

# Zechariah 5-8: The Future for God's People

## Introduction

In the previous lesson, we noted the first five of eight visions Zechariah had on the night of February 24, 519 B.C. These visions were given to encourage the people in the reconstruction of the temple and to show them that God was on their side. Their efforts were not going to be thwarted. The remaining three visions are important in that they promise future glory for continued obedience to God's commands.

## The sixth vision – the flying scroll

Sometime after the vision in chapter four, Zechariah lifts his eyes and sees a flying scroll. The scroll was very large and was suspended in the air for all to see. Zechariah can give his audience the exact measurements – ten by twenty cubits or fifteen by thirty feet. The size of the scroll was as large as the holy place inside the temple (Exodus 26:15-25) and as large as the porch Solomon built on the temple, 1 Kings 6:3. Some have suggested that the size of the scroll and the holy place being the same demonstrated the need for holiness and reverence for all who came there.

The scroll contained writing on both sides. On one side was God's prohibition against stealing. The other side contained prohibitions against swearing. Stealing was a sin against another person and swearing is a sin against God. The interpreting angel said that those who were guilty of these sins would *be purged away according to the writing on the other side*, 5:3. This scroll was going to go forth (5:4) and would judge the people based on their actions. Those who sinned against others and against God would be punished. Had the people become lax in their character since their return from Babylon? It is possible. But overall, the Jewish people needed to understand that they were going to be obligated to live righteously to receive the promised blessings.

## The seventh vision – the ephah and the woman

Next, Zechariah is shown an ephah. This was most likely a basket or large barrel. An ephah is roughly the equivalent to 38.86 quarts.<sup>1</sup> Some commentators liken the ephah to the size of a bushel. It was the largest of dry measures used by the Israelites.<sup>2</sup> The ephah represented the people of wickedness in their land. The ephah had a lead cover, 5:7. The talent of lead was often used to weigh out gold and silver. It was heavy, and that it was used as the cover on this basket indicates it was needed to keep whatever was inside the basket from escaping.

The lead cover was lifted and inside sat a woman, 5:7. It would be impossible for a woman to fit inside a bushel basket. The usage of the term ephah only describes what type of basket it was. Like the very large flying scroll in the previous vision, here we have a very large basket with a lead cover keeping a woman inside. In 5:8, the visiting angel describes what the woman represented. *This is wickedness!* Does she try to escape? Immediately he throws the lid back over the basket. She symbolized all the evil in the land and the sin that was tolerated by the people.

Next, two women with wings came and lifted the basket, 5:9. These women had wings like a stork. Zechariah wishes to know *Where are they taking the ephah?* 5:10. It has been suggested that these two women represent the removal of evil from the land. The women carried the ephah to the land of Shinar, 5:11. The mention of the land of Shinar is significant. It is first mentioned in Genesis 10:10-11 and has always been associated as a place full of rebellion against God. It is important to keep in mind that Shinar in Zechariah is not a literal place, but a place symbolic of the realm of evil dominated by Satan. The main point of both visions in Zechariah 5 is that God was going to remove all the evil from the land. The people needed to have complete and total separation from influences of evil. God had separated this people to Himself. Do you see any parallels with New Testament teaching on this matter?

## The eighth vision – the four chariots.

Next Zechariah sees four chariots coming out between two bronze mountains, 6:1. Four is the Bible number symbolizing “completeness.” Bronze seems to symbolize the enduring nature of the mountains<sup>3</sup>. Many have speculated as to which two mountains in the land of Palestine might fit this prophecy. There is no way to know, and it matters little anyway. The first chariot was pulled by red horses. The second chariot was pulled by black horses; the third with white horses; the fourth was pulled with *strong dappled* horses, 6:3. Red is the color for war. Black usually symbolizes death. White horses point to victory. The *strong dappled* color may point to a plague or disease. These colors are said to represent the different types of judgment God would bring on those needing justice.

Zechariah inquires as to the meaning of this vision, 6:4. The attending angel answers that these were *the four spirits of heaven, going forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth*, 6:5. They stood ready at the call of God to execute judgment. The black horses headed off to the north country and the white ones followed. The north country was the home of the Assyrians and Babylonians. While it is true that the Assyrians and Babylonians had both fallen, the spirit of persecution and torture that characterized these nations still existed in the Persian nation. The *dappled* ones went to the south – toward Egypt, 6:6. With forces in both the north and south being dealt with, this symbolized that God was going to punish all the world powers for their wickedness. A time of peace and prosperity for Jerusalem and the people of Judah would be forthcoming.

Who are the *strong ones* as mentioned in 6:7? Some believe this refers to the red horses. Others suggest this is a fifth chariot. Could it be the *strong dappled* horses (the fourth chariot)? Not only did they seem excited to go to the south country, but they wanted to patrol the entire earth. The Lord said, *Go, patrol the earth. So they patrolled the earth*, 6:7. As the horses travel out doing the Lord's business, their actions *appeased My wrath in the land of the north*, 6:8. God proclaimed victory. His purposes had been carried out.

## The symbolic crowning of Joshua

How long the contents of the rest of chapter six are from the night of the visions Zechariah received is not known. Some believe that the following events take place the next day. The word of the Lord came to Zechariah telling him to take an offering from Babylonian exiles, make *an ornate crown* and *set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest*, 6:11. Under Old Testament law, high priests did not

wear a crown, but a turban or headpiece, 3:5. Why this crown is to be placed on Joshua's head will be seen as we continue through the chapter. It is interesting that Zerubbabel is not mentioned here. To place a crown on his head would have symbolized the return of power to the earthly Davidic kingdom. But with the crown being placed on the head of Joshua, it symbolized a priestly-king and beginning in 6:12 we see some Messianic applications. Zechariah was to say,

'Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.'

The *Branch* mentioned in 6:12 is Jesus. He was going to build a temple. Not the physical temple being built by the people of Zechariah's day, but a spiritual temple, His church. These passages do not look ahead to a future literal temple built for Jesus in Jerusalem, but a spiritual temple built by Jesus where He *will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne*, 6:13. There are several passages which demonstrate that this spiritual temple is in existence now. See 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21; and 1 Peter 2:5. The crown Zechariah made was to be placed in the temple as a reminder. All that saw it would *know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. And it will take place if you completely obey the Lord your God*, 6:15.

## Fasting or feasting?

Almost two years later, on December 7, 518 B.C., Zechariah receives a message from God. Sharezer and Regemmelech had been sent by the people of Bethel to inquire of the Lord on His requirements for fasting. This question was asked of the priests and prophets at the house of the Lord, still under construction, 7:3. The men ask the priests and prophets, *Shall I weep in the fifth month and abstain, as I have done these many years?* God's reply came through Zechariah. God's answer consisted of three questions.

*When you fasted...these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted?* The fast in the fifth month was to cause Jews to remember the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians. The seventh month fast was to remember the last governor of Judah, Gedaliah, who was assassinated by the Babylonians.<sup>4</sup> Did God command the Jews to observe these feasts? The only fasting required by Old Testament law was on the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 23:27. The fasts these two were asking about were manmade. God had not regulated that they observe these fasts.

*When you eat and drink, do you not eat...and...drink for yourselves?* Many of their feasts were not commanded by God. God also wanted to know if they would listen to the words of the prophets who had come before the destruction of their nation. Had their forefathers listened to those prophets, the current conversation would have been unnecessary since the nation would not have been destroyed.

## Do not reject the Lord's word

God once again speaks through Zechariah and reminds them of the need for good moral living. Each person was to *dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother*, 7:9. God wanted the hearts of the people to be pure, 7:10. What God wanted out of the people before they were

destroyed was what He wanted out of the remnant: righteousness and holiness. The earlier generations had refused to *pay attention and...stopped their ears from hearing*, 7:11. They shut their hearts to the point where absolutely nothing could penetrate. *Therefore, great wrath came from the Lord of hosts*, 7:12. God then recounts how He scattered them because of their stubbornness and hardness of heart, 7:13-14.

## A coming peace and prosperity

Chapter eight continues the answer to the question raised by Sharezer and Regemmelech in 7:3. This is now seen from a more positive and futuristic perspective. God had an extreme love (jealously, 8:2) for Zion. God wanted to raise up Zion to a place of prominence. In verse three, God promises to dwell amid Jerusalem. The city would be called the City of Truth. The city had been purged of idolatry and wickedness. God once again would dwell there again. It would once again become a place of peace and safety, 8:4-5. Up to this point, Jerusalem had not been in this condition: it was anything but a place of safety and peace. If this seemed impossible to the people, with God all things are possible, 8:6. God would bring the Jews back to their homeland from the east and the west, 8:7. God wanted a relationship with His people, 8:8.

In verses nine through thirteen, we see more promises laid down for the people of Zechariah's day. God encourages them in the work they are working and reminds them that He was going to be with them. Zechariah reminds the people of how the conditions were before the temple reconstruction began. There was no work and no peace. All was uncertain, 8:9-10. God then promises that He would not deal with them *as in the former days*, 8:11. Days of peace and prosperity were coming. Crops would produce, famine will be absent, and the stigma that was associated with being a Jew would disappear, 8:13. God promises to *do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear!* 8:15.

These promises of blessings were conditional. God's people were expected to *speak the truth to one another, judge with truth... [not] devise evil, ...and do not love perjury*, 8:16-17. The times of fasting that the people had remembered would now become times of *joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts*, 8:19. The fast of the fourth month was to remember the piercing of the walls of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The fast of the fifth and seventh months have already been described earlier in this lesson. The fast of the tenth month was to commemorate the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem.

As the Jews would once again begin to prosper, *many peoples and mighty nations* would come to Jerusalem, 8:22-23. The blessings that the Lord was pouring out on His people would be seen by many people and they would wish to partake in it. These words would have been of the ultimate encouragement to people still engaged in a massive project like rebuilding the temple. With this, the first major section of the book of Zechariah ends. Chapters nine through fourteen seem to be written sometime later, which will be discussed in the next lesson.

## For Discussion

1. What is the main message behind the three remaining visions in Zechariah 5-6?

2. What is the meaning and message of the sixth vision? (5:1-4)
  
3. What is the meaning and message of the seventh vision? (5:5-11)
  
4. Where is the land of Shinar and what does it represent in the seventh vision?
  
5. What is the meaning and message of the eighth vision? (6:1-8)
  
6. Do you see a connection between the first and the eighth vision? If so, what?
  
7. What are the Messianic applications of 6:9-15?
  
8. Who had initiated the feasts mentioned in 7:1-3?
  
9. How does God first answer the question raised in 7:3? See 7:4-7.
  
10. Describe how Israel would be blessed in the future. Upon what were these blessings conditioned?

## (Endnotes)

- 1 Hailey, Homer, E. *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Religious Supply, 1993), p. 345
- 2 Smith, James E. *The Minor Prophets*. p. 550
- 3 Hailey, Homer, E. *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Religious Supply, 1993), p. 346
- 4 Smith, James E. *The Minor Prophets*. p. 550

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