

Living Messages of the Books of The Bible

GENESIS TO MALACHI

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

THE MESSAGE OF ZECHARIAH

A. THE PERMANENT VALUE

I. Its fundamental Revelation of the pervasive Power and persistent Purpose of the Lord

- i. The suggestive Title. "**The Lord of Hosts.**"
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 - 1. History.
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 - b. Not prevalent during the Period.
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 - 2. Meaning.
 - a. Stars. } Sovereignty.
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 - b. Its introductory Grouping. 1:3.
 - 1. The Will made known. 1:6.
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 - ii. The pervasive Power.
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 - iii. The persistent Purpose.
 - a. The Principle illustrated by the Visions.
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II. The resultant Revelation of the true Attitude and Activity of His People under all Circumstances

Hearken.

- i. The suggestive first Word. Return.

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. A Revelation of the Secret of Strength "While we look . . . "

- II Corinthians 4:18.
- i. The Secret of Strength is Vision.
 - ii. The Proof of Vision is Strength.

II. An Appeal to be Strong.

Hebrews 12:12, 13.

See and Obey.

ii. The Attitude. (7, 8)

- a. Look back, and know your Sin.
- b. Look on, and see God's Purpose.

iii. The Activity.

- a. Build the House.
- b. Abolish the human Fasts.
- c. Keep the Divine Feasts.

THIS is the second of the three prophetic books which are undoubtedly post-exilic; consisting as they do of messages delivered to the people after their return from captivity.

The relation of Zechariah to Haggai we recognized in our study of the latter book. The atmosphere is the same. The people to whom Zechariah delivered his message were looking back, and were conscious of a history which was at once glorious and shameful. The history of God's dealing with them was full of glory. The history of their dealing with God was full of shame. The immediate outlook was one of difficulty and discouragement. The hope of the nation was practically extinguished. Hemmed in by opposing forces, without national constitution or power, it certainly must have seemed to that feeble remnant that there was very little hope in the future. The peculiar value of the teaching of Zechariah was that it was calculated to inspire hope in the heart of the discouraged people.

The first message of Zechariah was delivered between two messages of Haggai, so that the first phase of his ministry was one of actual and immediate cooperation with Haggai. In that first message the one burden upon the heart of the prophet was that of urging the people to obey the message of his co-worker, and to build the house of God. Following the first simple message, we have the visions of the prophet; not easy of exposition, but flaming with light, singing in hope, and resonant in confidence.

Finally, we have those messages in which, in language as stately as any to be found in the prophetic books, and with somewhat more of detail, there is presented the portrait of the great Deliverer-King, Who through suffering comes to crowning. The principal value of such message was that of filling the heart with hope, even in the days of darkness and of hopelessness.

The burden of Zechariah was that of the pervasive power and the persistent purpose of the Lord. The book has been accurately described as the apocalypse of the Old Testament. An apocalypse is the removal of something that hides; an unveiling.

Zechariah was the great unveiler, the man through whose message the people were enabled to see things which, while actual, were nevertheless obscured by the prevalent conditions of adversity.

Our observation is limited to the sight of the eyes and the hearing of the ears. The peculiar peril of the day of adversity is that therein men are in danger of seeing only the things that are near.

The apocalypse provides visions and voices; visions through the near to the distant, voices from the distant calling to the near. These men were looking at the near; Zechariah bade them look through to the things beyond. They were looking at the narrow circumstances; Zechariah called them to the wider circumstances of the Divine government and activity.

The permanent values of Zechariah then are:

- First, its fundamental revelation of the pervasive power and persistent purpose of the Lord; and
- Secondly, its resultant revelation of the true attitude and activity of the people of God in all circumstances.

As to the first of these permanent values, let us look at the opening paragraph,

"In the eighth month, 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, The LORD hath been Sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts: Turn ye unto Me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts."

His one inclusive appeal is contained in the words,

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts: Turn unto Me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts."

Everything which follows is by way of application and illustration.

Notice first very carefully the suggestive title thrice repeated, "**The LORD of hosts**," as to its history and its meaning.

Think of its history.

You cannot find it in Genesis; it does not occur in Exodus; it is absent from Leviticus; it is to be discovered neither in Numbers nor Deuteronomy. You never find it in the Pentateuch. You may go still further and you will not find it in the book of Joshua or the book of Judges. Then you come to the first book of Samuel, which is the book of transition from the Theocratic to the monarchic form of government, the story of how these people turned from God to a human government. In that book the title first occurs. The phrase was born with the monarchy.

On the human side, as Perowne suggests, it was the result of the people's new thought of massed and marshaled armies. We are principally interested in the significance it gathered in the process of the years. In the historic books it very rarely occurs; but in the prophetic literature it is the constantly recurring title of the Lord. Isaiah repeatedly employed it. Jeremiah used it more often than did Isaiah. Zechariah used it more frequently than any other prophet. Fifty-three times at least does this majestic and wonderful title appear upon the pages of this brief prophecy of fourteen chapters.

In order to an understanding of the suggestiveness of the title we should need a careful examination of the prophetic use of it; not merely a study of the actual words, but of the place in which we find them in our Bible. Let three very simple thoughts suffice. The word hosts is used of stars, of angels, of the nation of Israel, of the armies of other nations. The significance of this fact is that whatever the title meant when it was first employed, it came ultimately to mean that the Lord is sovereign Lord and Master of the universe.

In the prophetic use of it is suggested, not the sovereignty of the Lord in the abstract merely, but that sovereignty in activity. The prophet saw the Lord marshalling all hosts - of stars, of angels, and of men. Zechariah lived in a day when Israel had lost its army, its power, and its organization; and he constantly spoke of the Lord of hosts, thus reminding the people of the abiding and active sovereignty of the Lord.

The threefold use of the title in the opening paragraph of Zechariah speaks of that fact of sovereignty to the conditions in the midst of which the people found themselves.

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts.”

The declaration first suggests that the will of God is made known to His people. That is further illustrated by what follows.

“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 doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto Me, saith the Lord.”

The main value of that reference to the past is its insistence upon the fact that God has spoken His will to His people. That is His perpetual method. He speaks. He makes known His will. The prophet insists upon it that He continues that method. That is the first part of the prophetic burden.

“Turn [Return] unto Me.”

That is the second value of the prophetic message. The Lord calls His people back, and provides a way for their return. In the subsequent vision of Joshua, the high priest, confronted by Satan the adversary, the title is linked to the great announcement.

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts . . . Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.”

Thus the way back to God is provided.

“I will turn unto you.”

That is the third value of the message. The Lord promises to return to His people, and He accomplishes the work which makes this return possible.

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”

The power necessary for the restoration of order will be provided by the coming of God to His people, by His Holy Spirit.

These are only the key-phrases, but around them the whole system of the prophet's thinking was grouped.

His conviction was threefold:

- The Lord reveals His will;
- The Lord calls men back to Himself, and provides the way for their coming;
- The Lord promises that if they will return, He will return to them, and He does so in the power and might of His own Holy Spirit.

I am not prepared for one single moment to affirm that Zechariah apprehended the great doctrine of the Trinity, or those of our evangelical faith; but all are to be found potentially in his words. The Lord of hosts speaks; it is the perpetual method of God with men, that of making known His will. The Lord of hosts calls men to return; and in the mystery of that Branch - Whose nature is dealt with later on in the prophecy, and Whose history is written in the last movement - He makes the way of return.

The Lord of hosts declares that if men will return to Him, He will return to them, and this He does by the coming of the Spirit. All this teaching was inclusively an unveiling first, of the pervasive power of God; and secondly, of the persistent purpose of God.

The pervasive power of the Lord is illustrated by the visions and by the oracles. This is seen when we take each one in separation, and allow it to make its own impression upon the mind. In every case certain conditions are described, and side by side with the conditions, facts are declared which the average man cannot see.

The first vision is that of the shady place; and also of the Watcher, the angel of the Lord. The people were conscious of the shady place; but they were not conscious of the Watcher. He was unveiled.

The second vision is that of the opposing forces and the weapons being formed against the people of God; and also of the forces for the destruction of the opposing forces. The people were conscious of the weapons formed against them; but not of the forces for the destruction of those weapons. These were unveiled.

The third vision is that of a city, and a young man so interested therein that he desired to measure it; and also of the fact that the new city had no walls, for two reasons; first, because it is too great to be included by walls, and secondly, because it does not need the defense of walls by reason of the defense of the Lord. The people were conscious of the city and of its imperfections, but they were not conscious of the splendour of the city that is to be. This was unveiled.

The fourth vision is that of the adversary; and also of the Advocate. The people were conscious of the adversary; but they were not conscious of the Advocate. He was unveiled.

The fifth vision is that of responsibility, the candlestick and the light shining in the dark places; and also a vision of resource, the oil and the perpetual supply. The people were conscious of the responsibility, but not of the resource. That was unveiled.

The sixth vision is that of the presence of evil; and also of the practice and application of law. The people were conscious of the presence of evil; but not of the administration of law. That was unveiled.

The seventh vision is that of the pollution of commerce; and also of the restriction of the area of its influence. The people were conscious of the pollution; but not of the restriction. That was unveiled.

The eighth vision is that of the need of administration; and also of the spirit of government, the horsemen from the mountains of brass riding through the world for the establishment of order. The people were conscious of the need of administration; but were not conscious of the spirit of government. That was unveiled. Thus, under all circumstances, the prophet was conscious of the presence and activity of the Lord of hosts. The Lord Jehovah, the becoming One, the One Who becomes exactly what His people need in any and every hour of need.

- Are they in the shady place? He is the Watcher.
- Are weapons being formed against them? He is the destructive force that breaks the weapons.
- Is the new city being built? He is its defense.
- Is the adversary unmasked? He is the Advocate.
- Is the responsibility heavy? He is sufficient resource.
- Is evil present everywhere? He gives the law to which evil must bow.
- Is commerce polluted? He restricts the area.
- Is there need of administration? He sends forth riders upon horses from mountains of brass.

This man in the midst of the difficulty, disappointment, and desolation of his day, saw the Lord everywhere. The oracles teach the same lesson. The anointed King is rejected, but the book does not end with that story. The rejected King is enthroned by the pervasive power of the Lord.

The persistent purpose of the Lord is illustrated by the same visions and oracles. This is seen when they are considered, not in separation, but in sequence. Here I am compelled to touch upon controversial ground in the matter of interpretation. I hold that the vision of the myrtle trees is the vision of the present hour, so far as Israel is concerned, and that all the succeeding visions are yet unfulfilled. Israel has been in the shady place for over two millenniums. During all the period the Watcher is with her. Beyond the day of adversity, the day of trouble, will come the hour when Israel's enemies will be defeated. Then Jerusalem will be rebuilt. Israel, as the servant of God, will be cleansed from filthiness. Then she will fulfill her function in the world as the great light-bearer. Under those conditions the law will go forth from Jerusalem for the government of the world. Then Babylon will be held in check.

Finally the Kingdom of Heaven will be established on earth, when the riders upon horses will proceed from the mountains of brass, and in the power of the Spirit encompass the world.

All this reveals the persistent purpose of the Lord, whereby, in spite of human failure, and all opposition of men or demons, He moves on towards the final goal.

The same principle is illustrated by the oracles.

The Advent of rejection prepares for the Advent of coronation. The Advent of coronation perfects the Advent of rejection. This prophecy, then, reveals the true attitude and activity of the people of God in days of darkness and of difficulty.

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts.”

What is the attitude of the people of God in the presence of that declaration? That of attention.

“Turn unto Me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts.”

What is the attitude of the people of God in the presence of that promise? To believe it, obey it, and work in the power of it.

The great burden of the prophet to the men of his own age was that they were to build the house of God even though it was a day of darkness and disappointment; that they were to abolish their fasts by removing the cause for them, to have done with them by getting rid of the sin which occasioned them.

However diversified our opinions may be as to the interpretation of the details of this book, its spirit speaks with no uncertain sound. There can be no mistaking its living message.

If the final charge of Haggai is: **“Be strong . . . and work,”** the supreme message of Zechariah is its revelation of the secret of strength. When Paul was feeling the difficulties and discouragements of the Christian ministry, he wrote,

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

That is the message of Zechariah in New Testament terms.

“While we look not at the things which are seen.” Haggai said, **“Be strong . . . and work.”** Zechariah said, You will only be strong as you see the things that are not seen, the heavenly visions, and hear the things that are never heard, the heavenly voices. While we look at, and while we listen to the unseen things and the unheard things, we do our best work.

The proof of vision is strength. You tell me these days are dark days. So they are. But let us look not only at the things seen, but also at the things unseen.

- See the shady place if you will, but see also the angel of the Lord watching.
- See clearly the horns that are being prepared for the destruction of the purposes of God, but see also the smiths that will destroy the horns.
- See the unseen.

The secret of strength is vision. The proof of vision is strength. If men declare that they see these things and believe these things, and still do nothing, I cannot believe what they declare. Their sight is borrowed sight. They have been looking at a picture and not at the living fact.

- The man who sees the unseen is the man who grips the seen and masters it.
- The man who is conscious through all the appalling defeat of the hour, of the immediate, pervasive presence and power of God, is the man who gets hold of the piece of desolation nearest to him, and wrestles with it until it blossoms like the rose.

The demonstration of vision is the strength with which men take hold of the difficulty of the present hour.

I turn once again to the New Testament for the word which reveals the thought that was in the heart of the prophet, and which inspired him as he saw the visions fulfilled.

“Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

I am very much afraid that there are those who think it to be a sign of true sanctification to have hands hanging down, and palsied knees; that the measure of sanctification is the measure of pessimism; that the measure in which men are really spiritual is the measure in which they waste their breath deplored the difficulties of the hour.

Though there be darkness to-day, if we see the Lord, know His Presence, and fall in line with His power, it is ours to be sure of the consummation, and to hasten it. To see God here and now, and to fall in line with Him, is to be perfectly certain that presently when the Rejected is the Crowned, we shall share in the triumph, as we have shared in the travail.

~ end of chapter 37 ~

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