

Predictions of the Coming Messiah and the Return of Israel

Zechariah 10

Zechariah 10:1-5 - *“Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. The Lord will make flashing clouds; He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone. ²For the idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies, and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain. Therefore, the people wend their way like sheep; they are in trouble because there is no shepherd. ³“My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the goatherds. For the Lord of hosts will visit His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as His royal horse in the battle.*

⁴From him comes the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler together. ⁵They shall be like mighty men who tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle. They shall fight because the Lord is with them, and the riders on horses shall be put to shame.”

Background Notes

The prophet Zechariah lived at a relatively late time in Old Testament history. He ministered to God’s people Israel after their return from the Babylonian captivity, and thus he is known as a *post-exilic* prophet.

The records in Nehemiah 12 reveal that Zechariah was one of the captives who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. He was possibly young, perhaps only a teenager, when he returned. God raised him up as a prophet to encourage the people who had returned to Jerusalem. Remember - in the Old Testament, a prophet’s role was to speak forth God’s Word. When God’s Word is spoken, it is both convicting and comforting. It is both exhorting and encouraging.

The word of the Lord spoken through Zechariah was primarily a message of encouragement. It was an encouraging message to God’s people, Israel, because it told of Israel’s bright future.

God greatly encouraged His people through Zechariah’s prophecy with prophetic visions, messages, and burdens or oracles. Christians today can draw spiritual lessons and applications from these chapters, even though they were directly addressed to Israel. After all, this is the Bible. It’s **God’s Word!** And Romans 15:4 says, *“Whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”*

However, it is important to keep the proper distinction between “Israel” and “the Church” when interpreting the Old Testament prophecies to Israel and about Israel. The prophecies about the future of Israel must not be taken out of their proper context, and “spiritualized” to the Church! They are not to be taken from Israel and redirected as a “spiritual fulfillment” in the Church. These prophecies will **literally** be fulfilled with the literal **Jewish people** in the future!

According to Romans 11, Israel has been “set aside” – but only temporarily - during these present times, when God is building the Church and blessing the Church. *“Has God cast aside His people? Certainly not!” (Romans 11:1).* But Romans 11:25-27 says, *“...blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins.”*

In the future, Israel's spiritual blindness will be taken away and she will return to the Lord. At that time these Old Testament prophecies will literally be fulfilled to God's chosen people, the nation of Israel.

Doctrinal Points

1. Israel will be delivered from her enemies, and dependent on her Messiah.

Zechariah 10:1 probably belongs at the end of chapter 9, along with the blessings of the Millennium. The main idea in verses 2-5 is that when the Messiah comes, Israel will be delivered from all her enemies. This includes deliverance from **demonic powers** (v2), **false shepherds** (leaders) (v3), and **foreign powers** (v5).

It is interesting that, at the present time, there is no idolatry in modern Israel, as there was in ancient Israel. In fact, Israel's captivity in Babylon cleansed them of worship of the sun and moon, and idols of wood and stone. But the New Testament makes it quite clear that Israel will return to idolatry in the future. During the Tribulation period, before the Lord returns to this earth to set up His kingdom, there will once again be idolatry in the nation of Israel. In fact, in His Olivet discourse, the Lord Jesus said that during this period of tribulation, the “antichrist” of those days will set up an image in the Temple called *“the abomination of desolations spoken of by Daniel the prophet” (Matthew 24:15)*. Revelation 13 makes it quite clear that Jews and Gentiles will worship this image.

So, we believe that the idolatry mentioned in verse 2 is primarily a reference to the idolatry that will return to Israel in the last days. The *“false shepherds”* and *“male goats”* (v3) refer primarily to the false prophets and false shepherds of the end times, who will operate under the false messiah or “antichrist” of those days. According to Zechariah 12:3, during that time period all nations will gather together for war against Israel.

But now comes the good news! During those last days the Lord of Hosts will visit His flock, and there will be a spiritual restoration of the nation Israel. We'll see that in the rest of chapter 10. (And by the way, those last days may not be very far off!) Many in Israel will believe in the Messiah whom they once rejected. Then the Lord will return and lead His redeemed people in victory over all evil and all enemy forces - including occult powers, including enemy nations, and including the antichrist.

So, the victories of verse 5 go beyond any victories of the Maccabees that we discussed in chapter 9. Their victories were only a foreshadowing of the future. Their victories only anticipated the victories that will take place when the Lord returns! Notice the titles that are given to our Lord as Messiah in verse 4: *“From him comes the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler together.”* As the *cornerstone*, the Lord Jesus is central, and everything rests on Him. The *tent peg* mentioned here is not like the tent peg of today - the stake that holds up a tent! The idea is a large peg or pin as part of an oriental dwelling tent, where the family’s valuables were hung. As the *tent peg*, all hope and blessing will hang or rest upon the Messiah. As the *battle bow*, the Messiah will lead His people in military victory when He returns. And as the supreme *ruler*, **all** will be subject to Him - and all opposition eliminated.

What a great day that will be! Israel will be delivered from her enemies and dependent on her Messiah.

2. Israel will be re-gathered to the Land and restored to the Lord.

Zechariah 10:6-12 - *“I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back, because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside; for I am the Lord their God, and I will hear them.*

⁷ *Those of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man and their heart shall rejoice as if with wine.*

Yes, their children shall see it and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord.

⁸ *I will whistle for them and gather them, for I will redeem them; and they shall increase as they once increased.* ⁹ *“I will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far country. They shall live, together with their children, and they shall return.*

¹⁰ *I will also bring them back from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon until no more room is found for them.*

¹¹ *He shall pass through the sea with affliction, and strike the waves of the sea. All the depths of the River shall dry up. Then the pride of Assyria shall be brought down and the scepter of Egypt shall depart.*¹² *“So I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in His name,” says the Lord.*

These verses certainly cannot refer to Israel’s return from their Babylonian captivity because this prophecy is post-exilic. Israel had already returned from Babylon when Zechariah wrote this. We certainly don’t want to practice bad hermeneutics here and spiritualize all of this to the church and say it doesn’t apply to Israel anymore because after all, Israel broke the covenant with God. Israel had already broken the covenant. That’s why they went into captivity. The promises here to the Jewish people are still valid today. Israel will be re-gathered to the land and restored to the Lord.

Notice that all of Israel is included in verse 6: *“I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph.* The “house of Joseph” was the northern kingdom, so called because Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were the largest two tribes of the northern kingdom. The “house of Judah” was the southern kingdom. Like a shepherd, the Lord will whistle for all of His flock (v8), and the Jews will return from the far countries of this world (v9).

As you know, Jews are already returning to the modern state of Israel - but there are many more to come! Verse 10: *“I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon, until no more room is found for them.”*

The borders of Israel will be enlarged in the future, incorporating Lebanon to the north and Gilead to the east (part of the nation of Jordan today). The armies of the present secular state of Israel will not enlarge the borders - **the Lord Himself** will remove all obstacles and barriers! *“He shall pass through the sea with affliction, and strike the waves of the sea: All the depths of the River shall dry up. Then the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart” (v11).*

Neither natural barriers (like the Red Sea) nor enemy powers (like their ancient archenemies, Egypt and Assyria) - **nothing** will stop the re-gathering of Israel. But the best part of all this is their restoration to the Lord! Verse 12: *“So I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in His name,” says the Lord.*

What a great prophecy! Jews are now returning to Israel in unbelief, but in the future they will return in faith. Israel will be re-gathered to the Land and restored to the Lord.

Practical Application

Have you responded to “God’s whistle”?

Verse 8: *“I will whistle for them and gather them, for I will redeem them...”* In the context, the “whistle” of verse 8 is God’s call for the return of Israel to the Land and to the Lord - but it certainly has practical application for every one of us today.

Have **you** responded to “God’s whistle”?

Perhaps God is calling you to come to Him and receive His free gift of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Or perhaps God is calling you to come back to Him, if you’re wandering away from Him as a backslidden believer. As a shepherd would whistle to call his wandering sheep, so God is “whistling” for you to come home. Why delay?

When our children were young, sometimes I would whistle for them when it was time to come home for dinner - just as a shepherd might whistle to call His sheep. The Good Shepherd, the Lord Himself, is “whistling” right now – He’s calling for the lost and wandering sheep to come home. Are you one of those lost or wandering sheep? God loves you - and He is “whistling” for you!

Have you responded to God’s whistle?