



The Minor Prophets #29 - Zechariah

by Ronald L. Dart

There is really no question that, when you read an Old Testament prophet, you should begin by asking how he was understood at the time, and how the prophecy would have applied in his own lifetime. But if you stop there you may miss something *very important*. What a prophet like Zechariah was seeing and hearing from God would tend to repeat in successive generations, well...like a standing wave repeats. They come, they go. It ebbs and it flows. There may be any number of reasons for this, but two principals need to be taken into account. Number one: Human nature doesn't change. Number two: The divine nature doesn't change either. Therefore, history naturally tends to repeat itself.

But then another question follows closely: What was God really aiming at in that prophecy? Was it an earlier wave of history, or was the earlier used only as an example—a type—of what was ultimately to come and what God was really aiming at? What makes me wonder is the way a prophet like Zechariah will move *so easily* from something that can *only* apply in his own day into something that obviously has limited or even *no* application in his own day.

Some friends and I were recently discussing the ideal temple that is found in the closing chapters of Ezekiel. That's long been a curious section of the book of prophecy that men have looked at, talked about, scholars have discussed; because the temple you find there doesn't fit any historical model at all. And so people struggle with it. One observed the serious difficulties that commentators have found with this temple, and then another one pointed out similarities to the closing chapters of the Book of Revelation, the New Jerusalem, and the river of water of life, and the tree of life. What begins to emerge, only darkly at the moment, is an awareness that both prophecies are actually concerned with the same time and the same events, the same outcomes. But that then leads to the conclusion that there is a meaning behind the vision (that is, the prophecy) that *transcends history*.

The fact of the matter is there are some things that are going to happen in the future of this world that people would not understand if you explained them to them, because we have no frame of reference for it. So what the prophets tended to do was, in the terms of their own day, in the things people in their own time would understand, to idealize; and to draw a picture—to create a painting, as it were, in the mind—of what God is going to do that we can deal with. So if you keep in mind that a vision is symbolic—the reality will not look the same at all—*then* you can compare something like the last of Ezekiel and the last of Revelation, and see these are both aiming at something over the horizon that we can't see yet.

Now, with that in mind, look at where we've come in Zechariah. Chapter 8, verse 20:

Zechariah 8

AKJV

²⁰ Thus said the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities:

²¹ And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also.

Now, in the time in which Zechariah wrote this, it didn't just say "LORD", it said "*Jehovah*" (or "*Yahweh*", if you prefer).

Zechariah 8

AKJV

- ²¹ [...] Let us go speedily to pray before [Jehovah], and to seek [Jehovah]: I will go also.
²² Yes, many people and strong nations shall come to seek [Jehovah] of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.

Did you get that? *Many* people, *strong* nations. I don't think anything like that has *ever* happened in history, and yet Zechariah is looking at something out there that is to come.

Zechariah 8

AKJV

- ²³ Thus said the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

What a thing to say. After all the generations of antisemitism, now men of all nations are ready to follow a Jew anywhere. I don't think we have ever seen this at any time in the history of the world. So I have to conclude that Zechariah has slipped far into the future on us without even so much as to giving us a hint. It becomes even plainer as we pass into chapter 9. In chapter 9, verse 1:

Zechariah 9

NIV '84

An Oracle

- ¹ The word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrach
and will rest upon Damascus—
for the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel
are on [Jehovah]—

Now, Hadrach and Damascus were city-states in what is now Syria; so is the first place mentioned in the next verse.

Zechariah 9

NIV '84

- ² and upon Hamath too, which borders on it,
and upon Tyre and Sidon, though they are very skillful.
³ Tyre has built herself a stronghold;
she has heaped up silver like dust,
and gold like the dirt of the streets.
⁴ But the Lord will take away her possessions
and destroy her power on the sea,
and she will be consumed by fire.

You know, reading back on this, or looking at the Middle East today, you wouldn't even know what he's talking about. But at the time, Tyre was a *major* player on the Mediterranean—probably *the* Mediterranean power of her day. They had built quite a city there. During one war that they'd had before, the city was somewhat destroyed; and so they actually built the thing on a little island with a

very narrow causeway coming out to the island. Over time, others began to come against Tyre, and finally Tyre was destroyed. One invader [Alexander the Great] built a *huge* causeway out there so all of his armies could go out there and besiege the city. Tyre, by the way, had also been built with a seawall around it. Actually, much of the city was below sea level and the sea was being held back. Ships came and went; she traded all over the Mediterranean. You can go out there today—you can walk out to the end of that causeway they built and stand and look down in the water at the old ruins of Tyre. He says,

Zechariah 9

NIV '84

- ⁵ Ashkelon will see it and fear;
Gaza will writhe in agony,
and Ekron too, for her hope will wither.
Gaza will lose her king
and Ashkelon will be deserted.
- ⁶ Foreigners will occupy Ashdod,
and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.

What comes from this standing wave down through history is hard to figure exactly, except that the land of the Philistines is the land of the Palestinians; and Gaza, and Ashkelon, and Ashdod, and so forth are in the areas the Palestinians hold today. Then he goes on to say,

Zechariah 9

NIV '84

- ⁷ I will take the blood from their mouths,
the forbidden food from between their teeth.
Those who are left will belong to our God
and become leaders in Judah,
and Ekron will be like the Jebusites.
- ⁸ But I will defend my house
against marauding forces.
Never again will an oppressor overrun my people,
for now I am keeping watch.

...says God. You know, even though this deals with history, it seems to take a long view at the same time; because we really have never seen anything quite like what is being described here; because far subsequent to the time of this prophecy being given, Judah *was* overrun. This looks down to a very, very different time in history. Lest anyone should be in doubt, listen to what Zechariah says next. Verse 9:

Zechariah 9

NIV '84

- ⁹ Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
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.

Every Christian knows this verse. It comes and is cited in Matthew, chapter 21. Jesus was coming toward Jerusalem, and...

Matthew 21

NIV '84

¹ [...] Jesus sent two disciples,

² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.

³ If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

Then follows what is called Jesus' "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem. But why did Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a donkey? Why not on a horse? Well, because he was not coming in war; he is coming in peace. Horses and chariots are instruments of war. It was the custom in Israel for the king, not to ride a horse, but to ride a mule or a donkey. Zechariah 9, verse 10:

Zechariah 9

NIV '84

¹⁰ I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the war-horses from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow will be broken. [...]

Now, *that* sounds a lot like what Isaiah talks about when he says...

Isaiah 2

AKJV

⁴ [...] they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Zechariah 9

NIV '84

¹⁰ [...] He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Here we fall into a passage...it reads like the libretto of an oratorio. (This would make a great one.) Now, what we're talking about here...it looks like the time when God has brought peace to the earth. Okay?

Zechariah 9

NIV '84

¹¹ As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.
¹² Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope;
even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.
¹³ I will bend Judah as I bend my bow
and fill it with Ephraim.
I will rouse your sons, O Zion,
against your sons, O Greece,
and make you like a warrior's sword.

Strange, the words here, but they hearken back to ones in Ezekiel where God tells Ezekiel,

Ezekiel 37

AKJV

¹⁶ [...T]ake you one stick, and write on it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write on it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel his companions:

¹⁷ And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in your hand.

He seems to be talking about a time when Ephraim (as one political entity, really, leading the ten northern tribes of Israel) will be reunited with Judah—the house of Judah—another political entity centered on Jerusalem.

Zechariah 9

NIV '84

- ¹⁴ Then the Lord will appear over them;
his arrow will flash like lightning.
The Sovereign Lord will sound the trumpet;
he will march in the storms of the south,
- ¹⁵ and the Lord Almighty will shield them.
They will destroy
and overcome with slingstones.
They will drink and roar as with wine;
they will be full like a bowl
used for sprinkling the corners of the altar.
- ¹⁶ The Lord their God will save them on that day
as the flock of his people.
They will sparkle in his land
like jewels in a crown.
- ¹⁷ How attractive and beautiful they will be!
Grain will make the young men thrive,
and new wine the young women.

Wow! When you read these things, you're looking at a *wonderful* time. Zechariah 10:

Zechariah 10

NIV '84

- ¹ Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime;
it is the Lord who makes the storm clouds.
He gives showers of rain to men,
and plants of the field to everyone.
- ² The idols speak deceit,
diviners see visions that lie;
they tell dreams that are false,
they give comfort in vain.
Therefore the people wander like sheep
oppressed for lack of a shepherd.

Now he seems to have backed up in time, to a time when the people are scattered for lack of a shepherd, when actually you have false diviners and false prophets wandering the landscape, and then he says in verse 3 of Zechariah 10,

Zechariah 10

NIV '84

- ³ My anger burns against the shepherds,
and I will punish the leaders;
for the Lord Almighty will care
for his flock, the house of Judah,
and make them like a proud horse in battle.
- ⁴ From Judah will come the cornerstone,
from him the tent peg,
from him the battle bow,
from him every ruler.
- ⁵ Together they will be like mighty men
trampling the muddy streets in battle.
Because the Lord is with them,
they will fight and overthrow the horsemen.

Interesting that God is angry with some leaders and he raises up new men out of Judah to fight them and to overthrow them. Verse 6:

Zechariah 10

NIV '84

- ⁶ I will strengthen the house of Judah
and save the house of Joseph. [...]

That's two different groups, two different political entities.

Zechariah 10

NIV '84

- ⁶ [...] I will restore them
because I have compassion on them.
They will be as though
I had not rejected them,
for I am the Lord their God
and I will answer them.

This kind of looks forward, also, to Revelation where you have false prophets that come out in one of the seals—the big scroll with the seven seals—that false prophets and false Christs come along the line; and then, as we work our way through time, we come to the return of Christ and the overthrow of people like that. He says,

Zechariah 10

NIV '84

- ⁷ The Ephraimites will become like mighty men,
and their hearts will be glad as with wine.
Their children will see it and be joyful;
their hearts will rejoice in the Lord.

It's a time of complete *restoration*. It's a strange idea, though: Ephraim had gone off into captivity long before Judah went to Babylon. They got carried away by the Assyrians, and to all intents and purposes they had *disappeared* as a people. You go around looking for a political entity to put your finger on that's Ephraim; there is nobody carrying that name. And yet Ezekiel had this prophecy of the two

sticks, and he foretold a time when the stick of Ephraim and the stick of Judah would once again become *one* in God's hand. He looked for a time when all Israel would be gathered back into the land, and there would once again be one Israel. It's in the prophets. It's there. What kind of an end-time fulfillment? Well, we'll just have to wait to see. Verse 8:

Zechariah 10

NIV '84

- ⁸ I will signal for them
and gather them in.
Surely I will redeem them;
they will be as numerous as before.
- ⁹ Though I scatter them among the peoples,
yet in distant lands they will remember me.
They and their children will survive,
and they will return.
- ¹⁰ I will bring them back from Egypt
and gather them from Assyria.
I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon,
and there will not be room enough for them.

I think some people see this idealized in the return of Judah (along with some Ephraimites, perhaps, and other Israelites) from Babylon. But the only return has been the one from Babylon; there has been *nothing* like this one, with people brought back from Egypt and from Assyria, and brought back, not to Jerusalem, but to Gilead and Lebanon—the *northern* areas of the northern tribes. It *does* seem, somewhere out there, there is still something else to happen.

Zechariah 10

NIV '84

- ¹¹ “They will pass through the sea of trouble;
the surging sea will be subdued
and all the depths of the Nile will dry up.
Assyria's pride will be brought down
and Egypt's scepter will pass away.
- ¹² I will strengthen them in the LORD
and in his name they will walk,”

declares the LORD.

You know, sometimes rather than try to interpret every prophecy, I think we might do better to simply sit back and enjoy the beauty. We may not be able to determine every nuance of the prophecy until it comes to pass, and it's really interesting how often this turns out to be true. You actually do not see God's hand in things sometimes until after the fact, and you look back and see *God has done it*. In the meantime, our job is to know the prophecy, to internalize it, so we will remember it when the time comes and be able to make the association that it requires.

It's helpful, as you read through these chapters (again, realizing they may even have been performance art, they may have been like an oratorio), it's helpful as you read it to remember the image of standing waves, with peaks and valleys, as you go; because it's almost as though you look ahead to a time of God's intervention for our good...and times when he's not so happy with what we've been doing. Zechariah 11:

Zechariah 11

NIV '84

- ¹ Open your doors, O Lebanon,
so that fire may devour your cedars!
- ² Wail, O pine tree, for the cedar has fallen;
the stately trees are ruined!
Wail, oaks of Bashan;
the dense forest has been cut down!
- ³ Listen to the wail of the shepherds;
their rich pastures are destroyed!
Listen to the roar of the lions;
the lush thicket of the Jordan is ruined!
- ⁴ This is what the Lord my God says: “Pasture the flock marked for slaughter.
- ⁵ Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, ‘Praise the Lord, I am rich!’ Their own shepherds do not spare them.
- ⁶ For I will no longer have pity on the people of the land,” declares the Lord. “I will hand everyone over to his neighbor and his king. They will oppress the land, and I will not rescue them from their hands.”

Kind of vague, exactly what he’s talking about here, but it’s pretty clear that he’s talking about a time, a circumstance, where the leaders—the shepherds, the ones who should be looking out for the welfare of the people—are just using them up, selling them off, making themselves rich at the hands of others.

Zechariah 11

NIV '84

- ⁷ So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favor and the other Union, and I pastured the flock.
- ⁸ In one month I got rid of the three shepherds. [...]

Who are they? I have no idea.

Zechariah 11

NIV '84

- ⁸ [...] The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them
- ⁹ and said, “I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another’s flesh.”
- ¹⁰ Then I took my staff called Favor and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations.
- ¹¹ It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the Lord.
- ¹² I told them, “If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.” So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.
- ¹³ And the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter.

Well, it’s not hard to figure where we have suddenly found ourselves, is it? The whole image of Judas and his thirty pieces of silver comes right into play—at a time when people are refusing to serve God, and a time when *the shepherds* are selling off the flock and destroying them. It’s hard to know what to make of it, but it’s sitting there for us. Verse 14:

Zechariah 11

NIV '84

¹⁴ Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

¹⁵ Then the Lord said to me, “Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd.

¹⁶ For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs.

¹⁷ Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded!”

What do you make of that? It certainly sounds that you’re going back to a time when the brotherhood between Judah and Israel was broken. But...my, that was *long* before Zechariah was ever born that that breach took place. It took place shortly after the death of Solomon, when Jeroboam the First called Israel—the ten tribes of the house of Israel—away from the house of Judah, and established a kingdom in the north. They were actually at war with each other from time to time—the Jews in the south, Israel in the north led by Ephraim. But during this period of time, of course, one foolish shepherd in that time certainly was Jeroboam the First. Zechariah, chapter 12:

Zechariah 12

NIV '84

¹ This is the word of the Lord concerning Israel. The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares:

² “I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. [...]”

The image is of a cup of wine that, when you drink it, makes you drunk.

Zechariah 12

NIV '84

² [...] Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem.

³ On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, [...]

Okay, “all the nations of the earth” gathered against Jerusalem. That sort of makes you think of Revelation, whenever all these armies assemble in the valley of Megiddo—the day of Armageddon—and they’re then ready to make war against Israel, and start rolling down through the valley to Jerusalem. He said,

Zechariah 12

NIV '84

³ On that day, [...] I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves.

I’m not going to try to place this in time, because God in history does this sort of thing again and again. I fear I see in some of the prophets yet another Holocaust; but I also see clearly enough that, if I were the Arab nations around Israel, I would tread very carefully after reading this prophecy. Why?

Zechariah 12

NIV '84

⁴ “On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness,” declares the

Lord. “I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations.”

All their weapons, all their armies, all their tanks—I’ll blind them.

Zechariah 12

NIV '84

⁵ Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, “The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the Lord Almighty is their God.”

⁶ On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.

Not a good time to be attacking Jerusalem.

Zechariah 12

NIV '84

⁷ The Lord will save the dwellings of Judah first, so that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem’s inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah.

⁸ On that day the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the Lord going before them.

When I read through this, I can’t help myself, I see days yet ahead of us...and perhaps not that far.

Until next time.

Transcript of a *Born to Win*
radio program by
Ronald L. Dart.

Christian Educational Ministries
P.O. Box 560 ❖ Whitehouse, Texas 75791
Phone: 1-888-BIBLE-44 ❖ Fax: (903) 839-9311
❖ www.borntowin.net ❖

The Minor Prophets #29
DATE: 1/15/08
ID: MP29