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MINISTRIES

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Minor Prophets, Major Messages | Zechariah: YHWH Has Remembered

The so-called “Minor Prophets” are a collection of twelve prophetic books in the Tanakh—that is, the Old Testament. Even though they are called the “Minor Prophets,” these books contain “major messages” that remain relevant to believers today. In this series, we will unpack the major messages of each Minor Prophet. We will discuss their practical applications for believers today and how they connect to the Messiah’s work and teachings in the New Testament.

In this teaching, we are looking at the Book of Zechariah. Let’s dive in.

Zechariah: An Overview

Zechariah’s name means “YHWH has remembered,” which fits the overall theme of the book (J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Prophets* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 240). He prophesied during the time when the Jewish people were returning to Jerusalem following their exile in Babylon. The returning exiles undoubtedly had high expectations that God’s glorious promises concerning the Messianic kingdom were about to be fulfilled. During the exile, prophets like Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel declared that when the people return to the land, there would be peace and safety in the land, the kingdom would be united and wholeheartedly devoted to YHWH, and the Messiah would establish his reign over all the nations (e.g., Isaiah 40-55; Jeremiah 30-33; Ezekiel 34:23-31). However, as we read in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, those prophecies were not fulfilled when the Jews returned from exile.

This was the disappointing and anti-climactic situation at the time of Zechariah’s prophecies. However, Zechariah comforts those discouraged by present circumstances, assuring them that they will soon rejoice (Zechariah 4:10). YHWH has remembered his promises. According to Zechariah, those prophecies were just in the beginning stages of fulfillment. Thus, along with the Prophet Haggai, Zechariah admonishes the people to reconstruct the temple in Jerusalem and tells them they should expect God to fulfill his promises (Ezra 5:1-2).

The book is divided into two main sections: chapters 1-8 contain eight of Zechariah’s symbolic visions, while chapters 9-14 consist of oracles and prophecies.

Regarding the first section, in the first vision (Zechariah 1:7-17), Zechariah sees a vision of horsemen that God sent to “patrol the earth,” and they report that all the nations are at rest, indicating an era of peace. During this vision, YHWH declares that he will have mercy on Jerusalem, his house will be rebuilt in the city, and the people will prosper.

In the second vision (Zechariah 1:18-21), Zechariah sees four horns, symbolizing the nations of Assyria and Babylon that scattered and oppressed God’s people. These two nations might be envisioned as two fierce bulls, each with two horns, hence the description “four horns.” Afterward, he sees four craftsmen scattering the horns, symbolizing Persia acting as God’s instrument of judgment against the nations that oppressed God’s people. Here, the meaning behind the number “four” is uncertain, but it may be used simply to match the image of four horns. (Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 214-215).

In the third vision (Zechariah 2:1-13), Zechariah sees a man with a measuring line, symbolizing the future expansion of Jerusalem. God promises to dwell among the people and declares that many nations will turn to him and become his people.

In the fourth vision (Zechariah 3:1-10), Zechariah sees the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of YHWH in filthy garments, with Satan accusing him. YHWH rebukes Satan and commands that Joshua’s filthy garments be removed, symbolizing the removal of sin. Joshua is then clothed in clean garments, symbolizing God’s forgiveness. The angel admonishes Joshua to walk in God’s ways and promises to send the “Branch” to the people, a title that Jeremiah and Isaiah use to describe the Messiah (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Isaiah 11:1).

In the fifth vision (Zechariah 4:1-4), Zechariah sees a golden lampstand with seven lamps and two olive trees. Golden oil is poured out from golden pipes beside the two olive trees, symbolizing God’s Spirit empowering Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple.

In the sixth vision (Zechariah 5:1-4), Zechariah sees a flying scroll inscribed with curses against thieves and liars, symbolizing God’s judgment upon sin.

In the seventh vision (Zechariah 5:5-11), Zechariah sees a woman, representing wickedness, inside of a basket, representing iniquity. Two women with wings carry the basket away, symbolizing the removal of wickedness and iniquity from the land.

Finally, in the eighth vision (Zechariah 6:1-8), Zechariah sees four chariots with different-colored horses coming out from between two mountains. Like in the first vision, these chariots “patrol the earth” and report that the nations are at rest, once again indicating an era of peace.

The purpose of all eight visions was to assure the people that God’s promises would eventually come to pass, even though, at the time, it seemed doubtful that things would get better. After these visions, the book goes on to describe a surprising word from YHWH. He commands the people to make a silver and gold crown and place it on the head of Joshua, the high priest:

Zechariah 6:11-13

Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. And say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts, “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD [YHWH]. It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD [YHWH] and

shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”

We will discuss this passage more later, but here, Joshua is presented as a symbol of the coming “Branch,” which again, is a title for the Messiah. This coming Branch will build the temple, bear royal honor, and sit on the throne as priest and king.

Notably, Zechariah concludes this symbolic action by announcing that the arrival of this Messianic kingdom was actually dependent upon the people obeying God:

Zechariah 6:15

And this shall come to pass, if you will diligently obey the voice of the LORD [YHWH] your God.”

After this, Zechariah admonishes the people to pursue sincere obedience. He urges them to show kindness, justice, and mercy, and to stop oppressing each other (Zechariah 7:1-14). He also speaks of the blessings for Jerusalem if the people follow God’s ways with sincerity (Zechariah 8:1-21).

This brings us to the second section of the book, which consists of oracles and prophecies concerning the coming Messianic kingdom. Zechariah prophesies of the coming Messiah, who is depicted as a humble king riding to Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). Zechariah goes on to encourage the people to seek YHWH, promising hope and provision. Zechariah then describes a symbolic narrative where he acts as a shepherd who cares for God’s people. However, the people reject his care, symbolizing the people’s rejection of the true shepherd.

According to Zechariah, this rejection will not last forever though. Zechariah goes on to say that YHWH will someday pour out a spirit of grace upon his people, and they will look upon the one whom they have pierced and mourn for him:

Zechariah 12:10

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

After this, Zechariah speaks of a future time of cleansing and purification. False prophets and idols will be eliminated from the land (Zechariah 13:1-9). The book concludes with a vision of the New Jerusalem, where YHWH establishes his reign over all the earth:

Zechariah 14:9

And the LORD [YHWH] will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD [YHWH] will be one and his name one.

When this future kingdom arrives, the nations will come to Jerusalem to worship YHWH and celebrate Sukkot (Zechariah 14:16-19), a festival where the Torah is read before all the people (Deuteronomy 31:9-13). This vision aligns with other prophecies about the nations coming to Jerusalem to learn the Torah (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4).

Zechariah's Major Message

According to Zechariah, “YHWH has remembered” his promises concerning the Messianic kingdom, but the timing of their fulfillment remains uncertain. These prophecies did not come to pass in Zechariah's time, perhaps because the people failed to be faithful to God (Zechariah 6:15).

Nevertheless, the book of Zechariah encourages us to trust that God's promises *will* come to pass, and to be faithful to God in the meantime. The question is, are we ready to receive the promised kingdom? And if we say that we are, we should start living like members of the kingdom now. What does that look like? Yeshua, or Jesus as he was called in the first century, explained what it looks like during his Sermon on the Mount. He said that if we want to be members of the kingdom, our righteousness must surpass the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). That means we should follow the commandments better than them. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, who often preached but did not practice the commandments (Matthew 23:3), Yeshua's followers must teach *and do* the commandments (Matthew 5:19).

Are you ready to live in the kingdom to come? Prove it by living as a member of the kingdom now.

Interesting Connections

As we mentioned earlier, in chapter 6, a symbolic action is performed where the people place a crown upon the head of Joshua, the high priest. Joshua is presented as a symbol of the coming Messiah:

Zechariah 6:11-13

Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. And say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts, “**Behold, the man whose name is the Branch:** for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD [YHWH]. It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD [YHWH] and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”’

So, this passage teaches us some interesting things about what the Messiah will be like. The Messiah is symbolized as a priest who sits on the throne as king. In other words, the Messiah will fulfill two roles—that of a priest, and that of a king. He will fulfill both priestly duties, such as making atonement for sin, and royal duties, such as ruling the people with justice and saving them from their enemies. It is also interesting to note that this particular high priest is named Joshua, or Yehoshua in Hebrew. Yehoshua is the long form of the name Yeshua, Jesus.

As we learn in the New Testament, the Messiah is in fact named Yeshua, and he fulfills both priestly and kingly roles. Yeshua fulfilled his role as priest by making atonement for sin through his death on the cross. He will return as king to save his people from their enemies and rule the world in justice.

Hebrews 9:28

So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Revelation 19:11-16

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his

head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

How Zechariah Points to the Messiah

The New Testament authors draw upon Zechariah's prophecies about the Messiah and apply them directly to Yeshua. For instance, in Matthew 21:1-11, Yeshua enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey, and Matthew quotes Zechariah 9:9, explicitly identifying Yeshua as the humble Messianic king.

Additionally, Zechariah 12:10 speaks of one who is pierced and over whom the people mourn. Jewish interpretive tradition has long identified this figure as a type of Messiah (David C. Mitchell, "Messiah bar Ephraim in the Targums," *Aramaic Studies* 4.2 (2006): 221-41). John states that this prophecy was fulfilled after one of the soldiers pierced Yeshua's side with a spear during his crucifixion (John 19:34, 37). The Book of Revelation also applies this image to Yeshua:

Revelation 1:7

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Undoubtedly, from the perspective of the New Testament authors, Yeshua is the "pierced one" of Zechariah 12:10.

Beyond fulfilling Zechariah's prophecies, Yeshua also echoed Zechariah's major message. Like Zechariah, Yeshua urged his disciples to trust that the kingdom will eventually fully arrive. Also like Zechariah, Yeshua exhorted his followers to live as active members of that kingdom in the present. For instance, in Acts 1:6-7, just before his ascension, the disciples asked Yeshua if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at that time. Yeshua redirected their focus, emphasizing that the timing was in God's hands and that their mission was to be witnesses of the coming kingdom, starting in Jerusalem and extending to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

And that is Zechariah's major message: live out the kingdom in the present while maintaining hope in the fulfillment of God's promises in the future. If we say that we are ready to receive the kingdom, we should start living like members of the kingdom now. God has remembered his promises, and he will be faithful to fulfill them. Will we be faithful to him as we wait on his timing?

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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