

What's the Message – Lesson 81

Our study today looks into the preaching of the second prophet present during the return of the exiles, Zechariah.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Our prayer today is that the Lord would provide us ongoing comfort through His holy Word, just as He gave comfort to the returned exiles in Jerusalem through the words of His prophets. Amen.

Last time we heard the message of the prophet Haggai. This time we hear the words of Zechariah, a younger contemporary of Haggai, who returned from Babylon in the initial resettlement group with the older Haggai, and whose ministry overlaps that of the elder man both in terms of time and focus. Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah was not only a prophet but also a priest, born in Babylon, the grandson of a high priest, who succeeded him as head of that priestly family.

The style of writing is largely apocalyptic, with visions that use similar symbolism to that used by St. John in his Revelation. Accordingly there are parallels that can be compared between the two books. We can simplify the message of this prophet by saying it was of two parts: the first being rebuke and encouragement to complete the rebuilding of the temple. But the second part of the prophet's message was to look beyond the time of rebuilding, to the glorious future that awaits the people of God. So in all aspects it can be seen – like Revelation – as a book of comfort.

His opening words are a blistering indictment on the behavior of the people. *Return to me . . . and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty. Do not be like your forefathers.* This time they heard and obeyed, and we read what followed: *Then they repented and said, the Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve.*

After this comes a series of apocalyptic visions. The first involves four horses that go throughout the earth, much like what St. John saw centuries later. Then there is a vision about the high priest being purified and his sin taken away. This is followed by a vision involving two olive trees, representing the king and the high priest.

But another vision melds these two offices into one person, which we hold to be a messianic prophecy pointing to Jesus as our High Priest and King. Then in chapter 7 we have a condemnation of mechanical ritualistic worship, instead of worship from the heart. And in chapter 8 we see how the Lord will bless the faithful. *This is what the Lord says: I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem . . . they will be My people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God. . . . Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of the Lord. . . . In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."*

In the final chapters we have a series of four oracles that are very much about the coming Messiah. All fourteen chapters of this book of Zechariah can be considered as powerful pictures of comfort to a people struggling for survival and attempting to rebuild a nation. But what is the significance for us? Teacher, what's the message we want to take from this?

We could answer your question by saying that you have already described the total message of Zechariah as being one of comfort. And you are correct in that.

Like Haggai and Ezekiel before him, Zechariah preached not only a message of deserved judgment, he also reassured the Israelites of God's love and forgiveness. But the message of Zechariah, like that of Isaiah, is unique in that it unveils some of the specific details of the coming Messiah. Let me cite a couple of familiar examples.

The entry of the Messiah into Jerusalem will be humble and not majestic, as many later expected it would be. We read in chapter 9, verse 9: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

And the purpose of the Messiah is given in the following verse: *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.*

But there is also a prophecy of some bitterness in store for both Jerusalem and the Messiah. This is given in chapter 12, verse 10: *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 Him, the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child.* So we have here some additional insights into what to expect when the Messiah comes.

But what do these passages mean to you? Are there a number of threats today, both nationally and internationally, affecting your life with economic, political, and military stress? Is there uncertainty in our world? Yes, we must admit that. Are there times when we wonder if our God is really in control, or if we should look to a human leader for our future, a false shepherd as Zechariah describes? Yes, we all know this is possible, too. This makes our situation today much like that of the people in the time of Zechariah. So where do we turn? Does the Bible give us some guidance, some reassurance that God really does control the entire world to accomplish His purposes?

Zechariah sums it up this way: *Return to me, declares the Lord Almighty, and I will return to you.*

Next time we will turn our attention to the book of Ezra.