

Christ
in the book of
Zechariah



B. A. Ramsbottom

CHRIST IN THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

By

B. A. Ramsbottom

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PREFACE

Having spoken on at least two occasions on “Christ in the Book of Zechariah,” I was requested to expand the address into a book. It certainly is an interesting and valuable subject.

Unlike some of my other books, this is not written *especially* for young people, though we hope the younger ones who know and fear the Lord will find it profitable.

I have found the Commentary on Zechariah by T.V. Moore (published by The Banner of Truth Trust) very helpful.

Possessing the very rare *Devotional Family Bible with Notes and Illustrations* by Dr. John Fawcett of Hebden Bridge (1740-1817), I have concluded each chapter with the little “devotional exercises” which he adds chapter by chapter at the end of his comments.

My desire is that those who read this little book about the glories of Christ might find the two-fold prayer of Paul, in Philippians 3, answered: “That I may know Him”; “And be found in Him.”

CHRIST IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES

There used to be an old saying:

“The New is in the Old concealed;
The Old is in the New revealed.”

Concerning the Old Testament Scriptures, Jesus said, “They are they which testify of Me.” So we are warranted, nay more, encouraged, to look for the Lord Jesus in the Old Testament – in promises, prophecies, visions, and types and shadows. In the days of the Roman Empire it was said, “All roads lead to Rome,” and the whole Old Testament revelation points forward to Jesus, the Messiah, the coming Saviour.

Especially after His glorious resurrection did the Lord Jesus emphasise this. To the two on the road to Emmaus, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures [the Old Testament] the things *concerning Himself*.” We have always felt that this was the most wonderful sermon ever preached – two only in the congregation; the risen Saviour the preacher; and the subject “the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24. 27).

Again, in showing Himself to His disciples, He said, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, *concerning Me*” (Luke 24. 44).

The Book of Zechariah was written against the background of the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem. In 536 B.C. a remnant had returned from the Babylonian

captivity for this purpose, led by Zerubbabel, a prince of the house of David, and Joshua the high priest.

But there were obstacles. First of all, opposition from enemies who strove to cause God's work to cease; but more especially the sloth and indolence of the people.

So the Lord raised up two prophets to rebuke them, and to encourage them, Haggai and Zechariah, who both began to prophesy in 520 B.C. For sixteen years the work had been at a standstill, but now God blessed the witness of His servants the prophets, the work began again, and soon the temple was complete.

We can read the whole background to this in the Book of Ezra:

"Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them" (Ezra 5. 1, 2).

"And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo" (Ezra 6. 14).

Not many of the Lord's servants have had the privilege of such success of their ministry as Haggai and Zechariah – and so quickly. But there could not be two more different prophets! Haggai speaking directly, practically, to the work; Zechariah seeing visions and speaking of things to come.

The question may be asked: why is there such importance attached to the temple at Jerusalem? This is not only so in the books of Ezra, Haggai and Zechariah, but in many places in the Old Testament. For instance, Jonah in his extremity, in the whale's belly, looked to God's holy temple (Jonah 2. 7). Daniel, when he prayed, opened his windows toward Jerusalem. Surely this was more than superstition.

It is hard for us to realise the importance of the temple at Jerusalem to the godly in Old Testament days. This was the old dispensation. Christ had not yet come. There was the veil of shadows and types. The way into the holiest was not yet made manifest.

The temple meant everything. Here was a priest, a mediator. Here was a lamb slain. Here was blood shed. It all pointed forward to Calvary. It was the gospel to the Old Testament church.

How solemn, then, when the building of the temple ceased, and what holy delight there was when it was completed! "The children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy" (Ezra 6. 16).

But Zechariah by faith looks forward to a greater temple, the church of God whose builder is Christ Himself: "*He shall build the temple of the Lord: even He shall build the temple of the Lord*" (Zech. 6. 12, 13). We once heard a sermon where the minister said Christ is the architect (He planned it); the builder (He built it); the buyer (He bought it with His own blood); the owner (He calls it *My church*); and the occupier (He dwells there)!

So we have at least four direct quotations from the Book of Zechariah, each one referring to the Saviour:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (chap. 9. 9, quoted Matthew 21. 5).

“And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord” (chap. 11. 13, quoted Matthew 27. 9, 10).

“They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced” (chap. 12. 10, quoted John 19. 37).

“Smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn Mine hand upon the little ones” (chap. 13. 7, quoted Matthew 26. 31).

But apart from direct quotations, there are the visions, the promises, the prophecies, the types.

It has been well said that Zechariah contains:

Christ coming in lowliness (6. 12; 13. 7).

His rejection and betrayal (11. 12, 13).

His crucifixion (10. 10; 13. 7).

His priesthood (6. 13).

His kingship (6. 13; 9. 9; 14. 9, 16).

His coming in glory (14. 4).

His building the Lord's temple (6. 12, 13).

His reign (9. 10).

His establishment of lasting peace and prosperity (3. 10; 9. 9, 10).

No part of the Old Testament more clearly sets forth Christ's Person and work, His humiliation and exaltation, and His glorious offices.

If we come with the desire of those of old, "We would see Jesus," as led by the Holy Spirit, we shall not be disappointed. Then may this be our prayer in meditating on Christ in the Book of Zechariah.

CHRIST IN THE MIDST OF HIS PEOPLE

Zechariah chapter 1, verses 7 to 17.

7 Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Sebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,

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; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white.

9 Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will shew thee what these be.

10 And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth.

11 And they answered the angel of the LORD that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.

12 Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, 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?

13 And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words.

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.

15 And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.

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.

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.

The godly Puritans, when considering the Old Testament Scriptures, felt that one text must always be kept in mind: that the Lord is “the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.” As He was then, so is He now. So it is with this glorious revelation that despite their fears and discouragements, the Lord is always present with His people, in their midst. It was so in the days of the prophet Zechariah. It still is so today.

The prophet has a vision. In the vision he sees “a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom.” It is very clear that these myrtle trees represented Israel, the Jewish theocracy then, and looking forward to gospel days, the church of God now. A myrtle tree is a very suitable emblem for the church – small, insignificant, but giving out a beautiful aroma when bruised.

But it was night, it was dark, and the myrtle trees were “in the bottom,” in a valley. That was the state of Israel, despised, brought low, helpless, sinful – a dark and cloudy day. And it is the same with the church of God today.

As the chapter unfolds it becomes very clear that the man among the myrtle trees is Christ. Later He is referred to as “the angel” and then as “Lord.” What a wonderful truth it is that He is ever present with His people! “Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.”

Behind this glorious Man could be seen red horses, speckled (or bay) and white. We do not presume to explain exactly what they represent, but they moved in complete obedience to Christ as their Lord and Master as they were sent forth through the whole earth.

“Creatures of every sort and kind
Are all at His control;
The God that fills immensity
Must reign from pole to pole.”

They come back, and what have they discovered? “All the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.” If you will, in the whole of the earth everything is quiet, everything is going well. With the poor, despised people of God, everything is going wrong! We are reminded of Asaph’s complaint in the 73rd Psalm.

Now is the time for God to work (Psa. 119. 126). So, “The Angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah?” This is none other than the Son of God interceding on behalf of His people with His eternal Father.

The intercession of Christ is a wonderful thing. In heaven He intercedes, both on the grounds of His eternal relationship with His Father, and on the grounds of His complete atonement. “He ever liveth to make intercession.” The story is told of “the burghers of Calais,” condemned to death during wars with France. But the Queen of England interceded for them with her husband: first, because of his love to her; second, because during his absence she had ruled England well. And her intercession prevailed.

And Christ’s intercession *must* prevail. He received a blessed answer. “The Lord answered ... with good words and comfortable words.” Some words are comfortable but not good; some words are good but they are not

comfortable. These were both. And we are told what they were.

“Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy.” So often the prophets were commanded to cry aloud. This does not mean they had to shout, but to speak with authority, as the herald of a king. Jealousy really is composed of two things: love and hatred; so if the Lord is jealous for His people, it means that He dearly loves them and hates all that would draw their hearts from Him. His people had long been oppressed, but now He is going to appear for them. He is angry with those that are at ease who have afflicted them.

The good and comfortable words continue. “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.” This is a beautiful scripture, and it was just what the prophet and the godly remnant wanted to hear. And it is our prayer: that the Lord will return to us “with mercies.”

Mercy is one of the great themes of Scripture. Sinners can have no claim and all that the Lord does for His people is on the grounds of mercy. The little story has often been told. In the days of Napoleon a French soldier was sentenced to death. His aged mother walked all the way to Paris and craved an interview with the Emperor, begging for mercy for her son. Napoleon’s answer was, “Madam, your son does not deserve mercy,” to which she replied, “Sir, if he deserved it, it would not be mercy!”

“I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies.” So long Jerusalem had been forsaken, but now the Lord had

returned. Notice that the word “mercies” is in the plural. We understand that the Hebrew language often uses the plural (“mercies,” not “mercy”) to show the greatness of something. Here we have “the immensity of mercy.” But, also, we believe it sets forth the different displays of God’s mercy: forgiving mercy, saving mercy, delivering mercy, upholding mercy, preserving mercy. Above all, it is “mercy through blood” we make our plea.

The question might be asked: if the Lord never leaves nor forsakes His people, how can He be said to return? In reality and truth, the Lord is always present with His people. “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” But at times the Lord withdraws the sense of His presence, He hides His face, especially when there has been backsliding and a grieving of His Spirit. How precious, then, when He returns “with mercies” – the only ground on which He does return!

Then the great point practically: “My house shall be built.” For sixteen years the work had been at a standstill. Satan was determined that the temple should never be built. There were many adversaries. But God’s purpose must stand, and we can read how shortly afterwards the temple was completed (Ezra 6. 5).

“And a line [a measuring line] shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem” – the clear sign that God’s work is going on to completion.

But all this looks forward to gospel days. Christ says, “Upon this Rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” He is gathering out living stones from the quarry of nature; fitting, shaping, fashioning them; drawing them to the one Foundation;

and building them one by one in this spiritual temple. Each one is firmly built upon the Rock of Ages, Christ Himself.

As in Zechariah's day, the world and sin and Satan oppose, but,

“What though the gates of hell oppose?

Yet *must* this building rise.”

The world only continues till Christ has fulfilled His gracious purpose of love and mercy in building His church. Then, when the topstone is laid in its place, fitted and prepared for glory, let time be no longer (Rev. 10. 6). Our great concern should be to be found as a living stone in the building. (See 1 Peter 2. 5).

The comfortable words have a striking ending. Despite the darkness and the uncertainty, there is a future for the church of God. This remarkable verse contains the word “yet” four times (and there is no vain repetition in Scripture): “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.” Here is a promise, a promise of prosperity, and the emphasis is the certainty of it. And the reason? Because Christ is in the midst of His people. “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

One last thing, not unimportant, needs to be mentioned. Throughout this vision (and indeed throughout the whole book) the Lord is again and again spoken of as “the Lord of hosts.” What does it signify? The Almighty God. Hosts of angels, hosts of devils, hosts of circumstances obey Him. He is King of kings and Lord of

lords. And this name belongs to Christ, the Man among the myrtle trees, just as it belongs to His eternal Father.

“Yes, if His name be Lord of hosts,
Of His almighty power I’ll boast;
He all my foes shall quell.”

O Lord, all our sufferings arise from Thy just displeasure against us for our sins. But may the consideration of Thy readiness to pardon, and to receive returning sinners, encourage us to draw nigh to Thee, with broken and contrite hearts. Though darkness and sorrow attend Thy children for a time, Thou wilt return to them with mercies, and wilt heal their breaches, and comfort their hearts.

John Fawcett

CHRIST OVERCOMING ALL HIS PEOPLE'S ENEMIES

Zechariah chapter 1, verses 18 to 21.

18 Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns.

19 And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.

20 And the LORD shewed me four carpenters.

21 Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.

Some have thought this vision has nothing to do with Christ. But we must confess we find a real beauty in it. We cannot help thinking of the great Welsh preacher, Christmas Evans. Preaching on one occasion from a text which many contended had no reference to the cross of Christ, his comment was, "You must excuse me if I call at Calvary on the way!" We wish to follow in his steps.

It was a frightening sight, a terrifying sight, that Zechariah had in this his second vision – so different from the first. He saw four great, ferocious horns coming against God's people to destroy them. And God's people knew what "horns" signified! They were a pastoral people who knew the ferocity of a wild bull or a ram, especially when angered. Throughout the Old Testament we constantly have the horn as a symbol of power. Here were the enemies of Israel, fierce, powerful, ready to destroy.

But why *four* horns? Assaults, opposition, from every quarter – north, south, east and west; from without and from within. Wherever the people of God looked at this time, there were powers to oppose them – the Assyrians, Chaldeans and Samaritans to the north; the Egyptians to the south; the Philistines to the west; the Ammonites and Moabites to the east.

Never was this more applicable than the present day – the forces of evil united even against the outward forms of Christianity, determined to destroy. Witness Richard Dawkins, the daily press, politicians, the media. The church of God as never before is surrounded by the powers of hell.

But Zechariah saw “four carpenters” coming on a special mission, “to fray” the horns and “to cast” them out. The whole point of the vision, the emphasis is the coincidence of the numbers: *four* horns; *four* carpenters. For every enemy of the church of God, complete provision is made for its destruction. For every trouble there is a refuge. For every fear there is an answer.

So we cannot help seeing all this fulfilled in Christ, in His Person and triumphant work. “O’er every foe victorious.” It was Christ Himself who said, “Upon this Rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

“Gates of hell shall never
'Gainst His church prevail;
We have Christ’s own promise,
And that cannot fail.”

Also, we cannot help thinking that it was said of our glorious Lord and Saviour, "Is not this the carpenter's son?"

What happened soon afterwards proved the truth of this prophecy. The temple at Jerusalem *was* completed, despite all the powerful opposition. But what of those mighty enemies, the surrounding nations? They are long since forgotten. But Almighty God is still accomplishing His purposes.

But, again, all this looked forward to gospel days, especially as fulfilled in the Saviour. For every evil there is a remedy, and for every enemy a deliverer.

The church of God stands eternally complete in Christ. His word must stand: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." In His death and glorious resurrection Christ triumphed over all the powers of hell. And "He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

And what is true of the whole church of God is true of every believer. We are constantly assailed by foes that are too strong for us. The devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may destroy. The world both persecutes and allures into ways of wickedness. Temptations are too strong; the enemy comes in like a flood. Unbelief plagues us. We are too weak, unable to stand against these dreadful foes (as symbolised by "the four horns"). But,

"Christ, who conquered for us once,
Will in us conquer too."

“If God be for us, who can be against us?” The victory is sure. We follow a victorious Christ.

One interesting and important point must not be overlooked. The prophet “lifted up mine eyes, and *saw*, and behold four horns,” but, “The Lord *shewed* me four carpenters.” May the Lord *show* us the carpenters! As we lift up our eyes, we cannot help seeing our sin, our weakness, our danger, the power of our enemies. We need the Lord to *show* us the remedy. John, in the Book of Revelation, wrote, “He *shewed* me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal.” We are reminded of Moses at the waters of Marah: “the Lord *shewed* him a tree.” It is the Holy Spirit’s work to show us Christ as the answer to all these things, and the full provision He has made. “He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you.”

“Show us that loving Man
That rules the courts of bliss,
The Lord of hosts, the mighty God,
The eternal Prince of Peace.”

Whatever opposition may be made to Thy church, Thou canst easily defeat it. May our souls be encouraged by the good and comfortable words here recorded, that we may hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering. Amen.

John Fawcett