



*Becoming Fully Devoted Followers
by Studying the Followers Before Us*

WEEK 35
ZECHARIAH

AUGUST 27-31, 2007

DAY	<i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i>	<i>ABBREVIATED STUDY</i>
Monday	Zechariah 10-14, Psalm 21	Zechariah 2:1-13, Psalm 21
Tuesday	Ezra 1-5, Psalm 22	Zechariah 4:1-14, Psalm 22
Wednesday	Ezra 6-10, Psalm 23	Zechariah 8:1-17, Psalm 23
Thursday	Nehemiah 1-3, Psalm 24	Zechariah 9:1-12, Psalm 24
Friday	Nehemiah 4-9, Psalm 25	Zechariah 14:1-11, Psalm 25 Revelation 21:1-8 & 22:1-5

READ

Zechariah 2:1-13

Psalms 21

REFLECT

The book of Zechariah comes from the last period of Israel's history recorded in the OT. A contemporary with Haggai, Zechariah also was concerned about those who had returned from exile in Babylon but who were not realizing the fullness of God's plan for them. The first eight chapters present a beautiful assurance that God will bring His new kingdom as promised, divided into (1) a promise of the new kingdom (ch.1-2); a promise of new leadership (ch.3-6); and an exhortation about living in the new kingdom (ch.7-8). The last six chapters of Zechariah, chapters 9-14, are in a very different style, and seem to be a collection of earlier prophecies, perhaps ones that were important to Zechariah. If the first eight chapters depict a smooth and beautiful future, the last six are reminders that the change from sinful ways to holy ways will also bring violent opposition, and necessitates powerful action by the Lord.

The NT has about 40 citations or references to Zechariah, showing that the impact of this book was out of proportion to its brief length. Much of this appears in the NT writings about the approaching end times. But there are also a surprising number of references from the tumultuous second half, that cluster in the accounts of the latter part of Jesus' ministry on earth. It is a reminder that the ministry of Jesus brought powerful promise but also prompted shocking violence. His disciples found great comfort in discovering that it had been prophesied, and in remarkable detail. But for now we will turn to today's passage.

Chapter two recounts a vision of two angels active in doing the Lord's bidding. They are preparing for the new time of Israel's blessing,

and also declaring it to Zechariah. Measuring Jerusalem, they find that the walls are too small to hold the blessing of population and prosperity that the Lord has in mind for His people. (Certainly today we see a Jerusalem that has far outdistanced its ancient walls.) But the greater news is that the Lord will be present both as her "national security" and as her "domestic viability"; "I will be the wall of fire around her, and the glory in her midst." And the population of the city will include "many nations" who will "join themselves to the Lord." The chapter ends with the promise that this is about to happen: "the Lord is aroused from His holy habitation!"

Included in this promise of final and full blessing is the reason that God works on behalf of Israel: "he who touches you touches the apple of His eye." It is a reference back to Deuteronomy 32:10, and evokes not only the antiquity of the special relationship between God and Israel, but also its basis in sheer love. As so often in Zechariah, the power of this phrase has lifted it out of its context, and provided comfort to many Jews and Christians in adverse circumstances (for instance, Corrie ten Boom). God's care for us, and His work on our behalf, is rooted in His unrelenting love.

RESPOND

As we have read the prophets, we have seen that Israel needed to be reminded again and again of her own failures. But she also needed to be reminded again and again of the forgiveness and the faithfulness of God. So often religion would seem to us to be about our success and God's approval. It's not. It's about our total need for God, and His total willingness to be there (here!) for us.

PRAY

"O Lord, in Thy strength the king will be glad, and in Thy salvation he will rejoice Be Thou exalted, O Lord, in Thy strength; we will sing and praise Thee in Thy power." Psalm 21:1, 13

READ

Zechariah 4:1-14

Psalm 22

REFLECT

Today's passage is in the middle of the section of Zechariah that addresses the leadership of the new kingdom in Jerusalem. In it, the two main leaders of the Jerusalem community of the day – Joshua the high priest, and Zerubbabel the prince, the descendent of David – are affirmed in their roles by the Lord Himself. Their leadership is ordained of God, but it must therefore be accomplished by reliance upon Him.

The prophecy unfolds as a vision of a scene appropriate to a temple altar: a golden lampstand holding seven lamps with seven wicks each, overshadowed on either side by two olive trees. Zechariah recognizes what the lampstand is, but asks what the trees signify. The angel to whom he is speaking seems about to reply (v. 5), but delays his answer until the end of the chapter. Instead, he gives a double message for Zerubbabel regarding his rulership of Judea.

Verse six is the key to the chapter: "Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord." The efforts of Zerubbabel to organize the resources to complete the building of the Temple need to depend on the Lord's grace and provision. Something has produced a huge "mountain" of opposition to the work; suggestions range from a self-centered attitude of Zerubbabel's, to the opposition of one or more groups in Jerusalem that didn't share his vision. Whatever the case, the way forward was for Zerubbabel to act on the belief that the building of the Temple was the Lord's own project, and would be established with worshiping cries of "Grace! Grace!" I once visited a church which had stalled in the midst of a building project, and the preacher called upon the congregation to face in the direction of the construction site and shout "Grace! Grace!" It was a memorable service; and left me with one more way to pray in dire circumstances: to shout "Grace!" at the "mountain" in the way!

A second word (verses 8-10) confirms that Zerubbabel will indeed complete the Temple. And, as is characteristic of Zechariah, we are given a phrase that finds applications in innumerable circumstances: "Who has despised the day of small things?" (verse 10). When the Lord is with His people, and the leaders are hearing from the Lord, no gain, even a small one, is to be despised.

Now the chapter reverts to the question of the two olive trees. These are the "two anointed ones," the two leaders that have been called to do God's work in God's way, Joshua (the subject of chapter 3) and Zerubbabel. The priest functions to bring Israel before God and God before Israel, and the prince functions to organize the people in effective witness to God. Together they seem to provide an ideal combination of leadership. Actually a third role is also being enacted: Zechariah and his role as prophet, in insisting that God's will and word be heard. These three roles work historically in leadership of God's people: prophets, priests, and kings. Christians rejoice in the way we see Jesus fulfilling each of these roles, and transcending them as God incarnate: the Prophet teaching God's love, the Priest providing the perfect sacrifice for sin, and the King ruling in His people today, and bringing His kingdom in fullness when He returns.

RESPOND

Psalm 22 opens with a powerful reminder of the ordeal that leadership can bring – in fact the ultimate example, evoking the very sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Jesus showed leadership in giving His life for us, that we might live. But He also calls us to follow His lead in the same attitude of self-sacrifice (Mark 8:31-38). We do appreciate a good and right leader; well, we must also follow the guidance He gives.

PRAY

Dear Lord, Thank you for the care you have for us. Thank you that it means both that You provide the human resources of care that we need, and also that You draw us into leadership ourselves, each one of us, and so to participate in the life of Your Son.

- D.D.

READ

Zechariah 8:1-17

Psalms 23

REFLECT

We have seen in Zechariah the Lord's passionate desire for the return of Israel, and for the rise of solid leadership. In today's passage we read of His passion for the people themselves, and for the way their lives can become established in peace and joy even in the smallest details. (The word in verse 2 often translated "wrath" has the meaning of passionate ardor.)

The first part of the passage expresses the Lord's insistence upon returning to Jerusalem (to the completed Temple) so that the ancient promise can be fulfilled, that "I will be your God and you shall be My people" (Exod 19:5; Zech 8:8). This means both that the city will be established in truth and holiness, and that a wonderful and blessed normalcy will return. Not only older folks, but young children as well, will throng the streets, a promise not only of a few years of calm, but of multiple generations of active cultivation of the good things in life. Here is a wonderful statement of the fact that the Lord is an avid supporter of human life as it should be, in all its limitations and possibilities. He doesn't call His people to abandon human joy and fulfillment, but rather He works to support human normalcy and fruitfulness. This is accomplished not by the neglect of the high standards and commands of the Lord, but by the very observation of His "truth and righteousness" (8:8).

The second part of the passage predicts a strenuous life for the people who are called to live in God's kingdom. It begins and ends with the exhortation, "let your hands be strong!" (8:9,13). The Temple still remains to be finished (8:9), and this surely represents the ongoing need of the inhabitants to ensure an adequate physical city in which to live and

thrive. But even more work is needed, since other efforts will also prove fruitful; the land will be blessed and bring forth the crops that it is called to produce under God, which will mean much labor for the inhabitants. This bustle of work is specifically referred to as "peace" (8:12), a reminder for us that the biblical idea of peace ("shalom") is not inactivity, but a life that brings high levels of activity and satisfaction and praise of the Lord.

The third part of the passage reiterates the need for the people of the new kingdom to abandon the resistance to God that characterized former generations, and rather to cultivate the positive relationships that are His will. They are especially reminded to treat each other well in outward ways; but there is also the deeper, inner call to appreciate the loving work of God on their behalf, and to love Him in return.

RESPOND

The rich young man who came to Jesus asking how he could gain success in religion (Mark 10:17-31) had learned one aspect of the lesson of Zechariah: he had learned how to observe the laws of outward behavior (10:19-20). Nevertheless he felt something was missing. Jesus' response to him raised the need of inward trust in God: he ought to give away all his wealth. This caused a reaction of shock in the young man, and also among Jesus' own disciples: "Who then can be saved?" (10:26). Jesus' reply makes the same point that Zechariah has made, that all the "doing" of religion needs to be undergirded by an openness to and love for God, because only God can bring success in religious endeavor. Jesus' words – "With humans it is impossible, but not with God; with God all things are possible" (10:27) – in fact seem to be a recollection of Zechariah 8:6, in today's passage. Only God can save, because we are lost. Because we are lost, God saves. This is the power of His love.

PRAY

Once again we have the opportunity to pray the 23rd Psalm, rejoicing in God's saving love.

- D.D.

READ

Zechariah 9:1-12

Psalm 24

REFLECT

The ninth chapter of Zechariah is the start of the second part of the book. The smoother argument of chapters 1-8 about the new period, its leaders, and its life, is replaced by passages that are much more fierce both in the violence they predict and in the glory they foresee. Our passage begins with a prophecy of the Lord against the historic enemies of Israel. They are listed geographically from the north to the south, as if the Lord is coming like a conquering general, sweeping down from the north to release His people from their oppressors.

Then abruptly, as the Lord approaches Israel, the tone switches from wrath to rejoicing (9:9). Jerusalem is encouraged to break out in exuberant joy, as the Lord who has vanquished all her foes now arrives to dwell with His people. His arrival on a donkey signifies that He is so powerful that He does not need to ride a horse; in fact, He has banished the horse and other trappings of warfare (9:10). The donkey was a respected beast of burden good for travel, but not for war. The Lord's arrival on a donkey, then, signifies the peace and dignity that He has restored to the land; He comes not in an armored tank, but in an ordinary civilian vehicle.

Here again as Christians we note the way short passages in Zechariah become very poignant in other contexts. Zechariah 9:9 is to our ears nothing but a clear prediction of the events of Palm Sunday – as indeed the NT notes (Matt 21:5; John 12:15). It may be that Jesus intentionally signaled the importance of His mission by choosing this way to ride into Jerusalem. In other words, the well-known prophecy of Zechariah allowed Him to express His mission in a way that evoked a deep response on the part of the people, though it prompted a vicious reaction from the leaders (John 12:16-19). Jesus never pushed His messianic claim on anyone, even at His trial (Mark 14:61-62). But

neither did He hide His light under a bushel; He allowed the people to perceive what was there, and to come to their own conclusions.

One story that highlights the poignancy of these words comes from World War I, and the liberation of Jerusalem from the Turkish Empire by the British troops. When the Turks had conquered Jerusalem centuries before, they had dismantled one of the ancient gates so that the conquering general could ride into the city on a war horse. On December 11, 1917, the British general Edmund Allenby, having routed the Turkish troops, got out of his Jeep and entered Jerusalem on foot in an intentional statement of respect for the city, and of his own Christian commitment to “follow” Jesus.

Such stories bring out the paradoxical relationship between confidence and humility. It is those who are confident of their position that can afford to be humble. Jesus was not called to discard His kingly reality by acting humble; He expressed it in humility. We ought to consider that it is when we feel out of control that we are most apt to resort to “lording it over” others. God has no such need, and His servants learn that to believe in His authority frees us from such needs to establish our own. Humility is then one of the great expressions of authority.

RESPOND

Psalm 24 is the other great Palm Sunday text. (Handel's *Messiah* features both Zechariah 9:9-10, “Rejoice Greatly, O daughter of Zion,” and Psalm 24:7-10, “Lift Up Your Heads, O Ye Gates.”) We are called by all our texts today to acknowledge the saving power of our God, and to give ourselves to joy and rejoicing! We may start by making a list of five things that are in our lives only because the Lord has brought them about.

PRAY

Dear Lord, thank You for the glimpses of glory that we see, but also for Your ongoing presence in our lives. You have given us Your peace and joy, and we thank You from the bottom of our hearts.

- D.D.

READ

Zechariah 14:1-11

Revelation 21:1-8 and 22:1-5

Psalms 25

REFLECT

Today we will explore further the way Zechariah appears in the New Testament. We mentioned earlier this week that one set of citations cluster in the accounts of the latter part of the life of Jesus. We saw one major example yesterday, with the resonance between Zechariah 9:9 and Palm Sunday. Matthew makes the most of these references, which comports with his special interest in highlighting the fulfillment of prophecy. Thus Matthew 26:28 echoes the language of the “blood of the covenant” of Zechariah 9:11. Matthew 26:31 and 56 see fulfillment of the prediction of Zechariah 13:7 that “I [the Lord] will strike the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter.” And Matthew 27:9-10 finds many details corroborating Judas’ betrayal and death with Zechariah 11:12-13. One can imagine the amazement of the disciples reading OT passages like these, no doubt weeks or months later, and finding detailed descriptions of the horrifying events of Jesus’ arrest, betrayal, and death. What a wonderful confirmation of God’s plan for redemption, that even the gruesome details of the death of Jesus were foreseen long ago.

But another set of references to Zechariah has to do with events that we are still waiting to see. As we read Zechariah 14:1-11, we are again in the context of a final battle. The nations are successful in defeating Jerusalem until the Lord Himself begins to fight, at which point they are entirely routed. And then the approach of the Lord to take and rule Jerusalem again becomes the central theme. The local mountains are shifted to make way for His glorious approach, a massive earthquake that prefaces the arrival of God and all His angels. His rule is characterized by unlimited light and unlimited water (where have we encountered those themes?). The Lord is the only God acknowledged in all the earth, which in itself stabilizes relationships with all the other

nations. And the climactic element of the vision is that life is good, for “there is no curse.”

In the NT book of Revelation, in the passages noted above, we find that these promises are still alive, still yet to be accomplished, still ours to long for. The rich imagery of Zechariah is now transmuted into a Christian key, a vision of “the throne of God and of the Lamb.” The city of Jerusalem is made new, and is presented as the promise of God’s dwelling among us (21:2-3). All that is painful and hurtful is moving into the past (21:4); “there shall no longer be any curse” (22:3). Instead the healthfulness and fruitfulness of life are symbolized in the abundance of light and of water, the blessed resources of God Himself (22:1, 5). Such are the promised perfections of the life to come: full healing and restoration of the ravages of sin, and full resources for a new and almost inconceivably positive life ahead.

Today we fall between these times prophesied by Zechariah. We know the coming of Christ, and as Christians we receive deep and powerful benefits from His death and resurrection. We have seen and known the hope of Israel. But the story is not done. There is still a world that needs to hear of the love of God, before God is willing to say that this phase has been accomplished. He calls us to worship, and witness, and work together as He fulfills the goals of the present age, in preparation for the next.

RESPOND

Psalms 25 expresses beautifully the attitude of the believer “in between the times” who knows God’s deep grace, and therefore knows that even more is needed. As we pray this Psalm, we find ourselves looking toward God for deliverance, for teaching and growth, for forgiveness from sin, for the necessities of life, for personal comfort, for protection, and – yes – for ultimate redemption.

PRAY

“Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; for Thee I wait all the day.” Psalms 25:5

- Dave Dorman