

The Minor Prophets #25

Zechariah

by: Ronald L. Dart

The next to the last book in the Old Testament, the next to the last of the Minor Prophets, is a man named Zechariah. His grandfather had been a prophet and we don't know anything about him.

Zechariah Chapter 1: It came to pass "In the eight month of the king Darius of the Persians, came the word of the LORD to Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, {2} "The LORD has been sore displeased with your fathers. {3} Therefore you say this to them, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn you unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn to you, saith the LORD of hosts"".

Now if you're just reading this to yourself, you might not pick up on this, but if you were reading it aloud, this repetition, "saith the LORD of hosts, saith the LORD of hosts," this might not strike you, but if you're reading it aloud, you begin to understand here that this is the poetic structure. "Turn to me, I will turn to you, turn to me saith the LORD of hosts, I will turn to you saith the LORD of hosts," so you can see this poetic type of development. This idea also echoes all the way from Haggai the prophet before him, the structure here is more poetic.

Prophecies Can Be Musical

Many of these prophecies like the Psalms are musical and may have actually been intended for performance, they are in a way the protest songs of their generation. A significant clue to this arises in an incident involving the prophet Elisha many years before this. The kings of Israel and Judah were in a military campaign and they had decided they were going to put their armies together and go fight the kingdom of Moab. They however in making a big circle around to the south got themselves out in the desert without enough water for their livestock. They were in trouble, so they started calling in prophets to ask, "What do we do now?"

Prophet Of Jehovah

The king of Judah finally said, "Isn't there a prophet of Jehovah here somewhere?" and the king of Israel said, "Yes there is, but I don't like him very much." "Well get him in here anyway," so they called in Elisha to inquire of God, and when Elisha walked into the room he said, "You know as the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, surely if it weren't for my regard for the presence for the king of Judah, I wouldn't look at you, I wouldn't even see you." He said this to the king of Israel, but "Now bring me a minstrel," and it came to pass

when the minstrel played that the hand of the LORD came upon him" (2 Kings 3:6-15). So he sang his prophecy and so we can see from this the protest song, it didn't originate with Joan Baez or Bob Dylan, it has much, much older roots than that. It seems ironic that God would work that way, but we've seen in our own generation, how songs can move some people while they are dismissed by other people. This pattern, I guess is very old, of putting this kind of song together.

Thus Saith The LORD Of Hosts

Verse 4 of Zechariah 1, "Don't be like your fathers," said Zechariah, "to whom the former prophets have cried, saying, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Turn now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they didn't hear, and they wouldn't listen to me," says the LORD. {5} "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?" Well, No, they're all dead. {6} "But my words," says God, "and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, didn't they take hold of your fathers? "And they returned and said, "Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so has He dealt with us."

Laws Of God

What makes this interesting to me is, it underlines something important and often overlooked about the law of God.

The laws of God are a systematic revelation of what C.S. Lewis called "natural law." In other words, they reveal the way things work.

What the prophet says here is, "Didn't my laws catch up with your fathers? It wasn't that God had to lift a finger to punish them, the law did that naturally. You keep on breaking it, year after year and you'll build up a debt that will finally come home to roost.

There are three things that can happen when you break God's law:

1. Consequences, you drive drunk, you get involved in an accident, you lose an arm, it's gone, and that's the consequences for driving drunk.
2. Chastisement is another thing, God can intervene, cause you trouble you otherwise might have missed and thereby teach you a lesson from it.
3. The 3rd thing is punishment, which seems to have a more final ring to it.

Consequences of course can serve as chastisement, in fact I think we would do well to think of it that way. The object of chastisement is to correct bad conduct, and God tells us, "Hey, if you're my son I will chastise you, if not, you will just suffer the consequences of what you did." Sometimes the consequences of sin don't show up for awhile, which is why the

prophecy speaks of the law taking hold of their fathers or the terms we would use is catching up with them.

Well three months later, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah again.

Verbal Icons

Verse 7 of Zechariah 1, "Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, came the word of the LORD to Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, saying. {8} 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, there were red horses, speckled, and white."

Now I have heard more silly idea's about these horses than I can possibly recount here. What are we doing here is stepping into the area of verbal icons and I have to explain that. In our generation, we have suddenly become much more familiar with icons than where we were when I was a young man.

When I was a young man an icon was a religious thing, where you had panels that folded out and it had the images of the saints or prophets or images of Jesus on them.

Icon's now are tiny little images that you see on your computer screen, you see a little printer up there, you click on that and you print the document you have on the screen. All sorts of little icons, I counted them up one day and found forty icons on my screen while I was working on my word processor. They're very useful.

Well the Bible doesn't have any pictures, in fact pictures seem to be specifically prohibited in the Bible, God doesn't want to work that way, and His icons are verbal. For example, when you see horses mentioned like this in the Bible, you should know that a horse is an icon for instruments of war. Horses and chariots, well they're sort of like the armored tanks of our day. You had foot soldiers they were the infantry. The Cavalry, the horses, the chariots were for speed and power, so consequently when you see a horse in prophecy, it is suggestive of war or machines used for war. In that day and age, horses were simply not used for agriculture or even for transportation. They were used to fight.

Vision Of The Horses

So Zechariah, when he saw the horses, said. in verse 9 of Zechariah 1, "O my LORD, what are these? And the angel that talked to me said "I'll show you what they are." {10} And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, "These are they whom the LORD had sent to walk to and fro through the earth." {11} 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 sits still, and is at rest.""

When you understand that the horses is about war and fighting, you kind of wonder why in the world is this here.

Well the Middle East has always been a region in turmoil, I mean look at it today, if you want to know what it's always been like. John Glove said of the Arab people, "They have never been united at anytime in their history for any length of time except under the force of arms." The reason the earth was quiet was because of Persian hegemony, later it would be Alexander who would forcible pacify the region, still later it was Rome, and much later it would be the British although the British lacked the necessary brutality to control the world. They did kind of bring about a kind of peace in parts of it.

But the Persian peace had left Jerusalem in ruins.

Promises To Jerusalem

Verse 12 of Zechariah 1, "Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, "O LORD of hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which you have had indignation these seventy years?"

When seventy years past, I think almost everyone was beginning to wonder when freedom was coming?

The reason was they had learned from both Jeremiah and Daniel that seventy years was going to be the period of time they were going to be in captivity, and as it turned out, from the time the Temple was destroyed until it was finally finished was seventy years.

"And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words. {14} So the angel that communed with me said to me, "Cry out saying, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. {15} And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was just a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction."

God seems to feel that while Jerusalem needed chastisement, the nations had gone too far, now it would be their turn.

Verse 16, "Therefore thus saith the LORD, "I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies; my house shall be built in it," saith the LORD of hosts, "and a line shall be stretched forth," a surveyor's line, "upon Jerusalem."

Now this whole project had been on hold, it had begun quite a bit earlier, the building of the Temple, but because of political matters it had been stopped; now five months earlier Haggai the prophet called on the people to get back to work on the Temple and from the day they laid the first brick, God returned to them, so now, five months later, we have Zechariah talking about it again.

Verse 17, "Cry yet, saying, thus saith the LORD of hosts; my cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem. "

Now this is a part of the past we need to understand if we hope to understand the future, God will even yet choose Jerusalem.

If you look back, reading through the history of this time, you have to realize, that whatever it is he's talking about here, Zechariah and all the people in his generation are going to be dead before it ever comes to fruition, so he's looking well out into the future.

Visions Of Horns And Builders

He said in verse 18 of Zechariah 1, "Then I lifted up my eyes, and behold four horns."

Now here we are, back to verbal icons, usually in the Bible a horn is the symbol of power and of strength.

{ 19 } "And I said to the angel that talked to me, "What are these?" And he answered; "These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.""

Ok, so now we're looking out there and we see these powers, Assyria who invaded and destroyed the house of Israel in the north and took them into captivity, and Babylon who came and destroyed Judah, and finally took Jerusalem down and destroyed the Temple.

Verse 20, "And the LORD showed me four builders. "The King James Version has 'carpenters.' [21 } And I said, "What are these here for?" And He said, "These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man lifted up his head: but these builders are come to strike fear into them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.""

Now you see in a way when you read the book of Nehemiah, you see a classic case of a builder returning to the city of Jerusalem causing the people in the surrounding areas to fear, very much so, and rebuilding the city. However when you take the whole prophecy of Zechariah, it really seems to be bigger than that, reaching out far beyond anything Nehemiah himself was able to do.

Measurement Of Jerusalem

And that brings us to the second Chapter of Zechariah.

"I lifted up my eyes again, and I looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand."

In Biblical commentary they call this man the surveyor, he is there to see what's going on.

Verse 2, "And I said, "Where are you going?" And he said to me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth and the length of the city."

Angel

Now there is something I need to explain here that causes some confusion, we've already hit it two or three times and I didn't comment on it yet.

It's the word 'angel,' as it happens 'angel' like a lot of words in our language is Greek. It means and should be translated this way, 'messenger.' Somebody back in time decided that they would just bring that word over in English as 'angel' and it's gotten all kinds of mystical things attached to it. All the way from little cherubim with wings and bow and arrows, little angels to the great winged things that we see in Christmas decorations and what have you. Actually that's not the right image for them.

'Angel' in the Greek and the word for it in Hebrew, means 'messenger.' Its unfortunate that it has taken on such a wide variety of misleading connotations, it would have been much simpler and clearer if everywhere you found this word in the Bible they simply used the term 'messenger' because that's what it means. If they had used it that way, we might have a better grasp of an important personage in the Old Testament.

Angel Of The LORD

Now the Hebrew word for 'messenger' is 'Malak,' which means exactly the same thing as angel in Greek. The person we're going to be talking about is called Malak Jehovah, or Malak Jehovah, if you prefer. You can find him in your concordance if you want to look him up, under the heading, the 'angel of the LORD,' because that's how that expression is always translated. And it's really interesting as you work your way through these in the Bible because every time you come to this, 'angel of the LORD,' this is not just any angel, this is not just any messenger, it is a particular one and what's interesting about this particular one is, He speaks in the first person as Jehovah himself.

In Genesis Chapter 22 for example Verse 15: And the (Malak Jehovah which is Hebrew for) angel of the LORD called to Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, "By myself have I sworn," says Jehovah, "because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son: I will bless you."

This is not the only place where this messenger of Jehovah speaks in the first person for God.

Now it becomes fairly clear that we have divine messengers in large numbers throughout the Bible, often times they are just described as a man, I saw a man, and it's only in the context that you begin to understand that this is something supernatural not just an ordinary man. But it becomes clear that there is one messenger that actually bears the name of Jehovah or Yahweh in Hebrew, He is called the Malak Jehovah. There are those who believe that Jesus was an angel who became flesh and became what He was in the same sense they think that Gabriel and Michael are angels or messengers of God. I don't think so. Once you understand that the expression means the 'messenger of Jehovah' then it's a small step from there to the Word of God as in the beginning of the Gospel account of John.

Word of God

In John chapter 1 verse 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

You know you go back and you read in the Old Testament, time and time again a prophet will say the 'word of God' came to me. I don't think they mean that, well I just sort of discovered it, or I found it, or the thought came to me, I think they mean somebody, they called the 'Word of God' came to them, and this was the messenger of Jehovah that came there.

John said, {1} "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God. {2} The same was in the beginning with God; {3} All things were made by him."

One thing you have to be careful about in John is you have to keep your pronouns straight so you can see plainly what John is saying. When John says "All things were made by him," who is he talking about? He's talking about the Word.

"And without him was not anything made that was made. {4} In him was life; and the life was the light of men. {5} And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness just doesn't get it."

All things were made by the Word.

Later on in John, the first Chapter, verse 10: "He, the Word, was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. {11} He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

I don't know of any serious Christian who reads these words and doesn't understand the Word to be, the one we know as Jesus Christ.

Verse 12, "But as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: {13} Who were born, not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. {14} And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

What you're dealing with here is a being that has been there from the very beginning, always been there, was involved in the creation of the earth and voluntarily became flesh. Called by John, the Word.

In the Old Testament He was known as the 'messenger of Jehovah,' He spoke in the first person for Jehovah. I see the expression the 'angel of the LORD' or the 'messenger of the Jehovah' as the Hebrew way of speaking of the 'Word of God.' Now with this in mind, we might get a clearer idea of what it is that Zechariah is about to say and it's a little tricky.

Zechariah chapter 2 verse 3: "Behold, the messenger that talked with me was leaving, and another messenger went out to meet him, {4} and said to him, "Run and speak to this young man." (Presumably he means, speak to Zechariah) "saying Jerusalem shall be inhabited as

towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: {5} For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be a glory in the midst of her."

You do realize what you're reading is one speaking in the first person, saying, "I, saith the LORD" so consequently and earlier He was referred to, as the messenger. Now the vision is reaching way out into the future because Jerusalem of that era would have walls once Nehemiah came on the scene, He's talking about a time when it's far, far too big for that.

Now in verse 6, he continues to say. "Oh, Oh, come forth, and flee from the land of the north," saith the LORD: "for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven," saith the LORD. "Deliver yourself, O Zion that dwells with the daughter of Babylon."

This sounds very much like an appeal to the Israelites remaining in Babylon to get on the road to come home, and yet this also may reach way out into the future.

Now get a firm grip on who is speaking, "Thus saith Jehovah" is repeated again, and again and again. "For thus saith the LORD of hosts," and anytime you see that small caps word 'LORD' in the text it is the divine name YHVH.

"For thus saith the LORD of hosts; after the glory has he sent me to the nations which spoiled you: for he that touches you touches the apple of his eye. {9} For, behold, I will shake my hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me."

That was a little long and you may not have caught it, notice the way it starts, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts," "You will know the LORD of hosts has sent me." You have to think about it for a moment, who is sending who, and who is speaking. It sounds very much like the one called the LORD of hosts, Yehovah Tsaba in Hebrew; He's saying, He was sent by Yehovah. Now that shouldn't be a great problem, Jesus bore His Father's name and could thus Himself be called Yehovah in the Old Testament.

Now unless you think I'm completely off the wall here, this is what the Expositor Bible Commentary says about this passage, quote: "Another problem is the identity of the reference in the pronoun suffix 'me', both here and in verse nine, while many think 'me' refers to Zechariah, others maintain in the light of the language and the full scope of these verses, it looks toward the Messianic servant messenger, the angel of the Lord".

If this latter view is correct as it seem likely, the speaker identified Himself as the Lord Almighty at the beginning of the verse, He is the Messiah Himself, the angel of the Lord, who was sent by Jehovah.

But let's not come down to hard on that just yet, let's keep an open mind.

God's Presence Promised

Zechariah 2 verse 10, "'Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of you," says the LORD."

You could take that in a mystical sense that God will be among us, the wording of it, the way He is going about it, sounds like it's a little more firm than that.

"Many nations" {11} "shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of you, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me unto you."

Now this is really incredible, because He's basically saying, "I the Lord, I am going to come and live in the midst of you and you will know the Lord of hosts sent me." So we have the LORD being sent by the LORD. Now the easiest, simplest explanation of that for a Christian person is, Father and Son, members of the same family.

{12} "And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. {13} Be silent, O flesh, before the LORD: for He is raised up out of his holy habitation."

What a remarkable picture, you can find a way of explaining most of this away if you want to. In the lifetime of Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah, the exile, the return from the exile but it really doesn't work all that well. There are elements of it that never quite come to pass and never quite lock together and when you put it together with all the remainder of the prophecies dealing with these last days, like Isaiah for example, that talks about a time when men will beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks, everybody in the world will know God, He says in that day. You're not going to have to say to somebody, "Do you know the Lord?" They already will, and so all nations will come to God, when that time rolls around.

Zechariah seems to be looking down through the ages and getting one of the early glimpses of the kingdom of God, a kingdom to which we all wish to come.

I'm Ronald Dart.

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