

The Questor

God's Messengers....

.... Zechariah

Zechariah came from a family of priests. His grandfather, Iddo, had returned from Babylon with the first party of exiles led by Zerubbabel. He shared with his contemporary, Haggai, the task of getting the people of Judah to rebuild their ruined temple. Their preaching shook the people out of their self pre-occupation and got them working together as a people of God. There was a job to do and the two prophets teamed up to make sure it got done.

But Zechariah did more than that. He recognised that the people's self identity was as much in need of rebuilding as the Temple and the city walls. For a century they had been at the mercy of foreign powers, kicked and mocked, used and abused. This once proud people whose history included people like Abraham, Moses and David had been treated with contempt for so long that they were in danger of losing that connection. And, in particular, their magnificent identity as the people of God.

So he set about re-invigorating their self esteem and giving them a vision of what the future could be like if they returned to God. He told them that God was still angry with them because they continued to ignore him as their forefathers had done. But he still wanted Jerusalem to be his special place - and it could be if they turned back to him.

Zechariah had a series of visions which he described to the people. They are as full of startling imagery as those of his predecessor Daniel. There are also some elements that are repeated in the book of Revelation at the end of the New Testament.

The first and last visions are of powerful horsemen patrolling the earth, a bit like those that policed the Persian empire. But these patrols were God's agents. The second vision was of the destruction of the hostile powers that

had ground the nation down. The other visions were concerned with the future of the Jewish nation: a new Jerusalem, the completion of the Temple, the removal of sin and the coming of the Messiah.

He tells the people that they should stop grieving for the past. God is done with retribution and wants to restore Jerusalem and his people. He says that when this is accomplished, people will flock there from all over the world.

He then goes on to prophesy that there will be a leader who will make a joyful entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey and who will inaugurate a rule of peace. He will also release a fountain which will cleanse the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This leader will be like a shepherd for God's people who have been let down by their leaders. But the people will reject this shepherd. This is a clear reference to the coming of Jesus.

Finally he paints a picture of the age to come when God himself and his holy ones will dwell in Jerusalem and there will be perpetual daylight. Life giving water will flow from Jerusalem and the whole earth will become God's kingdom. Those who set themselves against God will be destroyed and all who survive will worship him.

The prophecy of Zechariah isn't an easy read. You need to be a bible scholar to fully understand his visions and poems. Sometimes they're talking about the past, sometimes the present and sometimes the future. But his style of writing would have been familiar to the people of his day.

As with all the prophets Zechariah offers us glimpses of God's hand at work, guiding history towards his purpose. So, ultimately, he invites us to look above the chaos and hope for the coming of God's Kingdom; and to be faithful in the present moment. That's the challenge Zechariah offers to all generations of God's people.