

Minor Prophets' Major Gripes, XI

Zechariah on Motives

August 31, 2003

POST-EXILIC PROJECT

- Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are post-exilic.
- They appear after the 70-year Babylonian exile.

Zechariah [ZEK-uh-RIGH-uh] was born in captivity. And as a boy (in 538 B.C.) he was one of 50,000 to be released by King Cyrus and allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

- King Cyrus overthrew Babylon and released the Israelites.
- Within two years they completed the altar and foundation.
- Harassment and discouragement brought on a 16-year stall.

Then in 520 B.C. Haggai appeared on the scene:

- On August 29, Haggai reignited their vision.
- On September 21, the temple project resumed.
- On October 17, they became very discouraged!

They realized that their temple was going to pale in comparison to Solomon's temple that once stood on the same spot. Then, a month later Zechariah joined forces with Haggai to encourage the people to keep building the temple.

In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah ... - Zechariah 1:1 NIV

VISIONS OF THE MESSIAH

- Haggai's message was a clear and concise two chapters.

Zechariah took 14 chapters to recount colorful visions of dirty garments being cleansed, golden lampstands, flying scrolls, and a woman in a basket.

But through it all, he encouraged the people to keep building this temple for one simple reason: Your King is coming!

For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the LORD. ... I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. - Zechariah 2:10-11 NIV

Zechariah saw it as a time when all non-Jews would be included:

In those days ten people from nations and languages around the world will clutch at the hem of one Jew's robe. And they will say, "Please let us walk with you, for we have heard that God is with you." - Zechariah 8:23 NIV

Unbelievably, Zechariah saw Him coming as a lowly, humble king:

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 9:9 NIV

With hindsight we know this as Palm Sunday; when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt, and everyone shouted "Hosanna!" (*Mat 21:1-11*)

- But Zechariah saw this event with 500 years of foresight!

And although Zechariah knew that all of God's promises would be fulfilled in this coming King, amazingly he saw this King as a shepherd whose own sheep would despise Him:

The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them ... - Zechariah 11:8 NIV

He even saw a value being placed on this shepherd; the price of a slave (*Ex 21:32*): Thirty pieces of silver. Then he says:

So, I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter. - Zechariah 11:13 NIV

This is not only the exact amount Judas received for betraying Christ (*Mat 26:14-15*) but when Judas remorsefully tried to give it back, the priests and elders wouldn't take 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

Zechariah is the most quoted Prophet (in the Gospels) during Jesus' final week. Just before His arrest, Jesus quoted him:

Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered ... - Zechariah 13:7 and Matthew 26:31 NIV

Amazingly Zechariah even foretells that the Messiah will not only be rejected but will be physically punctured even as he pours out His grace and petitions on behalf of His people.

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 ... - Zechariah 12:10 NIV

Even still, Zechariah saw that in spite of this, the result would somehow be an incomparable cleansing:

I will remove the sin of this land in a single day. - Zechariah 3:9 NIV

Zechariah also spoke about the return of Christ. People must have listened to his visions and thought: "What are you talking about?! Make some sense ... talk normal."

- You know he had to be way under-appreciated!

THE "RUTUAL" OF FASTING

In between his 8 visions and 2 oracles, the people came to the prophets with an interesting predicament.

The people of Bethel had sent ... their men, to entreat the LORD by asking the priests of the house of the LORD Almighty and the prophets, "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?" - Zechariah 7:2-3 NIV

During the Babylonian exile, the people fasted to remember the destruction of the temple and their sin that led to it. And now (two years into new construction) their curious: "If the temple is being rebuilt do we still fast for its destruction?"

And Zechariah answers them with a revealing question of his own:

When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves? - Zechariah 7:5-6 NIV

And so we have Zechariah's major gripe: They had allowed the practice of their faith to become "rutual". That's my own word for when meaningful ritual becomes a rut of mechanical habit.

Zechariah reminds them that this is the type of thing that led their forefathers into exile.

Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets ...? -
Zechariah 7:7 NIV

Each act of faith is meaningless if there isn't an authentic desire behind it, to know and love God.

- Right actions can not make up for wrong attitudes

Q: How many ways can we approach the Bible with wrong motives?

- To build knowledge to impress ourselves or others
- To measure up to an expectation or standard
- To free ourselves from guilt by "paying" the dues
- To earn God's love and approval
- To manipulate God into doling out His blessings
- To increase our "ammunition" (use it as a weapon)
- To ignore its application to our lives

Reading His Word with any of these motives is offensive, hurtful, and dishonoring to God because it masks a cold heart.

This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her." - Zechariah 8:1 NIV

The only right motive when we approach His Word is to see it as a love letter, through which:

- We get to know His heart
- We grow closer in intimacy with Him
- We become more devoted to Him
- We are transformed into His image (of righteousness)
- We increase our love for others

This goes for praying, attending church, tithing, or whatever. Zechariah did finally answer their question about fasting:

... 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 8:19 NIV

But this promise is reserved only for those who keep in mind that their King is coming, and live by Zechariah's principle:

[It is] not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty. -
Zechariah 4:6 NIV