

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY IN THE MINOR PROPHETS - PART ELEVEN - THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Zephaniah wrote about when the Lord would come, on the 'day of the Lord'. Haggai talked about why He would come, to build His temple in the hearts of men, which is to be our priority. Zechariah now drew these threads together and described who would come. The second half of his book gives the clearest picture since the second half of the book of Isaiah of how Christ will be recognisable when He finally arrives.

'Zechariah' means 'God has remembered'. After the long years of exile in Babylon it must have seemed like God had forgotten. Following the miraculous return of many Jews in 536BC, liberated by King Cyrus, there were 16 discouraging years in which Jerusalem remained rundown and the temple unbuilt. Again it must have seemed as if God had forgotten His people. Then God raised up 2 prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, at the same time each with a powerful but encouraging message. There were two leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, waiting to respond to God's direction when it came. Of course God had not forgotten. He was just waiting until there was someone listening. He still is.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND is exactly the same as that for Haggai, except that Zechariah's ministry went on longer, and he was able to explain the significance of the events which unfolded after the temple was rebuilt. Zechariah was the grandson of Iddo, one of the priests who returned in 536BC,(Neh.12:4) and therefore presumably a young man when his prophecy began. As part of a priestly family he had a special understanding of the significance of the temple sacrifices.(3:1-5)

Joshua and Zerubbabel are again the key figures in this book. The role of Joshua in chapter 3 gives a unique insight into the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus 'wore' our sin as Joshua wore dirty clothes. Satan must have accused Jesus of our sin as Joshua was accused. But God's answer on both occasions was that the dirt had been taken away and a new life given in its place.

The 'Branch',(3:8) takes up another familiar theme from Isa.11:1 and Jer.23:5 which looks forward to the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. 'Netser' in Hebrew means branch. 'He shall be called a Nazarene',(Matt.2:23) seems to be a play on this word. In 6:11 the picture is taken a stage further with the thought that Joshua would wear a crown. No Old Testament priest could be king because he would be from the wrong tribe, but Jesus would one day be both high priest and king.

The significance of these two characters provides a good way of outlining the first 8 chapters:

1. Return to God because His word reminds of how His warnings to His people in the past were carried out. He knows exactly what is happening in our lives and the forces which will arise against us in the future from which He is the only protection.
2. If we trust Him, He will bless us beyond measure and live among us, so that people of all nations will be drawn to Him.

3. The secret of God's blessing on us lies in the death of our High Priest on the cross as pictured by the way Joshua wore dirty clothes and was accused by Satan. This will make possible the coming of the Branch, resurrection life from the dead.
4. The work of Zerubbabel is pictured as 2 olive trees giving oil and so light to 2 lampstands. The risen Messiah will give life to Jew and Gentile, (Rev.1:12,20) and be the source of our power.(4:6)
5. God's word warns of judgement on those who reject His salvation and worship the woman who symbolises wickedness, like the harlot of Revelation.(Rev.17)
6. God knows that His people will take His message of peace to the ends of the earth when they not only trust their High Priest to take away their sin but make Him King and share His resurrection life at the same time?
7. When God's people know His message of forgiveness and new life, it will show in both genuine worship and a practical concern for the needy.
8. God will be present among His people, restoring life to normal, giving peace, strength and provision such that those who do not know the Lord will see how immensely attractive the Christian message is.

Chapters 1-8 answered the question 'Who?' by developing Old Testament symbols in which Jesus Christ was foreshadowed. They draw together so many ways in which the Christ had already been anticipated. Now chapters 9-14 present us with the Jesus of the New Testament in a series of amazing prophecies each of which is later identified as referring to Him. Christ in the OT is Jesus in the NT

9. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is prophesied.(9:9; Matt.21:5) He would ride into the city not as a conqueror in a chariot but on the back of a donkey. He would be in human terms a contradiction, a king who was humble who came to save not oppress.
10. On Jesus would be built His church. He would be the cornerstone and the tent peg rejected by the religious leaders.(10:4; Lk.20:17; Eph.2:20; I Pet.2:6)
11. He would be betrayed by a supposed follower, an unfaithful shepherd, for 30 pieces of silver which would later be thrown down in the temple and used to buy the potter's field.(11:12,13; Matt.26:15; 27:3-10)
12. He would be pierced on the cross while His own people looked on so that the Holy Spirit could be poured out into our lives.(12:13; Jn.19:37; Acts 2:17)
13. At His arrest His followers would all run away; they would be tested and come back to Him.(13:7,9; Matt.26:31; Lk.22:31,32)
14. He would stand on the Mount of Olives first before His death, then before His ascension and finally at His return.(14:4; Lk.22:39; Acts 1:9-12)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Who was Zechariah? How old was he? How was his home background reflected in this book?
2. When did Zechariah prophesy? Which other prophets were ministering at the same time? What were the circumstances facing the Jews at this time? What therefore would be their spiritual and practical needs in the light of such conditions? How do people in the modern world face similar conditions?

3. What does the name Zechariah mean? How does his name sum up his message? Where else in the Old Testament had God 'remembered' and with what effect?
4. What did we decide when studying Haggai that Joshua and Zerubbabel symbolised and why? What is promised here to each of them? Where in the New Testament are the same promises made to us?
5. What other familiar Old Testament symbols are used in the book of Zechariah? How does understanding each help us to understand this book?
6. What parallels can you find between Zechariah 1-8 and Revelation? How does each parallel help in understanding both books?
7. How many messages are contained in chapters 1-8? What is the theme of each message? Give a heading to each chapter?
8. In chapters 9-14 each chapter contains at least one prophecy concerning Christ. Find them and identify where in the NT each one is fulfilled or referred to.
9. Now go through each chapter, 9-14, presenting the chapter as a development of the prophecy about Christ it contains.
10. Zechariah 1-8 and 9-14 seem completely different in message and style? Why are they in the same book? How do the two parts form a link between the OT and the NT?
11. What is Zechariah's message for today? Zechariah said when Christ would come - the day of the Lord. Haggai told us why Christ would come - to build His temple, us, the church. What was Zechariah's contribution?