.



If we start a project that promises a load of work for a letdown, it's just almost impossible to motivate ourselves to finish. This is how Zechariah's people felt about the temple. They had returned from exile and quickly rebuilt the altar and laid the temple foundation ... but, then it sat for 16 years.

August 520 BC	September 520 BC	October 520 BC
S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S
1 2	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4
3 4 5 6 7 8 9	7 8 9 10 11 12 13	5 6 7 8 9 10 11
10 11 12 13 14 15 16	14 15 16 17 18 19 20	12 13 14 15 16 17 18
17 18 19 20 21 22 23	21 22 23 24 25 26 27	19 20 21 22 23 24 25
24 25 26 27 28 29 30	28 29 30	26 27 28 29 30 31
31		

Last week we saw how Haggai got them energized again. In the 2nd year of Darius, Haggai had motivated his people to start building the temple on August 29th, they began working on September 21st, and they were discouraged by October 17th.

Not only was it going to be a *massive* undertaking, but they quickly realized that their best efforts were not going to produce something that they would be proud of. Haggai had given them a sense of *obligation* but what they really needed now was passion. And *this* is when Zechariah shows up:

In the **eighth month**¹ of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah [*Behr-uh-KIGH-uh*], the son of Iddo [*ID-oh*]: – *Zechariah 1:1 NIV*

Obligation can get you started but it can't sustain. What sustains our faith is an authentic bond with a living God who meets our deepest needs for intimacy and understanding.

These people need a vision! And Zechariah is a man of just *that*.

¹ The Jewish calendar year begins at Passover (*Exodus 12:1*). The eighth month, Cheshvan, occurs in October/November.

He's young. They've been in Jerusalem for 18 years and still in one of his visions an angel is instructed to "Run, tell that *young* man ..." (2:4), which means he probably left Babylon as a teenager.



Excavation of Babylon's Processional Way



100 years ago, archeologists discovered the Processional Way and the Ishtar Gate which existed as one of eight entrances into Babylon during Zechariah's time. They excavated a portion and reassembled it at the Pergamum Museum (in Germany).



Ishtar Gate, Pergamum

All of these vivid colors are the original glazing on the bricks.

Zechariah may have passed through this very gate and along these same walls as he said his last goodbye to his city of birth.



Processional Way Walls

He exchanges the most beautiful and powerful secular city in the world for ruins and rubble in God's name. In return, he's given some of the most beautiful and powerful visions in the Bible. So, you have old man Haggai telling the men *what* to do, and young Zechariah telling them *why* they should do it.

About 60 years later, the prophet Ezra will comment in his writings, on this one-two punch of prophets.

Now **Haggai** the prophet and **Zechariah** the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews ... Then Zerubbabel [*their governor*] ... and Jeshua [*the high priest*] ... set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them. - *Ezra 5:1-2 NIV*

People can endure almost any "what" if they understand the "why".

Zechariah reveals to the people that they are part of God's cosmic plan to reach the entire world for His Kingdom; and that they must prepare the temple because their King is coming!

Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. - *Zechariah 2:10 NIV*

Happiness and despair come and go with circumstances; but hope, anchored in Christ, brings a joy that empowers us to persevere.

Zechariah's first six chapters are filled with eight visions of hope that he's given in a single night, on February 15th, 519^{BC}.



1. He sees a horseman with an army of angels sent throughout the world to ensure a time of peace for Judah. (1:7-17)



2. He sees four horns (that represent the powers that destroyed Judah) and God's craftsmen who have power over them. (1:18-21)



3. He sees a surveyor measuring Jerusalem, which will be so prosperous the walls won't contain it. (2:1-13)



4. He sees Joshua the High Priest removing filthy clothes and being dressed by angels in cleansed and purified garments, in preparation for serving in the temple. (3:1-10)

"I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it," says the Lord Almighty, "and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day." - *Zechariah 3:8b-9 NIV*

The "Branch" refers the Messiah being from the line of David.

The "stone" refers to the cornerstone. But, it has "seven eyes"; *seven* signifies completeness and *eyes* represent life and wisdom. This "solid rock" will be living and all-knowing. An "inscription" means it'll be dedicated by and precious to God.



This precious cornerstone from the line of David will remove the sin of the land in a single day. "This is why we're building!" Zechariah tells them.



5. He sees a golden lampstand with an olive tree on either side supplying it with an unending reserve of oil. (4:1-14) And this is a message to the governor, Zerubbabel:

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty. - *Zechariah 4:6b NIV*



6. He sees a 30' flying scroll that chases away evil men. (5:1-4)



7. He sees a woman in a basket who represents the iniquity of the people being carried away on the wind. (5:5-11)

8. He sees four chariots being excused from the presence of God and going throughout the whole earth in His name.

Zechariah is then told to make a crown for the high priest, signifying *for the first time* that the Messiah (who they anticipated *only* as a king) will also serve a priestly function.

And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two. - *Zechariah 6:13b NIV*

The role of king *and* priest was perfectly united in Christ.



This is a solid gold high-priest's crown that has been recreated by the Jewish Temple Institute for use in the temple someday.² It's a reproduction of the crown that was meant for Jesus to wear when He came to His people. But instead of a crown of gold, He received a crown of thorns, even as He fulfilled the ultimate high priest's role by offering a perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world.

Now, two years pass and the temple is halfway finished when the men come to Zechariah with an interesting predicament. During the exile, the people fasted in memory of the temple and the sin that led to its destruction. Now, the time for the fast has come again, but the temple is half done. So they ask:

"Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?" -
Zechariah 7:3 NIV

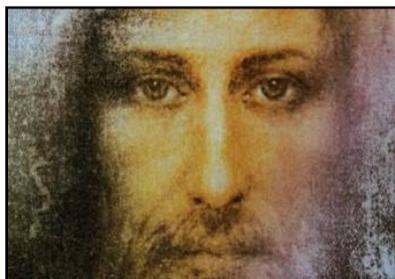
The Lord answers them with a question:

When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? - *Zechariah 7:5b NIV*

"You're serving out of obligation instead of passion! When will you learn that empty ritual doesn't please *Me* or benefit *you*!?" Right actions don't offset wrong motives. In chapters seven and eight, Zechariah rebukes their cold formalism, instructs them to be *practical* in their righteousness, and then reminds them once again that their King is coming. And he tells them to replace *obligation* with joy and celebrate!

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah." - *Zechariah 8:19a NIV*

Then Zechariah spends his last six chapters prophesying about the coming Messiah. And it's fairly spectacular and stunning!



First, he tells them *how* their King will come:

Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. - *Zechariah 9:9b NIV*

He's looking ahead 500 years to Palm Sunday when all the Jews shouted "Hosanna!" (*Matthew 21:1-11*)

But then Zechariah reveals that though the Messiah will seek to save Israel, he will be a rejected shepherd:

² For more information go to: Templeinstitute.org

The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them and said, "I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish." ... - *Zechariah 11:8b-9a NIV*

And, acting as the rejected Shepherd, Zechariah demands his pay:

So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter" ... So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter. - *Zechariah 11:12b-13 NIV*

This is not only the exact amount Judas received for betraying Christ,³ it's result of Judas regretfully trying to return it.

So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field ... - *Matthew 27:3-7 NIV*

This takes place in the very temple that Zechariah is urging his people to build even as he prophesies these words!

Jesus quotes Zechariah on the night that He's betrayed:

Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'" [*That's Zechariah 13:7*] - *Matthew 26:31 NIV*

Then Zechariah does something that I think is even more amazing; he looks into *our* future at the Messiah's *second* coming. He sees a time when his people will shamefully recognize their mistake, bitterly repent, and graciously receive forgiveness.

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. ... On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. - *Zechariah 12:10 & 13:1 NIV*

This is probably the most often cited Old Testament text in Jewish-evangelical discussions. It's the only passage where Popular Jewish translations⁴ break their own rules and substitute words; because, there's no way to render this text as written without it pointing to Jesus.

Then he looks even beyond *that*, to a day when Christ will reign and God will dwell among His people, who'll worship *not* out of obligation but gratitude and enthusiasm.

³ Matthew 26:14-15

⁴ The New Jewish Publication Society's translation Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures (1988) reads, "... and they shall lament to Me about those who are slain ..."