

GOD ENCOURAGES HIS PEOPLE – ZECHARIAH 1:1-17

In the eighth month of the Jewish religious year (Marcheshvan), and two months after the elderly Haggai began prophesying, the young Zechariah (2:4) began to prophesy in the second year of King Darius, in 520 BC. Usually, the dating relates to the reign of the kings of Judah and Israel, however, both Zech. 1:1 and Haggai 1:1 indicates these are ‘the times of the Gentiles’ (cf. Lk. 21:24).

Zechariah was from a priestly family. He was also a prophet (Zech. 1:1). His name means “God remembers” (i.e. His people). In fact, Zechariah (‘Jehovah remembers’) + Berechiah (‘Jehovah blesses’) + Iddo (‘in His time’) = ‘Jehovah will remember His people and bless them in His appointed time’.

At the beginning of the prophecy God called His people to repentance by reminding them of how their forefathers’ sins had brought about the wrath of God (Zech. 2:1), resulting in being taken into exile by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar (605, 597, 586 BC). The Babylonians had since been conquered by Cyrus the Great and the Medo-Persians, to which Cyrus’ nephew, Darius, belonged. (This was Darius the Persian/the Great, who reigned from 522-486 BC, and not Daniel’s Darius the Mede who reigned 538-536 BC).

Zechariah was impressing upon these returned Jews not to slip back into their old habits. God had been abundantly gracious to them for directing Cyrus to issue the decree (538 BC) allowing the first wave of forty-three thousand Jews to return in the *aliyah* with Zerubbabel to begin rebuilding the second temple. For the next eighteen years, however, their vulnerability and weakness bore the brunt of local opposition which hampered the construction (Ezra 6:14). Nevertheless, it recommenced in 520 and was eventually completed in 515 BC.

Through Zechariah, God was emphasising to the people to be faithful and obedient, ³ Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, **Turn ye unto me**, saith the LORD of hosts [*reinforcing His authority*], and **I will turn** unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. ⁴ Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, **Turn** ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD.

God was promising them His blessing on condition they trusted in Him, and He emphasised His point by reminding them, ⁵ Your fathers, where are they *Itoday?* By implication, they are not here for they were removed because of their disobedience! ... and the prophets, do they live for ever? ... alluding to how there had been no prophetic utterances during the eighteen years from the Jewish *aliyah* to Jerusalem until Haggai and Zechariah began prophesying. ... It is a judgment when God stops speaking! However, when the people repented, God honoured their decision, ⁶ But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and *they returned* and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

Three months later (v.7), - on the 24th day of the eleventh month, Shabbat (cf. Hag. 1:15 [5 months before] and 2:10 [2 months before]), - another prophecy came from the Lord through Zechariah, consisting of eight visions (revelations given by God), from 1:7 to 6:15. They began with the vision of the horseman (1:7-17), which illustrated how God was watching the nations, ⁸ I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom [*the ravine, glen, hollow*], and behind him were there red horses [*chestnut colour*], speckled, and white. ... In the ancient world, a horse was associated with war and conflict (e.g. Zech. 10:3 and Rev. 6:1-8) ... a red horse symbolised blood, judgment and vengeance, and white was the symbol of victory

and triumph. ... Therefore, the scene is set for war and conflict, and the 'bottom/ravine' refers to the Kidron Valley, outside the city of Jerusalem, on the east, where it connects to the Valley of Hinnom. In this 'glen', a rider sat on a red horse, surrounded by plush myrtle bushes, and behind him were more horses, chestnut-coloured, speckled, and white.

Immediately Zechariah enquired of the interpreting angel the meaning of what he saw. The angel preceded to tell him (v.9) the riders on the many red horses, speckled, and white (v.8) belonged to the army of the man riding upon the red horse (v.8a), - their commander-in-chief, - and they were those whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through *Ipatroll* the earth (v.10).

Zechariah was then given the identity of the commander-in-chief (a man riding upon a red horse, v.8). This was 'the angel of the Lord' Who is consistently identified throughout the Old Testament as the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ (Gen. 16:7-12; 21:17-18; 22:11-18; Ex. 3:2; Judges 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11-24; 13:3-22; II Sam. 24:16; Zech. 1:12; 3:1; 12:8). In several of these appearances, those who witnessed seeing 'the angel of the Lord' testified afterwards they had seen the Lord. Therefore, this man on the red horse, among the myrtle trees is the Lord Jesus, in the Old Testament (a 'Christophany'), preparing to embark upon leading His army into the impending battle.

He is on His horse, ready for war, with His hosts, among the 'myrtle trees', - in the ravine outside Jerusalem, - a 'hollow', a lowly place, a deep valley, out of sight, looking and waiting for when to enter and recapture the beloved city and to revive and reinstate its temple. ... He, the Angel of the Lord, is at the head of His army, anticipating the instruction to go forward into Jerusalem. Of this Angel of the Lord, David had written, **Ps. 34:7** The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. ... This was Jerusalem's

deliverance being promised! ... The Rider on the red horse, among the myrtle trees, down in the ravine, waiting, at the head of His army on red, sorrel, and white horses ... prepared for coming back to Jerusalem, judging the nations, reinstating the capital, and re-establishing the name and presence of Jehovah in the ancient city of King David. Over fifty years earlier, as Ezekiel anticipated, **Ezek. 43:1** Afterward he [an angel, *Ezek. 40:3*] brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: **2** And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory. ... **4** And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. **5** So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house.

Jerusalem and Israel had fallen to foreign pagan nations and had been desecrated with idolatry ... While God had previously returned the Jews to their beloved city, there remained mighty forces with which they had to contend, and this was God's promise to His people He would ultimately lead them to victory! ... And He did, for He brought them into their city again with Zerubbabel, and later Nehemiah, and evicted the likes of Tobiah, Sanballat, Geshem, and the surrounding enemies. However, this prophecy of Zechariah also reaches far beyond for it hails the greater fulfilment when, - at the conclusion of this prophecy, - and when the children of God are in the 'hollow' fearing their enemies, **Zech. 14:1** Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. **2** For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. ... The terrible time of Jacob's trouble, **Jer. 30:7**, - but at that point, and at that time, - but he shall be saved out of it, **Jer. 30:7**, - for the Lord Who has been waiting at the head of His army, **Zech. 14:3** Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. **4** And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very

great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south ... ⁷ But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light. ... ⁹ And the LORD shall be king over all the earth (cf. Rev. 19:1-6).

It is the same prophecy spoken by the Lord Jesus to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem, **Lk. 21:20** And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. ²¹ Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. ²² For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. ²³ ... for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. ²⁴ And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

God is watching over His people, and He has not taken His eye off them for in answer to Zechariah's question, O my lord, what are these? (1:9), the Angel of the Lord replied, - they are on patrol across the earth, these are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth (v.10). ... They are watching and ensuring nothing disrupts God's plan! Satan and his minions are all over the place for he is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, **Eph. 6:12** we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places ... *But* our God is greater and stronger for before Him "devils fear and fly". ... And the rewards and blessings reserved for God's victorious people are beyond the limits of our imaginations for when the next question was asked, ¹² O LORD of hosts, *how long* wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? ... the answer came immediately, ¹³ And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words *[God's answer]*. ¹⁴ So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy

[God's attitude]. **15** And I am very sore displeased *[n.b. 'sore displeased', v.2]* with the heathen *[the Gentile nations]* that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction *[God's anger].* **16** Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem *[God's arrivall].* **17** Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem *[God's assurance].*

... What great promises are presented to God's people in this prophecy of Zechariah, as it heralds the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, when He will be personally, powerfully, and pre-eminently glorified upon the whole earth!