

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, like a standing ocean 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 the 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 apply only in his own day, into something that obviously has limited or even no application in his own day.

Ezekiel's Temple

Some friends and I were discussing the ideal Temple that is found in the closing Chapters of Ezekiel. That's been a long curious section of the book of prophecy that men have looked at, talked about and scholars have discussed because the Temple you find there doesn't fit any historical model at all. So people struggle with it.

One observed the serious difficulty, that commentators have found with this Temple, and then another one pointed out the similarities to the closing Chapters of the book of Revelation, the New Jerusalem, and the rivers 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, and the same outcomes.

That 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's going to happen in the future of this world that people would not understand if you explained it to them. 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, let's look where we have come in Zechariah.

Zechariah

Zechariah chapter 8 verse 20: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; it shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people and the inhabitants of many cities: 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 that Zechariah wrote this, it didn't just say, "LORD", it said Jehovah or Yahweh if you prefer.

"Let's go speedily to pray before Jehovah, and to seek Jehovah; I will go also. Yea, 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.

"Thus saith 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 anti-Semitism, now men of all nations are ready to follow a Jew anywhere. I don't think we have ever seen this at anytime in the history of the world. So I have to conclude that Zechariah has slipped far into the future on us, while not even so much as to giving us a hint, and it becomes even plainer as we pass into chapter 9.

Tyre

Zechariah chapter 9 verse 1: "The word of the LORD is against the land of Hadrak and will come to rest on Damascus. For the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on Jehovah."

Now Hadrak and Damascus were city states, which is now Syria so are the places mentioned in the next verse.

{2} "And on Hamath too, which borders on it, and on Tyre and Sidon, though they are very skillful people. {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."

Looking at the Middle East today you wouldn't even know what he's talking about. But at that time, Tyre was a major player on the Mediterranean and probably the Mediterranean power of her day. They had built quite a city there, during one war before the city was somewhat destroyed. 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 Tyre was finally destroyed. One invader built a huge causeway so all of his armies could go out and besiege the city. Tyre, by the way, had also been built with a seawall around it, and 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, and you can go out there today and you can walk out to the end of that causeway that they built and stand and look down in the water at the old ruins of Tyre.

"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} And 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 area the Palestinians hold today.

Then he goes on to say, "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 I am now keeping watch," says God."

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 has been described here. Far subsequent to this prophecy being given, Judah was overrun. and this looks down to a very, very different time in history. If anyone is in doubt, listen to what Zechariah says next.

A Prophecy About Jesus

Verse 9 of Zechariah 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 Christians knows this verse. It is from Matthew 21, Jesus was coming toward Jerusalem.

Matthew Chapter 21 and verse 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, say 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 was 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.

God Will Bring Peace

Zechariah 9 Verse 10: "I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken."

That sounds a lot like what Isaiah talks about when he says "I'll turn their spears into pruning hooks and their swords into plowshares and they won't learn war anymore."

Continuing in Zechariah, "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 and it reads like the libretto of an oratorio, and this would make a great one. What we're talking about here, looks like, the time God has brought peace to the earth.

Verse 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."

Two Sticks

Strange the words here but they hearken back to one in Ezekiel where God tells Ezekiel, "Take you two sticks, take one stick in your hand for the House of Judah, take another one for the House of Ephraim, the House of Israel, then join them together in your hand and they'll become one stick."

He seems to be talking about a time when Ephraim, as one political entity, leading the ten northern tribes of Israel, will be reunited with Judah, the House of Judah, another political entity centered in Jerusalem.

"Then the LORD," {14} "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.

Back to the Past

Zechariah 10: "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.

God Is Angry With The Leaders

Zechariah 10 Verse 3: "My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD Almighty will care for his flock, and 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, and 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: "I will strengthen the house of Judah and I'll save the House of Joseph," (Reference to the House of Ephraim). That is two different groups and two different political entities. "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 in Revelation to where you have false prophets that come out in one of the seals of the big scroll with the seven seals. 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.

Then he says in verse 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."

Where is Ephraim?

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 were carried away by the Assyrians, and to all intent and purposes they had disappeared as a people. You can 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, he foretold a time when the stick of Ephraim and the stick of Judah would once again become one in God's hand. You look for a time when all of Israel would be gathered back into the land and there would once again be one Israel. It's in the prophets, it's there, it is an end time fulfillment. Well, we'll just have to wait to see.

The Northern Ten Tribes Will Return

Verse 8 of Zechariah 10: "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 won't be room enough room for all of them."

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

Verse 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."

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 you 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.

Leaders Abusing The People

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 the time of God's intervention for our good, and at times when He's not been so happy with what we've been doing.

Zechariah 11: "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! {3} Wail oaks of Bashan; the dense forest has been cut down! 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 their neighbors and their king. They will oppress the land, and I'm not going to rescue them from their hands."

Kind of vague, exactly as to 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, selling them off, making themselves rich at the hands of others.

Favor and Union

Verse 7 of Zechariah 11, "So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs, one called Favor and the other called Union, and I pastured the flock. {8} In one month I got rid of the three shepherds."

Who are they? I have no idea.

"The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them {9} And I 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} So I took my staff called Favor and I 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 is 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 valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and I 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 silver comes right into play, at a time when people are refusing to serve God. At a time when the shepherds are selling off the flock and destroying them, now it's hard to know what to make of it, but it's sitting there for us.

Verse 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 hooves. {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! An oracle."

What do you make of that? It certainly sounds like that you're going back to a time when the brotherhood between Judah and Israel was broken? But that was long before Zechariah was ever born when that breach took place. That took place shortly after the death of Solomon when Jeroboam the first, took Israel and the ten tribes 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 and of course one foolish shepherd in that time certainly was Jeroboam the first.

Nations Gathered Against Jerusalem

Zechariah Chapter 12: "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, and when you drink it, it makes you drunk.

"Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. {3} On that day when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her."

OK, all the nations of the earth are gathered against Jerusalem. That sort of makes you think of Revelation, when all these armies assemble in the valley of Megiddo, in the day of Armageddon. They're ready to make war against Israel and start rolling down through the valleys to Jerusalem.

He said, "in 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 an Arab nations around Israel, I would tread very carefully after reading this prophecy. Why?

Verse 4, "On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness," says the LORD. "I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, and I will blind all the horses of the nations."

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

Verse 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 the 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.

Verse 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 these days ahead of us and perhaps not that far.

Until next time.

This article was transcribed with minor editing from a message given by
Ronald L. Dart titled: "The Minor Prophets #29" (MP29) 1/15/08
Transcribed by: bb 12/18/16

Ronald L. Dart is an evangelist and is heard daily and weekly
on his Born to Win radio program.

You can contact Ronald L. Dart at Christian Educational Ministries
P.O. Box 560 Whitehouse, Texas 75791
Phone: (903) 839-9300 — 1-888-BIBLE-44

www.borntowin.net