

ZECHARIAH inspires the builders with zeal

God is wise. When the situation is critical, He steps up the action. So it was that the people of Judah who were re-building the Temple were blessed with not one but two prophets.

The two prophets carefully recorded the dates when the word of the Lord came to them. You can see that Haggai kicked off with his first two visions, then, just when the work was about to stop, along came Zechariah to add his weight to the effort. A month later Haggai has two more visions, and Zechariah rounds off the series two months after that. We know from the chronology of King Darius that the actual date was 520BC.

By comparing Haggai and Zechariah's dates with the parallel record in Ezra, we can see why an extra impetus was essential at this time. Ezra agrees in his chapter five that the rebuilding commenced under the inspiration of Haggai and Zechariah. He says Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the High Priest were in charge of the work. But he adds something we do not find in our two prophets. He says the local officials appointed by Darius came along to question the right of the Jews to build a temple, and reported their activity in a letter to the Emperor, naming the two leaders (Ezra 5:2-4, 6-9). We can understand now why the builders grew afraid. Big trouble could be brewing for them! But Ezra notes that with great courage they continued to build, knowing that God was with them:

"But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it". (verse 5)

When the reply came from His Majesty, it was to give his blessing, and command the local officials to let the builders have whatever materials they need free of charge

from the King's stores. The crisis was over.

It is intriguing to see how Zechariah's visions are based on a motif of builders and temples. For example, in chapter one he sees four carpenters (you can almost see the pencils stuck behind their ears) driving away four freestanding horns. A horn in the Bible is a symbol for power, since a bull pushes with its horns, and these horns, (v 21), represent the Gentile powers that have scattered Israel – Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome.

Similarly in chapter two he sees a workman with a measuring tape in his hand. He is going off to measure the dimensions of Jerusalem. God, the prophet is told, is a wall of fire round the city, like the chariots of fire that Elisha's servant saw surrounding his city when he was afraid (see 2 Kings 6:15-17). With His presence, the builders need not fear the enemies who were trying to stop the work.

In the third chapter Zechariah sees Joshua the High Priest, who has been busy labouring on the construction work with his own hands. His clothes, not surprisingly, are grubby. The prophet sees him accused by Satan (the word 'satan' in the Old Testament simply means an adversary). This simulates perfectly the way the local officials sent their report to the King. But Joshua was justified. *"The Lord rebuke you!"* the angel cries to the adversary. And he changes Joshua's dirty overalls for clean clothes, and sets a priestly cap on his head. Then he proclaims that the foundation stone of the temple on which Joshua was busy building had an inscription, as such stones do. It had an engraving of seven eyes. These were, he said, the eyes of the Lord, that oversee all that we do in His name.

So the prophecy continues, with a great lampstand in chapter four, an essential piece of Temple furniture, and two olive trees,

resembling the two olive wood cherubim in Solomon's temple that once stood in the Most Holy place. The next chapter has a flying scroll, exactly the dimensions of the old Tabernacle, with a warning message. This is followed by a basket with a lid of lead and two storks, one at each end – a parody of the Holy Ark with its winged cherubim and lid of gold. Inside the prophet saw, not the Ten Commandments, but a defiled woman, who set up her rival temple in the land of Shinar, or Babylon. Perhaps we have a hint here of the apostasy that would create a church in Rome, that great city that ruled over the kings of the earth. You see, Zechariah's visions, like the other prophets before him, span more than one fulfilment. They encourage the people of his own day, but they also look on through time to the latter days, and the coming of Christ. Indeed chapter six sees Joshua the High Priest with a crown on his head. This seems odd, because priests and kings were separate roles in the Old Testament, but it makes sense when you remember that God's son Jesus (in Hebrew 'Joshua' is the same as 'Jesus') will be both a king and a priest on his throne. "*Behold the man*", runs verse 12, echoing the words of Pontius Pilate, "*whose name is The Branch*". Jesus came from Nazareth, which means Branch Town. "*He shall build the Temple of the Lord*". So he will – a house of living stones, in which God will dwell forever.

amazing detail. Take a look at chapter eleven. Here we jump to the first century. Jesus' rejection by the rulers, the official 'shepherds' of Israel, is foretold, right down to the thirty pieces of silver that they would offer to Judas Iscariot to betray him, and the giving of the money to buy the Potter's Field for burying strangers. Chapter twelve speeds on to the end time, with Jerusalem surrounded by many nations. Zechariah sees the inhabitants looking upon "*him whom they have pierced*". God has sent Jesus back to the earth, but now they realise with shame it is the one their forefathers crucified. A fountain will be opened for them, says the last chapter, to wash away their sins. The Lord Jesus sets his feet on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem – the very place from which he ascended centuries before, and with earthquake and fire God's enemies are destroyed. And the outcome? "*The LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one.*" Zechariah 14:9. The Lord as king over all the earth, and one common religion for all nations (see v16)? Surely we have come to the Kingdom of God!

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The closing chapters of this gripping prophecy home in on the work of Jesus in