

Waiting for His Arrival and the Storyline of the Bible

"The Prophets Speak to the Hero's Arrival"

4th Sunday of Advent

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Prayer:

We beseech you, Almighty God, to purify our consciences by your daily visitation, [because we are your holy temple. We continue to long for your coming when you will receive us unto yourself for the full and final installment of your Story]; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*¹

Read: Zechariah 3:8-10; 9:9; 14:6-9

For at least two millennia the people of God have waited for the full and final installment of God's Story. Prior to humanity's rebellion against God, they would wait for Him in His Garden. After their rebellion, God stepped in and redeemed them from sin's debt and once more adopted them as His sons and daughters. From the very beginning God taught them to wait for Him through promises and pictures and they learned of Him by means of the same.

In every day of every week of every month of every year of every decade of every century, they lived in hope at His arrival bringing with Him deliverance from their internal and external enemies. Centuries become millennia and still they waited.

Life became routine and mundane and yet the believing would keep feast days and rituals to remember the Story. They would teach their children the Story through the image and symbol. It is just as true now as it was then. It is through the image and ritual that we remind and retell the Story to ourselves and to our families. National calamity would come through inept and evil rulers, yet in the shadows God spoke of something greater and still yet future . . . so they waited. Promises that appeared so real became lost in the passing of time. Pictures became obstacles rather than stimulants. Blindness caused people to stop with the image and fall captive to the shadow.

Yet God remembers. He is too wise to make a mistake and too loving to be unkind. The primary means of God reminding and retelling the Story would come to and through the nation of Israel. Her prophets would be the oracles, the keepers of the dream. They were the sages through whom wisdom would be preserved and perpetuated. Collectively, the nation to whom and through whom the promises and pictures came would become idolatrous through spiritual whoredom, yet God would continue to speak. The prophets would often be maligned and martyred, yet they would remain faithful to their charge. Within the nation there was a collective rebellion against God, but He would always have a believing remnant who longed for His arrival. The prophets spoke to this and to this we will give our attention. The nature of our study prohibits us from venturing too far into the literature, but we will seek to represent what all of them address. Our concentration will rest on the prophet Zechariah. Appropriately, his name means, "The LORD remembers."

It is always important to put the prophets in their historical, cultural and theological context. "When the Jews reviewed their history, it looked like a long slide downhill. After centuries of warning, punishment had come. Jerusalem was flattened. The survivors marched off in chains toward the other end of the world. They had not merely lost a battle. They had lost, seemingly, their place in God's heart and their future as his special people. But hope for a new start came in exile. When Persian emperor Cyrus took power, he offered Jews a chance to return to their land and rebuild their temple. Upon their return, they found a disheartening scene. Their once-beautiful city was a ghost town. Everything of value had been destroyed. The temple stayed in a state of disrepair for nearly 20 years [536-516BC], until the prophets Haggai and Zechariah stirred up renewed interest."² From within this context Zechariah, along with Haggai, speak of a future day when the promises of God will find their ultimately fulfillment. His writings are **apocalyptic** in nature. He uses visions

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and prophecies of things that are to come. He speaks in shadow of something greater. He stands as an **encouragement** to the nation of Judah.

Through the imaging and picturing of Zion's glorification, the overthrow of Israel's enemies, and the universal reign of the Messiah the prophet speaks of hope. Within this rich brew provided by the apocalyptic genre, there is a strong pastoral overtone. Because it speaks to the promises and pictures found throughout Israel's history, "The messianic emphasis of Zechariah accounts for its frequent citation by New Testament authors. [There are approximately] 41 New Testament citations or allusions to Zechariah's book."³

God's hero sits at center stage. Zechariah proclaims the Hero's arrival and what this "revelation" means to His people. It is fitting for the prophet to bear the name, "YHWH remembers." "**He 'remembers' his covenant promises and takes action to fulfill them.** In the book of Zechariah, God's promised deliverance from Babylonian exile, including a restored kingdom community and a functioning temple (the earthly throne of the divine King), leads into even grander pictures of the salvation and restoration to come through the Messiah."⁴

Consider with me the numerous references to the One who is to come.

- Zechariah 2:10-13 God will dwell among His people
- Zechariah 3:8-10 God's servant, the Branch
- Zechariah 6:12-13 The Branch as the priestly king/kingly priest
- Zechariah 9:9 The triumphal entrance of the King
- Zechariah 10:4 The cornerstone
- Zechariah 11:12-13 Thirty pieces of silver and the potter's field
- Zechariah 12:10 The Messiah's body would be pierced
- Zechariah 13:7 The Shepherd will die for His sheep

It is because God dwells among His people through the Hero's arrival that the day spoken of is distinct. It is a day of global solidarity whereby all the people of the earth become His people and He will dwell in their midst (Zech. 2:10-13). It is a day when the iniquity of the land shall be removed (Zech. 3:9, 10; 13:1, 2). In that day, His people will be forever protected from their enemies and they shall see Him in His beauty (Zech. 9:14-17; 12:7-9). That day will be a unique day, a day when the Story of God finds its fulfillment (Zech. 14:6-9).

This is the rich tapestry woven for those who wait. Like our believing forefathers, we long for His arrival. Malachi will be the last of the writing prophets, and for 400 years the voice of God will be found in the written text that remains. He will speak of the forerunner who will prepare the way for the Lord.

"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 3:1).

His people will wait. Like Simeon and Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:25-38) they will "wait for the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25)." Until the one who was promised and pictured in shadow would arrive, we continue to wait; even so, "Come quickly Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

¹ <http://www.bcponline.org/>

² *The New Student Bible*

³ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, OT, 1545.*

⁴ <http://www.ibs.org/niv/studybible/zechariah.php>

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